



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 19, 2019

## THE ATHLETIC

### How much has each team improved this offseason?

By Dom Luszczyszyn

The dog days of the NHL offseason have arrived and news has slowed to a crawl. Justin Williams and Joe Thornton still haven't re-signed, and Jake Gardiner remains without a home, but aside from that most of the biggest moves have been made. That makes it a good time to look at which teams stand to improve the most based on their offseason decisions.

There'll be other confounding variables that decide how much better or worse a team is next season – team-wide regression, differing usage, breakouts, declines, roster make-up, rookies, luck, coaching – but this should give you a decent idea of which teams improved the most on paper. And which teams got worse.

That's the only criteria here as we go down the list and measure how many wins a team added or subtracted from their bottom line based on who's in and who's out, though salary added is also an important criterion. Value is based on Game Score Value Added.

Here's how each team stacks up.

#### New York Rangers

In: Artemi Panarin, Jacob Trouba, Adam Fox  
Out: Jimmy Vesey, Neal Pionk  
Wins Added: 6.0 wins  
Salary Added: \$16.6M

The Rangers reeled in the biggest fish on the market in Artemi Panarin to bolster their forward ranks, but also added one of the better defenders in the league in Jacob Trouba, along with a talented defensive prospect in Adam Fox. On top of that, losing Jimmy Vesey and Neal Pionk also helps as they were both negative value contributors.

Add it all up and no team added more wins this offseason than the Rangers, and that doesn't even include the additions of second overall pick Kaapo Kakko and 2018 ninth overall pick Vitali Kravtsov. The Rangers should be much improved this year as a result.

Whether it's enough to make the playoffs is the big question though and I'm still hesitant to put the Rangers firmly in. They're arguably in the conversation and away from the other bottom feeders, but the team still lacks depth at both forward and defense. It's a huge step, but one that likely still leaves the team falling short next season as they still don't really stack up favorably to other teams in the East.

#### Florida Panthers

In: Sergei Bobrovsky, Brett Connolly, Anton Stralman, Noel Acciari  
Out: Roberto Luongo, James Reimer, Troy Brouwer, Jamie McGinn  
Wins Added: 5.0 wins  
Salary Added: \$10.1M

Florida's biggest problem last season was goaltending. Consider that void filled with the addition of Sergei Bobrovsky who is rated by my model as the league's second most valuable goalie. Florida is banking that they get the Bobrovsky that finished last season strong, played well in the playoffs, and was a Vezina threat the few seasons prior. The guy in between the pipes for the majority of 2018-19 wasn't that. Regardless, he should still be a massive improvement over what they had, albeit at an extremely expensive price for a very long time. That he's in his 30's already doesn't help, especially if last year's decline was a sign of things to come.

Brett Connolly adds some scoring punch and Anton Stralman is steady on the backend – that should give Florida some much-needed depth, though they paid a hefty price for Stralman. The Panthers should absolutely be better as a result and didn't lose anyone of importance, but even the massive strides made this offseason likely leave them right on the playoff bubble.

#### Vancouver Canucks

In: J.T. Miller, Micheal Ferland, Tyler Myers, Jordie Benn, Oscar Fantenberg  
Out: Ryan Spooner, Markus Granlund, Derrick Pouliot, Luke Schenn, Ben Hutton  
Wins Added: 4.9 wins  
Salary Added: \$7.8M

The recurring theme at the top of the list: the team is better, but is it enough (and was the timing right)? It's the exact same story for the Canucks who are still likely not a playoff team despite going into next season much stronger. That's mainly because the team has a very steep hill to climb from where they've been the past few seasons.

Vancouver didn't really add anyone special here and they paid a high price (a conditional first for J.T. Miller and way too much money and term for Tyler Myers) to do it, but at the very least what the team added was capable NHL talent. You can't really say the same thing about who they replaced and it's the reason the Canucks rank so high. All five of Spooner, Granlund, Pouliot, Schenn and especially Hutton were large negative influences, and their exit has a large effect. No team gained more from addition by subtraction than the Canucks who dropped nearly two wins of negative value.

#### Chicago Blackhawks

In: Andrew Shaw, Robin Lehner, Calvin de Haan, Olli Maatta, John Quenneville, Ryan Carpenter, Zack Smith, Alex Nylander  
Out: Dominik Kahun, Henri Jokiharju, Artem Anisimov, Marcus Kruger, John Hayden, Chris Kunitz, Cam Ward, Gustav Forsling  
Wins Added: 3.6 wins  
Salary Added: \$7.5M

To say the Blackhawks have been busy is an understatement as they both added and subtracted the most number of players in the league with eight apiece. The team made some



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sweeping changes to the roster in the hopes of squeezing a few more ounces out of the Kane and Toews era. Andrew Shaw was a good get to shore up their forward depth, Calvin de Haan and Olli Maatta should improve the blue line and Robin Lehner is a terrific safety net behind the oft-injured Corey Crawford. Chicago didn't really lose anyone of value from last year's roster either.

This team should be better, especially if the goaltending holds up, but again, it really only puts them closer to the playoff bubble than they were before. On the whole, it's probably not enough to put the Blackhawks back into the playoff picture unless everything goes right next season.

Still, they should be closer – just like the Rangers, Panthers and Canucks. With parity in the middle class relatively high, next year's playoff race should be extremely interesting. There really isn't much separating a number of teams.

## Washington Capitals

In: Radko Gudas, Richard Panik, Brendan Leipsic, Garnet Hathaway

Out: Brett Connolly, Andre Burakovsky, Matt Niskanen, Brooks Orpik

Wins Added: 2.1 wins

Salary Added: -\$4.0M

The Capitals' offseason has been massively underrated in that there's an argument they're a better team than they were last year and managed to pull that off while saving money on the cap. That's impressive.

It starts with the Radko Gudas and Matt Niskanen swap, where Washington got the cheaper and arguably more valuable player (Niskanen's play has really fallen off in recent seasons), and then the team re-modeled the bottom six on the cheap. Richard Panik is the savviest signing here as he's underrated for what he brings to the table and comes extremely cheap.

The Brooks Orpik retirement can't be ignored either here as he was a huge detriment to the team's scoring chance share. His absence alone provides a large portion of the wins added.

## Buffalo Sabres

In: Colin Miller, Marcus Johansson, Henri Jokiharju, Jimmy Vesey

Out: Jason Pominville, Alex Nylander

Wins Added: 2.0 wins

Salary Added: \$6.0M

Buffalo's biggest problem is its depth pieces and adding players like Colin Miller and Marcus Johansson should help address that, especially if it pushes some negative value guys out. This team is in desperate need of more skill up front and better puck-moving on defense and those two bring that. Swapping Henri Jokiharju for Alex Nylander also looks like a sound bet given the latter's progression in the AHL, even if Jokiharju did struggle in his first NHL season. By both GSVA and WAR he was a sub-replacement level player.

## Ottawa Senators

In: Connor Brown, Nikita Zaitsev, Tyler Ennis, Ron Hainsey, Artem Anisimov

Out: Oscar Lindberg, Brian Gibbons, Zack Smith, Cody Ceci,

Ben Harpur

Wins Added: 1.9 wins

Salary Added: \$4.5M

The Senators rummaged through their cross-province rival's recycling bin, scooping up some of the worst pieces from last year's roster and improved their team as a result. Neither Nikita Zaitsev nor Ron Hainsey are very good, but they're likely an improvement over both Cody Ceci and Ben Harpur. Connor Brown might be able to shine with a spot further up the lineup and Tyler Ennis is a capable depth add. The Senators did well here, but the holes the team still has obviously need to be plugged with much more than a dumpster-diving escapade in Toronto. One team's trash is another team's treasure.

## Arizona Coyotes

In: Phil Kessel, Carl Soderberg

Out: Richard Panik, Alex Galchenyuk, Nick Cousins, Mario Kempe, Kevin Connauton

Wins Added: 1.7 wins

Salary Added: \$0.8M

At this point in his career, Phil Kessel is overrated. He puts up points, but his defensive shortcomings are massive. Still, he does add value and should be an upgrade over Alex Galchenyuk who was similarly woeful on defense without nearly as much firepower on offense. That's a big win for Arizona who finally have an offensive star to rally around, but it likely won't be enough to make the playoffs. Carl Soderberg is a decent add, but likely doesn't move the needle much relative to the other guys already on the roster.

In any sense, the Coyotes didn't add much salary and got a couple wins out of the deal so that's some pretty good work. They're inching ever so close to the playoff bubble, but unless some young guys take big steps, they're likely still on the outside of the hunt despite the positive summer.

## Minnesota Wild

In: Mats Zuccarello, Ryan Hartman

Out: Nate Prosser, Anthony Bitetto

Wins Added: 1.5 wins

Salary Added: \$6.5M

The Wild thankfully did not trade Jason Zucker, didn't lose anyone important and were able to add some reinforcements up front to an offensively-starved team. I think they're better than they're given credit for and Mats Zuccarello should provide a boost for next season, but it feels like an attempt to delay the inevitable rebuild track this team should be on.

## New Jersey Devils

In: P.K. Subban, Wayne Simmonds, John Hayden

Out: Stefan Noesen, Kenny Agostino, John Quenneville, Steven Santini

Wins Added: 1.4 wins

Salary Added: \$10.1M

The Devils traded pennies on the dollar for P.K. Subban and should see their defense improved substantially as a result. Wayne Simmonds isn't what he once was, but he's still a capable third-line forward and the term is the perfect amount



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of risk. With the amount of cap space the team has, the price doesn't matter.

The Devils should be a much better team than last year's version as a result, especially since they didn't lose anyone of note, and that doesn't even include the biggest addition of all: first overall pick Jack Hughes. They should be in the playoff hunt.

