



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2019



## Hurricanes happy with offseason, GM says

Waddell discusses Aho offer sheet, Williams' future in wide-ranging conversation with NHL.com

by Tom Gulitti

Carolina Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell acknowledges the significance of matching the five-year, \$42.27 million offer sheet the Montreal Canadiens gave restricted free agent center Sebastian Aho.

By not hesitating to commit the finances to keep Aho, arguably their most important player and potential future captain, the Hurricanes and owner Tom Dundon demonstrated to the team, their fans and the rest of the NHL their commitment to maintaining the success they had last season.

"Everybody thinks we're not in a big so-called hockey market, but we're fortunate to have an owner that's been very successful in life and the one thing he recognizes is talent and assets," Waddell said. "We certainly weren't going to let this asset get away from us at this point. We got the offer at 2:40 p.m. on that Monday (July 1) and we knew at 2:42, once we both had a chance to read it, that we were going to match it."

The Hurricanes announced their intention to match the offer sheet July 2 and submitted the paperwork to the NHL on July 7, making it official that Aho, who led the team with an NHL career-high 30 goals and 83 points last season, would stay in Carolina.

Waddell maintains the Canadiens should have known the Hurricanes would match, but he's happy with the end result and believes Aho is, too.

"We talked. He wants to be here," Waddell said. "The agent told him this is a way to get this contract one way or another and not have to go through it (all summer). It's part of the CBA, it's part of the business, and you just have to accept it. I think you put it behind you. Sebastian is a great kid and I know what he's meant to our franchise, so I think everybody at the end of the day is very pleased with the outcome of him being a Hurricane for at least the next five years."

In a wide-ranging interview with NHL.com, Waddell discussed the Hurricanes' offseason, the status of captain Justin Williams, and the expectations for this season:

Has your offseason gone as you hoped as far as keeping the players you wanted to keep and the changes you wanted to make?

"For sure. We re-signed everybody we wanted to re-sign. The Aho contract was one we thought would probably go on all summer and it got sped up. That's part of the business and we're fine with it. The only difference in it is we would have liked to get a little longer term, but it's done for five years and we don't have to worry about it for the next five years.

"Other than that, we were able to re-sign the guys off our team from last year and add a few more pieces which we thought we needed."

Do you think the team is deeper at forward after acquiring Erik Haula in a trade with the Vegas Golden Knights and signing Ryan Dzingel to a two-year, \$6.75 million contract?

"I do. I like our forwards, for sure. I think we added another good center in Haula. That was a priority for us. Then Dzingel, we had talked about him at the trade deadline and I talked to him the first day of free agency. At that time, we didn't know where the money was going to end up. We stayed in contact with him, along with the agent, and myself, [Dundon] and (coach) Rod (Brind'Amour) all talked to him and at the end of the day, he wanted to be here and we got it done."

Captain Justin Williams, who turns 38 on Oct. 4, has been contemplating retirement after playing 18 NHL seasons. Has he given you any indication if he plans to play this season?

"We're still waiting on it. I truly think he's leaning toward playing, but he hasn't made that final decision yet. We're in good shape now if he decides to retire and if he comes back, it's a bonus for us."

Is there a timetable for his decision?

"Not really. Timetables really don't work. The timetable at this point is sometime in August, but I'm sure it will get sorted out before then."

Anything else you're looking to add or are you done for the offseason?

"We're never done because my boss always wants to keep me posted here. We're always talking to teams. You have to see what's out there and if something makes sense. From a free agent standpoint, I would say we're done. We're still short a couple of depth guys in Charlotte (American Hockey League). But other than that, I think it would take a trade or something if we felt it made us better. We're not afraid to make trades, so we'll keep our eye on it."

The Hurricanes qualified for the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season for the first time since 2009 and reached the Eastern Conference Final before losing to the Boston Bruins. How challenging will it be to follow that up and not take a step back?

"That's why we felt we needed to add some pieces to our mix this year. We made the playoffs the last week of the season and we had a good run. We were playing at the top of our game since the New Year. The other thing is our team changed when we got (forward Nino) Niederreiter (from the Minnesota Wild). We were three games over .500 (22-19-5) when we traded for him (Jan. 17) and ended [17] games over (46-29-7). So now you have him for a full season. You add



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Dzingel and Haula in there and (Andrei) Svechnikov has a year under his belt, so we think we're a better team than we were last year."

Maybe you took some teams by surprise last season. Will that be harder to do this season?

"It's always tough, but I don't think our mindset will change. The games in October are as important as they are in April. I think with Rod leading the group, we'll be prepared for whatever. The thing about teams taking you lightly, I never buy that anyway. Everybody is trying to get points every night and I think this year won't be much different than we saw last year. It's up to us to take care of our end of the business."