## Los Angeles Kings

In: Mario Kempe, Martin Frk  
Out: Brendan Leipsic, Nikita Scherbak, Dion Phaneuf  
Wins Added: 0.8 wins  
Salary Added: -\$4.9M

How did the Kings get almost a win better while shedding nearly five million dollars off their books while adding basically no one of significance? It's as simple as the team buying out Dion Phaneuf, who had that much of a negative impact on the team.

## Dallas Stars

In: Joe Pavelski, Corey Perry, Andrej Sekera  
Out: Mats Zuccarello, Tyler Pitlick, Valeri Nichushkin, Jason Spezza, Ben Lovejoy, Brett Ritchie  
Wins Added: 0.7 wins  
Salary Added: -\$8.3M

I really like what the Stars did this summer, a recurring theme from most summers. Dallas was a stronger team once they added Zuccarello to the lineup at the deadline, and Joe Pavelski is an improvement on that which should leave Stars fans excited for what the team can do next season. He alone brings another element to the team's forward depth, giving Dallas more balance and another scoring threat outside their top line. Adding him to a power play that already includes Tyler Seguin, Jamie Benn, Alex Radulov and John Klingberg sounds really tantalizing too.

The money isn't much of a consideration either considering Jason Spezza's mammoth-sized \$7.5-million deal is now off the books. The Stars are basically saving 500,000 on a huge upgrade, and overall are a better team while creating space to add more at the deadline. Corey Perry looks like a savvy add too at his price and should contribute some solid depth scoring. The Stars are in a good position to possibly contend this season as a result of their summer work.

## Boston Bruins

In: Par Lindholm, Brett Ritchie  
Out: Marcus Johansson, Noel Acciari  
Wins Added: 0.6 wins  
Salary Added: -\$1.6M

The Bruins didn't do much, letting deadline acquisition Marcus Johansson walk, while signing a couple of fourth liners. However, with internal options, the team shouldn't miss much of a beat.

## Nashville Predators

In: Matt Duchene, Steven Santini  
Out: P.K. Subban, Wayne Simmonds, Brian Boyle  
Wins Added: 0.5 wins  
Salary Added: -\$6.1M

Basically, the Predators traded P.K. Subban for Matt Duchene, moving out one big contract and adding another. Given their depth at the position and the emergence of Dante Fabbro, it's not a bad bet. The team should be slightly better going into next season, maintaining its championship window just a little bit longer, now with a better balance between forwards and defensemen. Whether it'll be worth the lengthy financial commitment remains to be seen.

## Philadelphia Flyers

In: Kevin Hayes, Matt Niskanen, Tyler Pitlick, Justin Braun, Nate Prosser  
Out: Radko Gudas, Cam Talbot, Andrew MacDonald, Phil Varone, Jori Lehtera  
Wins Added: 0.5 wins  
Salary Added: \$2.7M

The Flyers did a lot this summer in addressing their hole at 2C and revamping the defense. The Kevin Hayes deal is very rich for far too long, but for now he does make the team better. I'm not sure the same can be said for the defense though unless both Matt Niskanen and Justin Braun can bounce back from recent sub-par seasons. At their respective age, I'm skeptical.

## Edmonton Oilers

In: Mike Smith, Markus Granlund  
Out: Ty Rattie, Kevin Gravel, Andrej Sekera, Tobias Rieder, Alex Petrovic  
Wins Added: 0.3 wins  
Salary Added: -\$5.2M

The Oilers did very little, which makes this one of their best offseasons in ages. Mike Smith looked cooked last season, but the two years prior were decent and he looks like a solid, low-risk bet behind Mikko Koskinen. Markus Granlund isn't much of an upgrade on Ty Rattie or Tobias Rieder, but at the very least the Oilers have more flexibility now, something much needed for a team that was close to the cap with little to show for its expenses.

## Tampa Bay Lightning

In: Curtis McElhinney, Luke Schenn  
Out: J.T. Miller, Anton Stralman, Dan Girardi, Louis Domingue  
Wins Added: 0.1 wins  
Salary Added: -\$11.8M

The losses of J.T. Miller and Anton Stralman should not be understated, but the Lightning should be able to get by just fine by replacing both internally and increasing the usage of some of the other talented depth pieces they have. The difference between those two should also be offset by the upgrade the team made at back-up goalie as Curtis McElhinney has surprisingly been one of the league's most efficient tenders over the last few seasons.

The big key was creating space to sign RFA Brayden Point, something they should be able to accomplish, especially if he's under the same spell all Tampa Bay superstars are under before they sign new contracts.

## Calgary Flames

In: Cam Talbot  
Out: Mike Smith, Oscar Fantenberg, Garnet Hathaway



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Wins Added: 0.0 wins  
Salary Added: -\$4.4M

The Flames did almost nothing to a team that won the West this year and that's probably for the best, even if they do look like they'll take a step back next season. Swapping Mike Smith for Cam Talbot is a mostly inconsequential move.

## Colorado Avalanche

In: Nazem Kadri, Joonas Donskoi, Andre Burakovsky, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, Kevin Connauton

Out: Tyson Barrie, Alex Kerfoot, Carl Soderberg, Sven Andrighetto, Patrik Nemeth, Semyon Varlamov, Derick Brassard

Wins Added: -0.3 wins  
Salary Added: -\$8.4M

The Avalanche cut costs in the name of finding a better balance between a thin forward group and a growingly redundant defense corps. With Cale Makar coming in as the next big thing, Samuel Girard rising and the drafting of Bowen Byram, it became increasingly clear that Tyson Barrie was becoming expendable. The Avalanche turned him into Nazem Kadri who should be a perfect fit behind Nathan MacKinnon, giving the team a more formidable mix up front. Kadri is a stronger player than he's given credit for, and playing for Colorado should give him more opportunity to thrive. He should be a boost to the power play too.

Most of the players the team gave up were expendable as well, and the additions of Joonas Donskoi and Andre Burakovsky seem like smart bets to make in an attempt to further bolster the team's forward depth. Both are efficient players that could thrive with higher usage. The Avalanche's bottom line looks similar with all these moves, but internal improvement, plus a full season of Makar should mean the team finishes stronger next season. With a tonne of cap space, Colorado might become a big player in weaponizing it into future assets. The Avalanche are a rising power in the West.

## Pittsburgh Penguins

In: Dominik Kahun, Brandon Tanev, Alex Galchenyuk  
Out: Phil Kessel, Olli Maatta, Riley Sheahan, Matt Cullen  
Wins Added: -0.3 wins  
Salary Added: -\$4.3M

The Penguins cut salary and didn't lose much from the bottom line, but that has more to do with players they lost, rather than the actual moves they made. Losing Riley Sheahan and Matt Cullen make Pittsburgh a better team via addition by subtraction and the Dominik Kahun-Olli Maatta swap was fine too as the latter was likely expendable.

It's the Phil Kessel deal and Brandon Tanev signing that doesn't make sense in conjunction with each other. Together, the new duo of Tanev and Alex Galchenyuk take up \$8.4 million while likely not providing anywhere close to the value of Kessel. So what was the point of clearing that space to begin with? It's even more confusing when you look at the glut of NHL-calibre forwards the team has, making the Tanev signing even more redundant. That he's signed for six seasons is simply ludicrous.

The Penguins should still be a good team as long as Sidney Crosby is still Sidney Crosby, but they're increasing their margin for error with every passing offseason.

## Vegas Golden Knights

In: N/A

Out: Colin Miller, Erik Haula, Ryan Carpenter, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, Deryk Engelland

Wins Added: -0.4 wins  
Salary Added: -\$10.2M

The Golden Knights needed to cut salary and they did just that by shipping out Colin Miller and Erik Haula while allowing three players to walk in free agency. Even that won't be enough as the team still tries to sign RFA Nikita Gusev to a contract (or trade him), but at the very least the team shouldn't lose much value as a result. Losing Miller on the back end hurts, but the forward corps should still be strong enough to offset that.

## Detroit Red Wings

In: Patrik Nemeth, Valtteri Filppula

Out: Thomas Vanek, Martin Frk, Niklas Kronwall

Wins Added: -0.4 wins  
Salary Added: \$2.0M

As is tradition, the Red Wings added money to their salary cap and didn't really improve their team in any tangible fashion. Neither Patrik Nemeth or Valtteri Filppula move the needle much.

## Carolina Hurricanes

In: Erik Haula, Ryan Dzingel, James Reimer, Brian Gibbons, Gustav Forsling

Out: Micheal Ferland, Curtis McElhinney, Calvin de Haan, Adam Fox, Greg McKeeg

Wins Added: -0.6 wins  
Salary Added: \$3.3M

The salary added mostly comes from the addition of James Reimer in exchange for Scott Darling, since the latter wasn't really a factor. In any sense, Reimer looks to be a sizeable downgrade from the previous backup goaltender, Curtis McElhinney, and that's the main reason the team loses value. It's not much though as Erik Haula and Ryan Dzingel should adequately replace the value left behind by Micheal Ferland and Calvin de Haan, with an eye towards getting more out of their forward group considering how stacked the team's top four on defense is. The Justin Williams situations looms large here as he's a vital piece. Losing him would create a significant dent to the team's total value.

## St. Louis Blues

In: Derrick Pouliot

Out: Patrick Maroon, Michael Del Zotto

Wins Added: -0.6 wins  
Salary Added: -\$3.3M

The defending Stanley Cup champions mostly stood pat after winning last summer's offseason. The loss of Patrick Maroon might sting a little bit, but they should be fine in their quest to repeat. My model considers them to be one of the strongest teams in the West (after some adjustments to better account for a defense that is).



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## Anaheim Ducks

In: Michael Del Zotto, Nicolas Deslauriers  
Out: Corey Perry  
Wins Added: -0.8 wins  
Salary Added: -\$4.3M

Nothing to see here really. I'm not really sure I fully understand the buyout of Corey Perry considering the current trajectory of the team – it's not like that cap space will be going to good use going forward.

## Toronto Maple Leafs

In: Tyson Barrie, Alex Kerfoot, Kevin Gravel, Kenny Agostino, Jason Spezza, Cody Ceci, Ben Harpur  
Out: Jake Gardiner, Nazem Kadri, Connor Brown, Nikita Zaitsev, Tyler Ennis, Ron Hainsey, Patrick Marleau  
Wins Added: -0.8 wins  
Salary Added: -\$12.1M

The Leafs went to work in the interest of creating space for all their RFA's and they did a great job in that, shedding \$12.1-million from the books while trimming the fat from their roster. Gone is the albatross contract for Nikita Zaitsev, the bloated final year for Patrick Marleau and the too-expensive-for-a-fourth-liner deal for Connor Brown. All necessary moves in order to make the roster more malleable to the team's vision of skill throughout. Adding Cody Ceci to the team wasn't ideal, but his contract is at least more manageable than Zaitsev's.

There was also the Kadri for Barrie and Alex Kerfoot swap, one that arguably brought back some of the value lost from cutting the fat as well as losing Jake Gardiner to free agency. The Leafs are a slightly worse team as a result, but a better balanced one now and one with more flexibility to improve going forward.

## New York Islanders

In: Semyon Varlamov  
Out: Robin Lehner, Valtteri Filppula  
Wins Added: -1.0 wins  
Salary Added: \$0.8M

Considering the two goalies ended up with the same cap hit, swapping Robin Lehner for Semyon Varlamov is definitely not a move I would've made. That the latter comes with three extra years of term seems completely asinine as there's little doubt that Lehner is the better option in net. Lehner was unlikely to repeat last year's magical season, but even after factoring for impending regression he still projected to provide one more win of value over Varlamov next season. With the team likely to come back down to earth next season, they need every win of talent they can get.

## Montreal Canadiens

In: Nick Cousins, Ben Chiarot, Keith Kinkaid, Phil Varone  
Out: Andrew Shaw, Jordie Benn, Antti Niemi, Nicolas Deslauriers  
Wins Added: -1.1 wins  
Salary Added: -\$0.2M

Andrew Shaw had a surprisingly remarkable season last year and would've been good to keep around, but with the team's forward glut I don't blame Montreal for selling high. That's the main reason the team sees a 1.1 win drop in value, as the rest

is mostly a wash. Keith Kinkaid isn't great, but he's a marginal improvement on Antti Niemi. Ditto for Nick Cousins over Nicolas Deslauriers, though that's mostly a depth move. On defense, I don't think Ben Chiarot is the answer and he's likely a downgrade over Jordie Benn at a higher cost. If they wanted a one-dimensional left-handed defender at a premium for three more seasons, they already had Karl Alzner sitting right there.

## Winnipeg Jets

In: Neal Pionk, Anthony Bitetto  
Out: Jacob Trouba, Kevin Hayes, Tyler Myers, Brandon Tanev, Ben Chiarot, Par Lindholm  
Wins Added: -2.9 wins  
Salary Added: -\$16.1M

I think the Jets are in bigger trouble than they're credited for. The team has massive holes on defense with the departures of Jacob Trouba, Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot, and it's unlikely they'll be adequately filled by Neal Pionk and Anthony Bitetto. Though it was unlikely Kevin Hayes would return, the team still has a massive hole at 2C that Bryan Little is growing increasingly incapable of filling. The Jets lose the third most value from their bottom line from where they were in the playoffs and that just might be the difference between contention and the playoff bubble.

## San Jose Sharks

In: N/A  
Out: Joe Pavelski, Gustav Nyquist, Joonas Donskoi, Justin Braun, Joakim Ryan  
Wins Added: -3.1 wins  
Salary Added: -\$15.7M

The Sharks had to do a lot of work to fit Erik Karlsson and Timo Meier under the cap, and it left Joe Pavelski as a cap casualty. He's a massive loss to the team and the main reason for all the value lost. The Sharks were a contender last year, making it to the conference finals, and there's possibility to replace Pavelski's value internally, but he left a big hole to fill. It's likely they take a step back this season as a result.

## Columbus Blue Jackets

In: Gustav Nyquist  
Out: Sergei Bobrovsky, Artemi Panarin, Matt Duchene, Ryan Dzingel, Keith Kinkaid, Adam McQuaid  
Wins Added: -7.5 wins  
Salary Added: -\$19.7M

As if it could be any other team at the end. It wasn't even close as Columbus lost more wins from their roster than the next three teams combined. Ouch. Part of that comes from a quartet of deadline additions, but it still speaks to the caliber of team the Blue Jackets had at their disposal in the playoffs and how far they'll likely fall from that height next season. Losing 7.5 wins is enough to drop Columbus from playoff dark horse to playoff wannabe.

They'll be closer than some people think though as the team still has some talented pieces available to them. Adding Gustav Nyquist does help, even if it feels like slapping duct tape on a sinking ship, but the battle to make the playoffs is obviously now much tougher. It's admirable that the team went for it all, knowing they were unlikely to retain Artemi Panarin



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and Sergei Bobrovsky the following season and that those two were a huge part of their success. Now comes the fallout from that decision.

## The Hockey News

### No big splash, but the Hurricanes' effective summer sets stage for success next season

Carolina didn't land any top free agents or make any true blockbuster deals, but the Hurricanes have added where they needed to and kept key pieces in place. That's what has them primed to build off of last season's success.

By Jared Clinton

If off-season action was measured on some sort of mystical Richter scale, no teams in the Metropolitan Division would have created bigger shock waves than the New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils. Even the Philadelphia Flyers and Pittsburgh Penguins sent considerable ripples through the division, though it could be argued the latter did so for all the wrong reasons. Somewhere in the middle, though, would be the Carolina Hurricanes.

Yes, as we enter into the back half of July and inch closer to the third week of signing season, the Hurricanes haven't exactly been inactive, but Carolina's movement hasn't quite been of the same headline-grabbing variety as New York's additions of Artemi Panarin, Jacob Trouba and Kaapo Kakko or New Jersey's blockbuster acquisition of P.K. Subban, which came the day after they drafted Jack Hughes with the first-overall pick. It could even be said that the Hurricanes' summer hasn't been as splashy as that of the Flyers, who added Kevin Hayes, Matt Niskanen and Justin Braun via trade, and Carolina certainly hasn't shipped out a talent the same caliber as Phil Kessel nor signed a deal as debatable as Brandon Tanev's, so that puts them slightly behind the Penguins.

What the Hurricanes have done so far this summer, however, is cross items off of their summer wish list and check the boxes that needed to be checked. And even though it wasn't the contract Carolina intended, nor the dollar figure or term the team was aiming for at the outset, that begins with the resigning of Sebastian Aho to a five-year, \$42.3-million pact that came by way of a matched Montreal Canadiens offer sheet.

Make no mistake, either, that taking care of Aho was No. 1 with a bullet on the Hurricanes' off-season docket, and while his pact, with its \$8.454-million cap hit, is undoubtedly more than Carolina was hoping to have to dish out and the term shorter than the organization would have wanted for unrestricted free agency reasons, it allowed the Hurricanes to do two things. First, it saw them lock up the cornerstone of the offense and a 21-year-old who proved himself as a first-line pivot last season with a breakout offensive performance that brought with it promise of an even brighter future. Second, it allowed Carolina to flex some financial muscle, which is something the franchise has done little of in recent years and proof positive that owner Tom Dundon can put his money where his mouth is when push comes to shove.

But it's the moves that have followed the Hurricanes' matching of the offer sheet – an action that was made official one week after the offer sheet was made but one the ownership and

management made clear was coming within hours, maybe even minutes, of Aho putting pen to paper – that stand to see Carolina build off of the Bunch-of-Jerks hype that began last season.

Offensively, for instance, the Hurricanes have addressed their need for more depth and more punch. Even before the opening of free agency, the Hurricanes leveraged the Vegas Golden Knights' difficult cap situation into the acquisition of versatile speedster Erik Haula, who, despite missing almost all of last season due to injury, has scored 31 goals and 62 points in his past 91 games and could be a sneaky 20-goal scorer. And after waiting out the crowd, Carolina went and landed Ryan Dzingel on a fairly team-friendly, low-risk two-year pact that sees the two-time 20-goal scorer arrive as a readymade middle-six scorer.

In those moves, the Hurricanes have more than replaced what was lost in the free agent departure of Micheal Ferland, who scored 17 goals last season, and even if captain and 23-goal scorer Justin Williams decides to leave Carolina or hang up his skates, there shouldn't be a single tally lost. Add to it a full season of Nino Niederreiter and the growth of Andrei Svechnikov and there's reason to believe the middling offense can flirt with a spot in the top-third of the NHL next season.

And while Carolina tinkered with its defense, shipping out Calvin de Haan in what amounted to a cap-clearing deal, they did so without shaking up the core of the group. In fact, all four of the top-minute rearguards are set to be back next season, and the Hurricanes seem primed to graduate at least one blueliner to full-time NHL duty next season, be it Haydn Fleury or Gustav Forsling, who was acquired from the Chicago Blackhawks in the de Haan deal.