Petr Mrazek was re-signed and James Reimer was acquired in a trade with the Florida Panthers. Is the plan for them to be your two goalies to begin the season?

"No. I look at it differently. You've got Mrazek, who played well for us last year. I think the next job is for one of three guys, whoever wants that job. We're in a spot that we need to win hockey games. We've got to put the best guys out there each night to win hockey games. We proved it last year when we ended up sending (Scott) Darling down, who was making a lot of money in the minors."

So rookie Alex Nedeljkovic and Anton Forsberg (acquired in a trade with the Chicago Blackhawks) will compete with Reimer in training camp for the second goalie job?

"Yeah. All four (goalies) will be in a competition in some ways, but Petr will be here. We all know last year we ended up using three goalies and you need goaltending, so I feel very comfortable where we're at with the four guys we have at this point."



## Waddell: Decision to match Aho offer sheet was made within two minutes

The Carolina Hurricanes took their full week to match Sebastian Aho's offer sheet from the Montreal Canadiens, but according to general manager Don Waddell, the decision to match was made much sooner than that.

In fact, Waddell told NHL.com that the Hurricanes, who announced their intention to match after just one day, knew they would be keeping Aho within two minutes of receiving the five-year, \$42.27 million offer.

"Everybody thinks we're not in a big so-called hockey market, but we're fortunate to have an owner that's been very successful in life and the one thing he recognizes is talent and assets," Waddell said. "We certainly weren't going to let this asset get away from us at this point. We got the offer at 2:40pm on that Monday and we knew at 2:42, once we both had a chance to read it, that we were going to match it."

Aho's agent, Gerry Johansson, said after his client signed the offer sheet that he believed Aho "100 per cent wants to play in Montreal." Waddell, who admitted the team would have liked a longer term on Aho's contract, said the star centre simply used the offer sheet to speed up the restricted free agent process.

"We talked. He wants to be here," Waddell said. "The agent told him this is a way to get this contract one way or another and not have to go through it (all summer). It's part of the CBA, it's part of the business, and you just have to accept it. I think

you put it behind you. Sebastian is a great kid and I know what he's meant to our franchise, so I think everybody at the end of the day is very pleased with the outcome of him being a Hurricane for at least the next five years."

Waddell and the Hurricanes acquired goaltender James Reimer from the Florida Panthers this off-season, sending Scott Darling, who was quickly bought out, the other way. Despite Reimer's \$3.4 million cap hit, Waddell said he won't be guaranteed the backup spot behind Petr Mrazek, who inked a two-year, \$6.25 million extension this off-season.

Instead, the 31-year-old will have to battle in camp with rookie Alex Nedeljkovic and fellow off-season addition Anton Forsberg.

"No. I look at it differently. You've got Mrazek, who played well for us last year. I think the next job is for one of three guys, whoever wants that job," Waddell said. "We're in a spot that we need to win hockey games. We've got to put the best guys out there each night to win hockey games. We proved it last year when we ended up sending (Scott) Darling down, who was making a lot of money in the minors."

The Hurricanes have \$2.5 million in cap space and Waddell said the team continues to hope captain Justin Williams will extend his playing career by another season, but would otherwise be an unlikely to make another move in free agency.



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## The Hockey News

### Expansion Plan: Projecting the Carolina Hurricanes' protection list for the 2021 Expansion Draft

With how good Carolina's youth is, the Hurricanes are bound to lose a good player at the expansion draft in 2021. But fortunately, they're in a position to rebound better than most thanks to years of successful drafting and smart decisions.

By Steven Ellis

Welcome to the Expansion Plan, our summer series projecting the protected lists for the 30 NHL franchises who will participate in the June 2021 Expansion Draft.

Over the next two seasons, every team – save the Vegas Golden Knights, who will be exempt – will be planning for the arrival of the NHL's 32nd franchise and Seattle GM Ron Francis will begin to consider the options for his inaugural roster. As such, over the course of the next 30 days, we will profile one team, in alphabetical order, and forecast their potential list of protections and exposures, as well as address each team's expansion strategy, no-brainers, tough decisions and what lessons they learned from the 2017 expansion process.

This exercise requires some important ground rules. The 2021 Expansion Draft will follow the same rules as the 2017 Expansion Draft, but some assumptions are necessary. These are the guidelines followed:

- No pre-draft trades
- All no-movement clauses are honored
- Players who will become restricted free agents in 2020 or 2021 remain with current teams
- Players who will become unrestricted free agents in 2020 or 2021 either remain with current teams or are left off lists entirely (eg. Nicklas Backstrom protected by the Washington Capitals, Tyson Barrie not protected by Toronto Maple Leafs or any other team.)