The Hurricanes also got their wish as far as the crease is concerned, too. GM Don Waddell had made clear that he intended to bring back at least one half of last season's tandem and he did exactly that when he inked Petr Mrazek, who was a hero during the late-season charge, on a two-year pact. And while Mrazek's inconsistency and up-and-down play might be of some concern, he was a perfect fit in Carolina last season. Of the 43 goaltenders who played at least 1,500 minutes at 5-on-5 last season, Mrazek ranked ninth in save percentage (.931), sixth in high-danger save percentage (.863) and 10th in goals saved above average per 60 minutes (.31). New backup James Reimer finds himself in a much better situation with the Hurricanes, too, and after an ugly season with the Florida Panthers, there's reason to believe Reimer can return to his old form.

The icing on the cake among all of this, though, is that the structure of the roster hasn't changed enough and the core group hasn't been altered in such a way that Carolina should see any major shift away from the aspects of their game that



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made them so successful last season. The Hurricanes added where they needed to while being able to maintain the pieces that made them a possession juggernaut and the league's expected-goals-for king. If last season's underlying numbers are any indication, Carolina has the makeup to again be a force.

So, sure, the Hurricanes may not have made the big signing or blockbuster deal, but the reality is that they didn't need to. It's been a calculated summer, and one that sets Carolina up to make its biggest splash when the puck drops next season.



## Checkers sign Derek Sheppard, Hunter Shinkaruk and Colin Markison to AHL deals

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers bulked up their roster for next season on Thursday, signing defenseman Derek Sheppard and forwards Hunter Shinkaruk and Colin Markison all to AHL contracts.

Sheppard returns to Charlotte after inking an AHL deal in the middle of last season. The 25-year-old recorded an assist and 24 penalty minutes in 10 games with the Checkers during the regular season and added a goal and an assist with 35 penalty minutes in six postseason games.

Sheppard spent the majority of his rookie season in the ECHL with the Florida Everblades, where he racked up 40 points (14g, 26a) and 93 penalty minutes in 57 games to earn spots on both the ECHL All-Rookie Team and the ECHL Second All-Star Team. The Ontario native also appeared in 10 games at the tail-end of the 2017-18 ECHL campaign and helped guide the Everblades to a berth in the Kelly Cup Finals.

Prior to turning pro Sheppard played two seasons in the QMJHL with Gatineau before starring for four years at York University, where he was a two-time conference Defenseman of the Year and named conference MVP once.

Shinkaruk is heading into his sixth pro season after logging 10 points (5g, 5a) in 54 games for the Laval Rocket last

season. Taken 24th overall in the 2013 draft by Vancouver, Shinkaruk has 159 points (80g, 79a) in 305 AHL over his career with Utica, Stockton and Laval, as well as 15 NHL games with the Canucks and Flames.

The 24-year-old winger broke the 30-point mark in each of his first four AHL seasons, including logging a career-high 51 in 62 games during a 2015-16 campaign that saw him earn a trip to the AHL All-Star Game.

Prior to turning pro Shinkaruk, a Calgary native, recorded 235 points (105g, 130a) in 211 WHL games over four seasons with Medicine Hat.

Markison joins the Checkers after completing his fourth full pro season, setting a career high in goals (8) and matching his in points (27) last season over 62 games with the Texas Stars. The 26-year-old has 208 AHL games under his belt with Bridgeport and Texas and has logged 72 points (21g, 51a) along the way. The New Jersey native also appeared in 24 ECHL games for the Missouri Mavericks in 2015-16 and produced 17 points (10g, 7a).

Prior to turning pro Markison spent four years at the University of Vermont, where he recorded 52 points (23g, 29a) in 127 games, and the two years before that in the USHL, notching 34 points (13g, 21a) in 112 games for the Omaha Lancers.

### TODAY'S LINKS

<https://theathletic.com/1084921/2019/07/19/how-much-has-each-team-improved-this-offseason/>  
<https://thehockeynews.com/news/article/no-big-splash-but-the-hurricanes-effective-summer-sets-stage-for-success-next-season>  
<http://qocheckers.com/articles/transactions/checkers-sign-derek-sheppard-hunter-shinkurak-and-colin-markison-to-ahl-deals>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## SportScan

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

1149867 NHL

NHL Seattle believes new GM Ron Francis can deliver — if given some chips

July 18, 2019 at 7:16 pm Updated July 18, 2019 at 7:40 PM

By Matt Calkins

Seattle Times columnist

What's the rudest thing you can say to people that have already invested hundreds of millions more dollars into a project than expected? That they better keep the money coming.

But that's the advice for the NHL Seattle ownership group when it comes time to build a team. And that's what this hockey-hungry fan base should expect of them.

Thursday, Hall of Fame center Ron Francis was introduced as the yet-to-be-named team's general manager. He arrived after spending four years as GM of the Carolina Hurricanes, who never made the postseason under his watch.

Normally, such a playoff-less stretch might turn off an employer set to make the franchise's most important hire. But in Seattle, the powers knew that Francis was working with a budget stuck in the penalty box.

In Francis' final three years in Carolina, the Hurricanes had either the lowest or second-lowest budget in the NHL. And yet, through drafting and trading, Ron put together a team that finally broke into the playoffs the season after he was let go.

NHL Seattle CEO Tod Leiweke saw what Francis was able to construct while ownership pinched pennies. So he's damn intrigued by what Francis can do when ownership drops bills.

"When he was general manager, the team was up for sale, so it wasn't perfect conditions for someone who came in. But he then did it the hard way. He drafted, developed and stayed patient," Leiweke said. "He learned the hardest lesson there is in sports — how to take less chips and compete with the other teams. He's going to get an equal number of chips here. We're going to compete. We're going to be a cap team. We're going to have great facilities and the resources."

Well, there it is. The team president is on record saying ownership is going to give Francis the stack necessary to build a Stanley Cup contender. That doesn't necessarily mean he'll deliver, as teams constantly mispend large sums of cash (see: Mariners). But if Leiweke is true to his word, his new GM will at least have the proper set of tools to build.

To Francis' credit, he never disparaged his situation in Carolina. He said that his job has always been to work with the dollar amount he is given, and seems grateful for every opportunity that he got.

But this is also a man who was replete with options. He didn't come to Seattle out of desperation but rather fascination — and freedom to operate was part of it.

"We talked about what their vision and what their plan is," Francis said of NHL Seattle. "And I think this team is going to be in good shape as far as being able to go out and get players — whether it's free agents or taking on players with bigger contracts — because they want to do things right."

Priority one for Francis, after he hires a coach, that is, will be building through the expansion draft. That's how the Vegas Golden Knights created a team good enough to reach the Stanley Cup Final in its inaugural season two years ago.

But sustained success is what is going to keep the fans coming to KeyArena every year, and it's nearly impossible to do that without a willingness to spend.

So far, this ownership group has shown that willingness. KeyArena renovation costs were initially projected at \$600 million, but have since ballooned to over \$900 million. There is also an \$85 million practice facility in the works, and God knows what else.

But between David Bonderman, Jerry Bruckheimer, Tim Leiweke and other backers, the financial commitment remains strong. We'll see if that continues to be the case.

Tod Leiweke was close to tears after Thursday's news conference when he looked over at Ron Francis. It was the most tangible step taken since breaking ground in turning this NHL vision into a reality.

There is no doubt that the passion is there for everybody involved. But for this team to become an NHL power, the money must be, too.

Seattle Times LOADED: 07.19.2019

1149868 NHL

Multiyear deal signed, Seattle NHL general manager Ron Francis gets to work: 'We've got a blank canvas'

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter



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Freshly minted general manager Ron Francis spent part of his introductory news conference Thursday discussing the importance of using any afforded additional time and why he won't immediately hire a coach for this city's incoming NHL franchise.

"I think we're open to hiring the right guy at the right time," Francis told the assembled media members, political figures and hockey community officials at the KEXP gathering space adjacent to KeyArena's ongoing \$930 million rebuild. "But I think it's also important for us — since we've got a little bit of runway here — to make sure we take our time and go through the process. There are a lot of things that can change in that profession over the next couple of years."

Francis, 56, has certainly learned the value of grabbing additional "runway" in today's ultracompetitive NHL, where the patience level of teams and fans isn't what it used to be. He ran out of afforded time his last GM job with the Carolina Hurricanes when a new owner pulled the plug on Francis the spring of 2018, four playoff-free seasons into a rebuilding plan the Hall of Fame former player felt he'd need at least five for.

It's unlikely he'll get five seasons to build a playoff team here, though Francis said in an interview following Thursday's news conference that it shouldn't take as long to get his plan implemented this time. For one, he added, this city's team should get a variety of established players right away and won't be completely rebuilding with youth like in Carolina.

"I think here we're going to look at it in a lot of different ways," Francis said. "Obviously scouting in the NHL and the American Hockey League for expansion draft players. We're going to be scouting the amateur leagues for players that hopefully can get into our system sooner rather than later."

"And then, I think the city of Seattle has a quality of life that it can offer. The fact there's no state income tax is going to be exciting to free agents. I've really been talking with this ownership group about what they want to do and how they want to keep their players and staff. Word's going to get out that this is a very good place to play and so hopefully we can get that (team vision) accomplished sooner rather than later."

He should get at least three actual seasons to do that here. Though NHL Seattle did not officially release contract details, Francis is thought to have a five-year deal, the first two of which will be spent preparing for the franchise's October 2021 launch.

And though Francis insisted multiple times he's prepared to work with whatever resources he's given by ownership, he did have "some conversations" on that front before taking the job. With the Hurricanes, he continuously was given one of the smallest budgets in the league to work with.

"We talked about what their vision and what their plan is," he said of NHL Seattle. "And I think this team is going to be in good shape as far as being able to go out and get players — whether it's free agents or taking on players with bigger contracts because they want to do things right."

And all that should save Francis some precious time he ran out of in his previous gig. He acknowledged the hockey landscape has changed — referencing a USA Today article from last year on that topic — and that there's less patience to produce a winner today than when he took the Carolina job in 2014.

"In Carolina, our vision was that we had to rebuild it from the ground up," he said. "That takes time when you're only getting seven draft picks a year and those kids need time to develop."

NHL Seattle president and CEO Tod Leiweke noted during Thursday's event that much of the Hurricanes' conference finalist squad from last season and Calder Cup championship AHL affiliate was stocked with a core of Francis selections. Leiweke repeatedly noted the respect and admiration Francis carries throughout hockey after a career spanning parts of 23 seasons as a Stanley Cup-winning player and three more as an associate Hurricanes head coach before permanently joining the front office.

"He carefully laid a foundation of how to move that franchise forward," Leiweke said. "Not just for the NHL, but with the AHL."

Leiweke added: "We believe Ron's patience paid off. His patience in drafting. His fingerprints were all over both of those rosters. Eighty percent of the goals scored were by the players he drafted — an amazing achievement."

And his patience outside of hockey is something NHL Seattle is counting on Francis for to help them sell the game within the community. Not talked about by Leiweke on Thursday was how NHL Seattle ran tests on the names of their potential GM candidates with selected sports fans to see how well they resonated.

The reputations of some candidates personality-wise from their NHL playing days or prior GM stints apparently didn't go over as well with fans as others did. But Francis scored well above the fray, which isn't surprising given how — as Leiweke noted during the news conference — he'd won both the Lady Byng Trophy for sportsmanship and the Frank J. Selke Trophy for unselfish two-way defensive play as a forward during the same 1994-95 season with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

For now, Francis will take his time where it's given. On the coaching front, waiting a year or two buys time for an established coach to become available — think Mike Babcock if the Toronto Maple Leafs don't reach the Stanley Cup final soon — and others to gain or regain seasoning in the head position.

Francis's former Hartford Whalers teammate, onetime Florida Panthers head coach Kevin Dineen — whose father, Bill, was a longtime Seattle Totems fixture in the 1960s — was hired this week as bench boss of Anaheim's AHL affiliate in San Diego after coaching Canada's entry in the Spengler Cup in Switzerland last December. Francis was a co-GM of that same team and it wouldn't be surprising for Dineen — who was an assistant with the Chicago Blackhawks until last year but hasn't been a professional head coach since 2013 — to get a serious look after a year or two of San Diego work.

On the subject of the Spengler Cup, Francis said that annual tournament and his managing Canada's world championship entry in Slovakia and Austria this past spring helped bridge his time away from the league.

"When I was there, the passion really came back for me," Francis said.

And once Leiweke reached out and brought Francis in last month to meet owners and tour the KeyArena site, the passion "became white hot to me."

By that point, as patient as Francis can be, he realized another year on the sidelines wasn't something he could handle.

"This is going to be a fantastic opportunity," he said. "We've got a blank canvas. Sure, it's a daunting task and a lot of work. But it's a unique challenge that you don't get every day."



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1149869 NHL

Ron Francis has big hopes as GM of Seattle's new NHL club

BY CHRIS TALBOTT ASSOCIATED PRESS

JULY 18, 2019 01:45 PM

SEATTLE

Ron Francis has all kinds of eye-popping statistics attached to his Hall of Fame career. He averaged more than point a game, is second in NHL history in assists behind Wayne Gretzky and fifth in career points.

When CEO Tod Leiweke and the ownership group of the Seattle NHL expansion team looked at his playing resume, though, they were most impressed by another statistic: Francis was voted captain by three teams for 14 of his 23 years, first earning the role at age 21.

That leadership ability spurred them to hire Francis on Thursday as general manager of the yet-to-be-named team — well ahead of their schedule.

"Ownership made an incredible commitment . in supporting this idea of let's do this a year early," Leiweke said. "If we're really here working for our fans, let's reward their belief. They said we're willing to make this commitment a year early. We're willing to bring on a general manager earlier than any other expansion team in the history of the NHL and that gift of an additional year will serve us well and give us a chance to scout and build and plan. But we had to find the right person."

They believe the 56-year-old Francis is that person, announcing his hiring at a news conference that was attended by the mayor and a state senator. He'll have complete control of building the organization under Leiweke. He said he's already drawn up an organizational chart that will guide hiring as the team prepares to open play in 2021 as the NHL's 32nd franchise.

And he's already started daydreaming about how his team will look.

"I think if you look at my past experience, it's a team that's fast," Francis said. "I think it's a team that needs to have skill and hockey sense. I like a team that's extremely competitive. And for me I think you need a team that has character. It's easy to be a good person when things are going well. When things get a little bit tough, that's when character rises to the top and pulls you through those tough times."

Character defined Francis' playing career. Jaromir Jagr, his teammate on the 1991 and 1992 Stanley Cup-winning Pittsburgh Penguins, called Francis perhaps the most underrated player in NHL history. After starting his career as the No. 4 overall pick in the 1981 draft for the Hartford Whalers, he played for the Penguins and the Toronto Maple Leafs before returning to the Whalers in 1998 after they moved to Carolina.

He guided that team to the NHL finals before retiring. He joined the Hurricanes' front office and worked through a number of jobs under Hall of Fame GM Jim Rutherford, including assistant GM and associate head coach. He was promoted to GM in 2014 when Rutherford left for Pittsburgh and held that position until an

ownership change in 2018, a year before Carolina played in the finals.

Francis said he was depressed after leaving the Hurricanes, but found his drive again while working at the Spengler Cup and with Hockey Canada during last year's world championships.

"Getting around the NHL players again, the NHL coaches and stuff, the passion started burning again and I thought, 'OK this is really where I want to be,'" Francis said. "And when Tod called, I looked at the opportunity and said, 'What a great chance.' We get to build it from the ground up. We get to establish our culture and how we want to do it. I think it's a unique opportunity. It doesn't happen every day."

News Tribune LOADED: 07.19.2019

1149870 NHL

'Absolutely humbled' Hall of Famer Ron Francis becomes first GM of Seattle's NHL team

BY GREGG BELL

JULY 18, 2019 01:37 PM

SEATTLE

They came wearing Seattle Metropolitan jerseys from our region's original Stanley Cup title in 1917, Hartford Whalers jerseys from the 1980s — and, in the case of Jenny Durkan, the jacket-and-pants attire of being Seattle's mayor in 2019.

Northwest hockey fans, local politicians, journalists and more came to Seattle Center on Thursday morning to celebrate Durkan announcing the first huge hockey hire for Seattle's new NHL team.

It is, as franchise CEO Tod Leiweke said, "perhaps the most important hire we will ever make."

Ron Francis is Seattle's first general manager. He signed a multiyear contract.

"I'm absolutely humbled to be the first GM of this franchise," Francis said.

Leiweke was humbled, too.

"It's a dream come true," Leiweke said. "He is truly hockey royalty and a perfect fit for the team we are building."

Francis is a Hockey Hall of Famer. During his 22 starring seasons as a player he won two Stanley Cups playing for Pittsburgh. He is second all-time in the NHL to Wayne Gretzky in assists. He is fifth all-time in points. He is fourth all-time in games played. He was a captain teams in Hartford, Pittsburgh and Carolina for 14 years.

Then he was the architect of what grew into Carolina's conference-finals team this spring, while as the Hurricanes' GM from 2014-17.

Francis said he will begin immediately to assemble a staff and front office in Seattle. Eventually, he will hire a coach for the franchise's inaugural NHL season that begins in the fall of 2021.



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Speaking Thursday next door to the ongoing rebuild of KeyArena at Seattle Center that will become the hockey team's home—"one of the most beautiful arenas in the entire world," Leiweke predicted—the 56-year-old Francis said he was eager to form his master plan for the new franchise.

His challenge: build a champion from the ground up.

Francis mentioned the world-class arena under construction. He cited the support of Seattle Hockey Partners LLC owners; managing partner and billionaire David Bonderman and investors including film and television producer Jerry Bruckheimer hired a GM a year earlier than they had planned. Francis talked about the Puget Sound's untapped hockey market. About the new team having 32,000 season-ticket deposit holders, plus 25,000 more on a waiting list for tickets.

"Honestly, it just became, why not?" Francis said.

"This is just going to be a fantastic opportunity. We've got a blank canvas."

The team is planning to break ground early in 2020 on a three-rink team headquarters and practice facility at Northgate, north of downtown Seattle.

By hiring a huge name in Francis to lead its hockey operations, Seattle just got even more momentum behind it becoming the NHL's 32nd franchise.

"Sure, it's going to be a daunting task and a lot of work," Francis said. "But it's a unique challenge that you don't get every day, because not every sports team starts from scratch. ...

"It's so unique. There aren't a lot of those opportunities out there. Talking to Tod and to the owners and their vision for the town of Seattle and their hockey fans, there's no corners being cut. They want the best venue. They want the best team. They want the best fan experience.

"Even with the practice facility, right? It would have been easy to build one rink. But they (are building) three. The reason was, it provides ice for the youth in the community to go out and skate.

"So, it's not just about our organization. It's about things that are right and growing the product in this market."

Leiweke thanked the team's ownership group for OK-ing hiring a general manager a year earlier than they had planned. That approval came after some targets Seattle had in mind for potentially becoming the team's first GM got hired elsewhere this summer. Steve Yzerman, who impressed Leiweke when they worked together with the Tampa Bay Lightning, became Detroit's new GM. Ken Holland got the same job with Edmonton. Vegas assistant Kelly McCrimmon got promoted to GM for the Golden Knights.

That was a little over a year after Vegas set an absurdly high bar for Seattle by reaching the Stanley Cup finals as an expansion team, in 2017.

"Yeah, I used to joke you want to be the second GM in Seattle, based on what Vegas did," Francis said, smiling.

Canada's Sportsnet reported this spring the Ottawa Senators began showing interest in hiring Francis, a native of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, to be their president of hockey operations. Francis was available after Carolina had fired him in the spring of 2018, though he was under contract with the Hurricanes until this month, July 1.

That spurred Seattle into hiring him now to be its GM.

Asked what is "uniquely Ron Francis" that he alone can add to make Seattle's team an immediate success, the new GM sighed.

"Whoa, good question," Francis said.

"I think, Tod touched on the 23 years in the game. I don't think that helps me so much in this role, other than a lot of those years I was a leader. And twice I was fortunate enough to win a Stanley Cup. And I think when you win a Stanley Cup, that gives you something that other people don't have. You understand what it takes to be successful. You understand how to build that team.

"And it's not an easy trophy to win. But we look forward to hopefully doing that again here in Seattle."

Now that the team has its building going up, will soon break ground on its practice facility and has a GM, when will Francis make his big hire?

When will Seattle get its first NHL coach?

"We are open to hiring the right guy and the right time," Francis said. "But I think it's also important for us, we've got a little bit of runway here. We've got to make sure we take our time and go through the process.

"There's a lot of things that can change in that profession in the next couple years. So we'll take our time and make sure we get the right guy to lead our franchise."

News Tribune LOADED: 07.19.2019

1149892 Websites

Marner's contract talks with Maple Leafs a roller-coaster of anticipation

Luke Fox July 19, 2019, 12:33 AM

VAUGHAN, Ont. — Right before riders of the Yukon Striker plummet down a 90-degree, 223-foot drop, they just hang there, peering over the edge.

Stuck still, way up in the air, for a full three seconds to contemplate what it might feel like to scream through the world's tallest, longest and fastest Dive Coaster. Or wonder if the thing is up to code.

For the queasy among us, those three seconds can feel like three months, the mind whizzing through a series of what-ifs and shoulda-coulda-wouldas.

Which brings us to fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs and the unsigned Mitchell Marner, who scored a thrill bringing his pal, Arizona Coyotes forward Christian Dvorak, to Canada's Wonderland Wednesday, where they conquered the Striker multiple times.

"I was making a joke that we were being ride warriors there. It's fun," Marner beamed Thursday, as he walked the blue carpet at Dave & Buster's for the opening-night party of his second-annual Marner Assist Fund charity event.

"It's a nice ride, though."



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Yet when the business of hockey is concerned, Marner might as well be still hanging way up there at the Toronto amusement park's greatest peak — feet dangling over top of his city, fate unknown.

And for the card-carrying members of Leafs Nation, the anticipation — even if it all ends with laughter and relief and a memorable photo op — is killing them this summer.

They've seen this movie before and fret they know the ending.

They agonized as last summer's critical restricted free agent, William Nylander, skipped training camp, then a month-and-a-half of the real season and then waited until the Dec. 1 deadline to sign, with only about the time it takes to microwave a Pizza Pop to spare.

Marner has run into that worry. The fans he bumps into at the airport or at Wonderland all want to know when he'll hurry up and sign already.

"There's fans everywhere you go, especially here in Toronto," Marner, 22, says. "It's been kinda funny joking around with them."

Except when you proudly post an Instagram video of landing your first 360 on a wakesurfer, which you gleefully land after five or six failed attempts, and are compelled to shut down comments on the post because of all the contract chatter.

"There's nothing really good on social media anyways. For me, it's keeping my phone away, relaxing and kinda enjoying the summer," explains Marner, aware that nothing he can say to a scrum of reporters will end the constant swirl of speculation and opinionizing.

No. Only his and GM Kyle Dubas's signatures on a dotted line will do that.

Are we there yet?

"Hopefully sooner than later. I want to be there for the start of camp, so hoping something can get done then. My agent and Kyle are doing it, and they're going to figure something out," says Marner, who would go the Nylander route and skip camp until a deal is in place.

"There's so much risk with that. It's just something you don't want to risk."

So as Marner, elusive off the ice as on, deferred all contract queries to his agent, Darren Ferris, Thursday evening, the rumour mill churns.

Earlier this week, it was suggested Dubas might welcome an offer sheet, just to end this mess and kick back like Don Waddell in Carolina.

Last week it was Columbus exploring an offer sheet. Before that, New York's Lou Lamoriello, the man who drafted Marner to Toronto.

"There's been no sell," chuckles Islanders forward Michael Dal Colle, Marner's longtime friend and major peewee linemate.

"I'm sure it's been a little more hectic than usual for him, but he's handled it well. He's a first-class individual. He's a great person.

"He's just treating every day no differently than in years past. Hometown kid. I know he loves playing for the Maple Leafs, so hopefully he gets it done."

The hearsay of the day can be entertaining when all you have is breadcrumbs and there's no hockey games on TV, but it's important to zoom out and realize that Marner is but one of several elite RFAs inching toward August.

Tampa's Anthony Cirelli, close friends with both Marner and the Lightning's Brayden Point, reminded the assembled media that there is plenty of time for the teams to lock up their stars.

"I know he loves Toronto," Cirelli says.

Which would explain why Marner hasn't signed one of these threatened offer sheets, even though he refused Thursday to say if he'd consider it. Again: Ask Ferris. (Ferris is not speaking publicly these days.)

Marner did, however, address the trade of Patrick Marleau, a dear friend with whom he speaks daily and is visiting next weekend.

"He's still very close to me and my family. He's meant a lot to us," Marner says. "Whatever team gets him next year, he's going to do great for them."

Though he said it "sucks" to lose Nazem Kadri to Colorado, Marner spoke highly of defenceman Tyson Barrie, with whom he got to know when they won a silver medal with Canada at the 2017 world championships.

"He's a great defenceman," Marner says. "He's got great vision on the ice. He's that D-man that can get shots through from the point that seem like they're almost impossible to get through. Another puck-moving defenceman who brings a lot of skill."

Marner insists he's not paying as much attention to his contract stalemate as you are. Ferris will call when a deal is nigh.

Until then, the Maple Leafs' leading scorer is heeding this advice, courtesy of his pal Nylander: "Stay relaxed. Stay out of it. Enjoy your summer."

We might suggest Maple Leafs fans do the same. The anticipation will be more excruciating than the result.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 07.19.2019

1149893 Websites

Seattle job gives Ron Francis chance to prove himself as a GM

Mark Spector July 18, 2019, 5:30 PM

As a player, Ron Francis had everything.

More skill than most, a ton of heart, a mountain of character, oodles of class, two Stanley Cups... You look up "hockey captain" on Wikipedia and there should be a picture of the Hall of Famer staring back at you.

As a general manager?

As the great Gord Downie sang, "Nobody cares about something you didn't do."

After a humble debut in the manager's chair in Carolina from 2014-18, Francis was named the first ever GM of Seattle's incoming National Hockey League franchise on Thursday. It's his chance to prove what he's got as a manager, and Francis will have a budget that he never had in Carolina.

But he'll also be greeted by 31 general managers who are much wiser, after many of them were hoodwinked by George McPhee and



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the Vegas Golden Knights when they raided NHL rosters a couple of years ago.

"Twelve seasons working in player development, coaching, scouting and management have led me to this moment and this role," Francis, 56, said in a release.

The knock on Francis in Carolina concerned his patience. He didn't dive into the trade market, or the free agent market, fast or often enough for his critics. Of course, looking at the Hurricanes roster that he left behind may silence those people.

"We're going to be active in the free-agent market. I think Seattle has so much to offer. It's got a great quality of life," he said at his introductory press conference. "I think we'll be one of only six teams in the entire league that has no state income tax so that's going to be appealing for players to want to come and play here. I think when you put everything together and people see what the ownership group and (Seattle CEO Tod Leiweke) want to build here, people are going to want to play here and I think that's going to help us be successful."

Seattle filed this job a year ahead of the original plans by the team, a sign of commitment by the NHL's 32nd franchise. There is money here, with an ownership group fronted by investment banker David Bonderman and Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer.

The KeyArena is currently undergoing a \$930 million renovation, and they're building a practice rink that Francis will be asked to weigh in on, design-wise.

"Sure, it's a daunting task and a lot of work, but it's a unique challenge that you don't get every day because not every sports team starts from scratch. So, I'm really excited about the challenge and looking forward to doing some good things here in Seattle," Francis said. "In talking to Tod and the owners and the vision of what they want to do for the town of Seattle and hockey fans, there's no corners being cut. They want the best venue, they want the best team, they want the best fan experience.

"Even with the practice facility. It would have been easy to build one rink but they built three, and the reason is it provides ice for the youth in the community, go out and skate. So, it's not just about our organization, it's about doing things (that are right) and helping to grow that product in this market."

Hockey history is rife with former great players who thought they could coach or manager, and it turned out they were exactly that: great players. Francis started something in Carolina under some come serious financial constraints but could not see eye to eye with new owner Tom Dundon, who is the furthest thing from a hockey traditionalist.

In Seattle he's in a hockey market with hockey people, and he has a budget that should allow Seattle to have an immediate impact in the Pacific Division.

"Announcing Ron Francis as our team's first general manager is a dream come true," Leiweke said in a release. "He is truly hockey royalty and is the perfect fit for the team we are building. He has a proven track record in hockey management, a dedication to the community and an eagerness to innovate which fits our vision."

He won't find the fertile field that Vegas had in their expansion draft. But Francis never required anything to be easy for him to succeed — as a player.

Now we see if he can translate that to the front office in Seattle.

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1149894 Websites

NHL's Top 10 UFAs remaining: Latest rumours, reports

Luke Fox July 16, 2019, 7:32 PM

Two weeks after the madness, here we sit.

National Hockey League general managers will need to dig deeper, and jobless players may need to lower their asking prices, but there are still a few gems — or at least some worthy gambles and depth additions — to be unearthed from 2019's UFA class after the July 1 frenzy.

We round up the rumours and assess the value of the free agents who are taking a more patient approach this summer (in some cases, that's even by choice) and are still up for grabs a week in mid-July.

1. Jake Gardiner

Age: 28

Position: Defence

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$4.05 million

Gardiner, a Minnesota native, enjoyed being a Maple Leaf, and despite his defensive lapses — which can be magnified — the Leafs weren't happy to let him walk.

The Canada Day acquisition of Tyson Barrie, however, officially brings Gardiner's tenure in Toronto to a close. (Rumour had it, the defenceman was partly waiting to see if there was a way Kyle Dubas could make room for a return.)

That Gardiner's back ailed him during the post-season and he considered surgery should serve as a yellow flag for pursuant teams.

Yet he's a solid power-play quarterback, an excellent skater and passer, and a 50-point defender when healthy. He should be trying to fetch a long-term deal in the ballpark of \$6 million to \$7 million annually, using Tyler Myers' deal in Vancouver as his base.

The Chicago Blackhawks and Montreal Canadiens were rumoured to be interested in Gardiner, while the Toronto Sun's Steve Simmons reported Florida, L.A. and hometown Minnesota as some of the player's preferred destinations.

I made a case for Detroit's Steve Yzerman to inquire.

Now that Habs GM Marc Bergevin swung and missed on the Sebastian Aho offer sheet, does Gardiner become his next serious target? Or will lefty Ben Chiarot — signed last week — suffice?

The New Jersey Devils certainly have the cap and roster space to take a run here.

How much of the delay is based on Gardiner carefully selecting his next home versus clubs being wary of the puck-mover's injured back?

For our money, he's the best talent still unclaimed.

2. Joe Thornton

Age: 40



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Position: Centre

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$5 million

When the ageless Jumbo Joe announced at the NHL Awards that he was keen to keep playing, GM Doug Wilson described the news as "a pleasant surprise."

The cap-crunched Wilson let UFAs Joonas Donskoi and captain Joe Pavelski walk for more money elsewhere on July 1 as he made re-signing RFAs Timo Meier and Kevin Labanc (a steal!) his priority.

A popular theory: Labanc was convinced to accept a \$1-million deal in part to save money for Thornton.

"I think you know the relationship we have with Jumbo. He and I have had conversations and talk every couple days. We'll get that resolved in due time," Wilson said of Thornton's inevitable extension.

"Just getting Timo done as recently as we did was where most of my focus was. We'll start exploring whatever else we may do."

Question: If an active Jim Rutherford can be elected into the Hockey Hall of Fame, why can't we just slide Jumbo in there already?

It's the goats birthday today! Joe Thornton it's always an honor to watch you play it puts a smile on my face like a kid in a candy store! 40 years young and can't wait for the new season  
pic.twitter.com/jcKmh5vPBi

— Harris (@RHarris\_19) July 2, 2019

### 3. Ben Hutton

Age: 26

Position: Defence

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$2.8 million

Of all the UFAs still floating out there, none averaged more time on ice than Hutton (22:21). The left-shot defender is coming off a nice little bounce-back season after a dismal 2017-18 but was curiously not qualified by the Vancouver Canucks, and they lost a 26-year-old defenceman for nothing.

No doubt, Jordie Benn is a decent replacement for Hutton, and he should slide in as a third-pairing guy in Vancouver. So would Montreal (Benn's former club) take a look at Hutton, or is Ben Chiarot enough?

The L.A. Kings also reportedly expressed interest here.

We wonder if the Ottawa-area native would consider the Sens, who have plenty of cap space and could use more experienced NHLers.

If you're a believer in plus/minus, it doesn't paint a pretty picture here: Hutton has been a dash-21 or worse in three of his four NHL seasons. He's a fifth-rounder who took a step last season, and at 26 his best days should still lie ahead. Next to Gardiner, he's the most intriguing defenceman available.

Nothing imminent on Ben Hutton front. Don't expect anything to happen today. Several teams still in pursuit to varying degrees, including MTL & LA (@DennisTFP reported earlier LA initial offer was turned down, they could circle back).

— David Pagnotta (@TheFourthPeriod) July 1, 2019

The longer Ben Hutton stays on the market, the more I suspect the #Canucks are working on a Chris Tanev trade. That would allow Jordie Benn to slide to the right and open up a spot for Hutton to return.

— Stephan Roget (@StephanRoget) July 2, 2019

### 4. Justin Williams

Age: 37

Position: Right wing

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$4.5 million

Age ain't nothin' but a number. Mr. Game 7 enjoyed his most productive season (23 goals, 53 points) in seven years last winter with the Hurricanes, captaining Carolina to its best season in a decade. Teammate-turned-coach Rod Brind'Amour called Williams the club's most important player, and not just because he invented the Storm Surge.

The three-time Stanley Cup winner will be 38 when the puck drops on 2019-20, so it's understandable that he's seriously weighing retirement. Incredibly, Williams has missed just three games total over his past eight seasons — that includes six deep playoff runs.

"We've been in contact with Justin here recently," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said on July 2. "He hasn't given us 100 per cent yet which way he's going to go. I think he potentially could be leaning toward playing, but I think in the next few weeks it will shake out."

Williams built a house in Raleigh and would prefer not to move his family again.

"I'm going to take my time and make sure I make the right one, right?" Williams said upon season's end.

"Because if I'm all in, I'm going to be all in. If I'm not quite all there, then I have to reassess the situation. I'm not going to be good if I'm 85 per cent all in. I've got to be all in. That's the only [thing] that's fair to me, fair to the teammates, fair to everybody."

Waddell: "I think Justin Williams could be leaning towards playing."

— Sara Civ (@SaraCivian) July 2, 2019

### 5. Derick Brassard

Age: 31

Position: Centre

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$5 million

Brassard put up a career-best 60 points with the Rangers in 2014-15. The following season, he rang up 27 goals. Since then, he's gradually been on a downward slide, playing with four franchises over the past two seasons and failing to stick.

Bad fits? Player in sharp decline?

Brassard is a centre who has shown in the past he can both check and score, and yet he's nowhere near a \$5-million asset anymore. Until he proves otherwise, he's a third-liner.

Available centremen are scarce, however. This feels like a case of a player needing to lower his asking price, and we wouldn't rule out a return to Columbus or New York, where Brassard enjoyed his most success.

The Oilers are also in the market for affordable veteran forwards.

Montreal has been aggressive in its hunt for centre depth. Would Bergevin give Brassard a look?



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What sort of contract could Derick Brassard (and other NHL free agents still on the market) expect to receive?  
<https://t.co/fC43ApxPL8>

— Taylor Haase (@TaylorHaasePGH) July 5, 2019

### 6. Pat Maroon

Age: 31

Position: Left wing / Right wing

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$1.75 million

Maroon took a one-year, bet-on-himself deal at this time last summer to be able to spend more time with his son, Anthony. (Hometown discounts still exist!) And he was rewarded with some quality family time and a Stanley freaking Cup.

Now, he's right back to square one.

Not the fleetest of foot, Maroon is a big body who can crash the crease and is well-suited to playoff hockey. The Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames are among the clubs who have expressed interest.

A return to the Blues — who have several key RFAs to sort out — cannot be completely ruled out but appears doubtful.

The Blues' top beat writer, Jeremy Rutherford, reports that Maroon's offers are all for one year, again.

Update on Maroon: a week into free agency, he remains unsigned. He has offers, but the belief is they're all for one year. He's looking for a couple years and the right fit and is willing to be patient. Several sources have said the Blues' interest remains limited. #stlblues

— Jeremy Rutherford (@jprutherford) July 8, 2019

Edmonton looking into returning Pat Maroon to the fold. Oilers among a few teams pitching for the big LW.

— Mark Spector (@SportsnetSpec) July 1, 2019

Meanwhile, Maroon spent the weekend coaching his son Anthony's roller hockey team, which won the @TORHS\_2H41 in Tampa, Fla. They received a Cup and when players celebrated in the locker room, Maroon went to the concession stand, bought a few Powerades, came back and filled it up. [pic.twitter.com/ThxC7iGEC3](http://pic.twitter.com/ThxC7iGEC3)

— Jeremy Rutherford (@jprutherford) July 8, 2019

### 7. Brian Boyle

Age: 34

Position: Centre / Left wing

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$2.55 million

Mostly we wanted to include Boyle here because of his incredible July 1 tweet (see below), but it helps that the veteran role player is still an effective centreman who can do all the little things (kill penalties, win faceoffs, block shots, provide leadership) coaches and teammates respect.

Boyle would be a nice add for the Oilers' culture, so it's intriguing that Edmonton is one of the clubs reportedly on his list.

Brian Boyle is reviewing his options. Told 5 teams have serious interest in signing him. A decision could come later today, but he's not rushing things.

— David Pagnotta (@TheFourthPeriod) July 2, 2019

### 8. Deryk Engelland

Age: 37

Position: Defence

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$1.5 million

Two days prior to free agency's opening, it appeared Engelland's re-signing with Vegas on a one-year deal was inevitable. So, it is a bit curious that by July 8 an announcement on the veteran has yet to be made. He's been remarkably durable in his mid-30s and, birth certificate be damned, is arguably the best right-shot defender still out there.

Yes, Engelland is getting up there in, um, experience and down there in foot speed, but on a cheap, one-year term, he can still munch a lot of blue-collar minutes (19:52) and provide the kind of hard defence that should make him worth every penny.

McPhee notes they're working on a contract with Deryk Engelland right now.

Based on his tone and mention of working out bonuses it sounds like he's very confident Engo will be back #VegasBorn

— Jesse Merrick (@JesseNews3LV) June 29, 2019

Deryk Engelland at \$1 million, Malcolm Subban at \$800K and a Nikita Gusev trade would give the Golden Knights a cap-compliant roster...with what's left of my car payment to spare #VegasBorn [pic.twitter.com/CR0GURL5NX](http://pic.twitter.com/CR0GURL5NX)

— Justin Emerson (@J15Emerson) July 2, 2019

### 9. Jason Pominville

Age: 36

Position: Right wing

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$5.6 million

Welcome to Pominville, where the unemployment rate is 100 per cent... for now. The 1,060-game veteran certainly isn't worth the \$5.6 million he was raking in Buffalo last season, but he's put together consecutive 16-goal, 30-point seasons, could contribute on a second PP unit and won't take foolish penalties. If he wants to keep the dream alive, Pominville might have to earn a spot on a PTO or take a third-line role on a club in need of wing depth.

I know they didn't/don't have much money to play with but yikes. I feel like, at the very least, they should be in on a guy like Jason Pominville. Has averaged 1.71 points/60 at 5v5 over last two years and could give them a bit of pop on the wings at a cheap price.

— Todd Cordell (@ToddCordell) July 15, 2019

### 10. Ben Lovejoy

Age on July 1: 35

Position: Defence

2018-19 salary cap hit: \$2.67 million

As soon as Erik Karlsson re-signed in San Jose, right-shot defenders became the weakest position among this summer's free-agent class, and it's not even close. A stay-at-home veteran like Lovejoy could land a decent contract simply based on a lack of available talent. After Lovejoy, we're talking about names like Dan Girardi.

Buyers know what they're getting in Lovejoy: a stay-at-home, experienced, durable defender who can kill penalties and log



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minutes. Dallas liked the Reverend enough that they traded New Jersey the younger Connor Carrick plus a third-rounder to rent him for its 13-game playoff run.

If anyone knew Ben Lovejoy was this valuable, might've gotten more than a 3rd for him. Devs look lost.

— Arthur Staple (@StapeAthletic) February 23, 2019

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1149895 Websites

Is Talbot primed for a bounce-back season in Calgary?

Travis Yost

On July 1, journeyman goaltender Cam Talbot signed a one-year, \$2.7 million contract with the Calgary Flames. And it may just end up being one of the better bargain buys of the summer.

Talbot, now with his fourth team since entering the league in 2013-14, has had a fascinating career arc. After two impressive opening seasons in New York, Talbot was traded to Edmonton for three draft picks in the summer of 2015. At the time, Talbot was victimized by a numbers game that started and ended with Henrik Lundqvist.

In Edmonton, we saw mixed results. The 2015-17 stretch saw Talbot restore order to the goaltending position, and I think it's fair to say that he was as instrumental as any player not named Connor McDavid in ending the Oilers' playoff drought. However, like most of the Edmonton roster, Talbot's performance slipped over the last couple of years. And at a low point, he was moved to the Philadelphia Flyers for goaltender Anthony Stolarz.

If you look at Talbot's save percentages over the years relative to where the rest of the league has been – well, it's mystifying. In his early years, Talbot looked like a likely long-term starter at the NHL level. More recently, his numbers have cratered so emphatically that it was increasingly difficult to believe he could land a back-up goaltending job at the NHL level.

Front offices are frequently biased by recent performance. In some cases that's beneficial, particularly if something occurred (e.g. a lingering bodily injury, signs of aging, et al.) that would substantiate a change in production. In other cases, it's counterproductive. The NHL is extremely susceptible to being fooled by randomness, in large part because hockey is a highly volatile, low-event game that doesn't lend itself well to highly accurate player evaluations and future forecasts.

Even the measures we do have available to us can frequently be misleading. Take save percentage as an example here. Save percentage does well to tell us how frequently a goaltender can stop a shot, and there is some repeatability in this measure but no one believes that save percentage isn't polluted – perhaps significantly so -- by team performance. Every year we see goalies adversely impacted by poor defensive play up front. We also see examples of goaltenders benefiting from play up front.

One of the real in-roads hockey analytics have made over the years relates to expected goals. Expected goals capture two components: shot quantity, and shot quality. Shot quality is the much more complex version of the two. Think of shot quality as applying a

percentage or likelihood of any given shot finding the back of the net. How would we do that? We would look at historical distributions of goal expectancies based on the distance of the shot, type of the shot, angle of the shot, the individual shooter, and so forth.

Since expected goals are quite predictive, we can use it as a signal of sorts to determine if goaltenders are being victimized – or assisted – by the play of the rest of the team. In the case of Talbot, that's particularly important. Because as Talbot's save percentage cratered, so too did his expected save percentage. And while it doesn't take the sting out of last year's bad season, it does add some important context (Data via Evolving Hockey and Natural Stat Trick).

We would have expected a goaltender in replacement of Talbot last season to stop about 90.4 per cent of shots. That's still well above his 89.2 save percentage last year, but it's also below the league average save percentage (91.0 per cent) over the same time frame. Perhaps more noteworthy is it shows him as a value added presence during the 2017-18 season – despite trailing the average league save percentage, he still stopped more shots than we would have expected a replacement goaltender to do behind Edmonton's defence that year.

And, more broadly speaking, we have a six-year span where Talbot has only been negative once. Since entering the league, Talbot has saved his team about 0.2 goals for every 60 minutes of hockey played. How does that compare against other regular goalies over the same window? Quite well:

Perhaps it is possible that last year is the season that's predictive of Talbot's future, and that for some reason – explainable or otherwise – his game has completely eroded. But the power of large numbers is that we don't have to be fooled by wild deviations in small samples. From 2013-18, Talbot was a very strong goaltender. From 2018-19, he was not. Put those six years against the data of those around him, and he compares well to most starters around the league. (By the by, six years of data is one of the reasons I think a betting man would see Talbot outperform his replacement in Edmonton on a going forward basis.)

And on a one-year, \$2.7-million contract? Well, I'm making that bet every single time.

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1149896 Websites

Former NHL player Greg Johnson died of apparent suicide, according to report

Chris Bumbaca, 7:46 p.m. ET July 18, 2019 Updated 11:08 p.m. ET July 18, 2019

Former NHL player Greg Johnson died as a result of a likely suicide, police said.

Per the Detroit News, Johnson was found by his wife around 10 a.m. on July 7 in the storage room of the couple's basement with a gun and a single bullet found near his body, according to the Rochester (Michigan) Police Department.

Johnson was 48. He played for four teams — Detroit Red Wings, Pittsburgh Penguins, Chicago Blackhawks and Nashville Predators — over a 14-season career.



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"Very sad, obviously, beautiful family," Johnson's longtime agent Tom Laidlaw told USA Today Sports. "He was a fantastic person. Greg was a well-respected man. He and his family, they lived by a certain code: honor and ethics."

Nashville Predators center Greg Johnson (22) passes the puck past New York Islanders defenseman Brent Sopel (3).

Laidlaw would not comment on the cause of death.

The Detroit News reported that Johnson's wife, Krisitin, reportedly told police her husband suffered "numerous concussions during his playing career." Concussions have been linked to a brain disease called chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), which is the result of consistent head trauma from blows to the area.

Other former hockey players who battled concussions, such as Rick Ryphen, who committed suicide, and Derek Boogard, who died of an accidental overdose.

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1149897 Websites

New York Rangers' Artemi Panarin criticizes Vladimir Putin in interview on YouTube

A.J. Perez 6:07 p.m. ET July 18, 2019 Updated 6:09 p.m. ET July 18, 2019

USA TODAY Sports' Kevin Allen breaks down which teams improved the most in NHL free agency. USA TODAY

New York Rangers star Artemi Panarin rebuked the refrain from many in his native Russia — including ballet icon Anastasia Volochkova — who say they can leave the country if they are upset over the state of affairs under longtime leader Vladimir Putin.

"All the major brains have already left (Russia)," Panarin told journalist Alexander Golovin who posted the hourlong interview on YouTube. "That's not the way it should be."

Panarin, 27, was born in Korkino, a town located in a mountainous region of Russia where coal mining is a leading industry. He played two seasons each with the Chicago Blackhawks and Columbus Blue Jackets before Panarin signed a seven-year, \$81.5 million contract with the Rangers earlier this month.

NHL star @9Artemi: Putin's time is up, he can no longer distinguish between right and wrong; I don't like the lawlessness.  
<https://t.co/EarmyLiwsP>

— Lucian Kim (@Lucian\_Kim) July 18, 2019

Panarin's comments contrast with those of another Russian NHL standout forward. Washington Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin has voiced support of Putin and was part of social media movement in November 2017 called "Putin Team" that he wrote would "show everyone a strong and united Russia." The Instagram post where he wrote that message included a photo of Ovechkin with Putin.

The Kremlin thanked Ovechkin through a spokesperson at the time. Messages left with the Russian embassy in Washington by USA TODAY Sports were not immediately returned Thursday.

Panarin, in the same interview transcribed in part using Google Translate, criticized the "lawlessness" that has persisted under Putin's tenure, which includes much of the last two decades as Russia's president.

"Our mistake is that we treat him like a superman," Panarin said. "But he is the same as we are."

Panarin opined that it's "psychologically not so easy for (Putin) to soberly assess" the country's issues.

Panarin said he favors the term limits in place for the president of the United States, which caps the role at two, four-year terms because it makes it "impossible to return to power" as Putin did.

Messages left for Panarin's agent, Paul Theofanous, by USA TODAY Sports on Thursday were not returned.

USA TODAY LOADED: 07.19.2019