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Carolina's inclusion in the 2019 playoffs was a popular one in the hockey world: the team's play gave fans hope for the first time in a decade and the post-victory celebrations caused more than a few ripples around the league. But a miracle playoff that included topping the defending champions from Washington before sweeping the New York Islanders helped show the regular season wasn't just for show.

It's one thing to have a nice playoff run every once and a while, but it's too far and in-between to hop on the Hurricanes bandwagon with confidence. The Hurricanes have the assets to become a contender for the next couple of seasons and keep the momentum from their fun 2018-19 season campaign alive. Compared to 2017, when most of the team's core was too young to make an impact (or not even drafted), the Hurricanes are looking good ahead of the expansion draft in 2021.

In 2017, the Hurricanes lost forward Connor Brickley to Vegas, but only after GM Ron Francis sent a fifth-round pick in an effort to steer clear of other players available (it's believed Lee Stempniak was the player the Golden Knights were targeting). The Hurricanes were one of the worst teams in the Eastern Conference and missed the playoffs by quite a margin, but they're almost certainly going to lose a roster player this time around. A lot can change in two years, but the Hurricanes are ready for a few extended playoff runs in the coming seasons and have a load of talent – in the NHL, AHL and junior – that they can make up for any loss they have.

PROTECTED (7F, 3D, 1G):

Forwards:

- Jordan Staal (NMC)
- Sebastian Aho
- Teuvo Teravainen
- Andrei Svechnikov
- Nino Niederreiter
- Warren Foegele
- Morgan Geekie

Defensemen:

- Jaccob Slavin
- Brett Pesce
- Dougie Hamilton (NMC)

Goaltenders:

- Alex Nedeljkovic

NOTABLE OMISSIONS: Jake Bean, Petr Mrazek, Haydn Fleury

STRATEGY: Carolina isn't far off of being a top team in the NHL but just needs consistent goaltending and a bit of refining around the edges to make that happen. By 2021, with Petr Mrazek set for the UFA market that summer, the Hurricanes should have already made Alex Nedeljkovic the team's starter and will look to keep him in the long run. In front of him, the Hurricanes should look to extend Dougie Hamilton after his deal expires in 2021 and keep him united with Jaccob Slavin on the team's top pairing. The Hurricanes wouldn't have signed Slavin to a seven-year deal that began this past season if they didn't want him in the long-term plans, either.

One of the more interesting names on this list is Morgan Geekie, Charlotte's superhero from the team's Calder Cup victory a few months back. Geekie had a solid pro rookie season and he projects to be a solid third-line center with a level of energy you can't find every day. Geekie showed great



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improvements as the year went on and if his playoff run is any indication, he'll be a fixture to make the Hurricanes out of training camp this summer.

**THE NO BRAINER:** It's almost standard to just say teams will try their best to keep their core together, but Carolina has a group that's truly exciting. Montreal made Aho's contract situation quite easy for the Hurricanes, who now have their top star signed for the next five years. That means Aho, Staal, Teuvo Teravainen and Niederreiter are signed until at least the end of 2022, with the first three extending past that. Even ignoring Staal's NMC, those four are untouchable and are the heart of the franchise moving forward.

**TOUGH DECISION:** Carolina has had one of the best defense cores for a few years now, but something has to give. Jake Bean, an RFA in 2021, won't become the top-pairing defenseman he was once believed to become, but he's still

one of the best U-23 defensemen in the organization and, at 20, he can make Seattle very happy. Haydn Fleury is in a similar situation because of the depth the team holds and could become a solid shutdown defenseman if Seattle decides to select him. If one of them do go, Jesper Sellgren and Domenick Fensore can easily serve as replacements by 2021.

**LESSON LEARNED:** Patience is key. While first-round picks Elias Lindholm and Jeff Skinner are off plying their trade elsewhere, Slavin (fourth round in 2012), Pesce (second round in 2013) and Warren Foegele (third round in 2014) have panned out better than they could have expected. The Hurricanes have been known to stay patient when developing prospects and it's starting to pay off. Sure, they'll lose some key pieces at the expansion draft, but they've got the prospect pool to make up for it.

## The top ten NHL prospects to watch at the World Junior Summer Showcase

The World Junior Summer Showcase is set to begin this weekend, giving teams an early look as to what their rosters could look like when the big event kicks off in December. Here are the NHL drafted prospects to keep an eye on in Plymouth.

By Steven Ellis

Don't ever let people tell you hockey takes a break in the summer.

Sure, the NHL does, but there's never truly a break. KHL training camps have been in session for a few weeks now and some teams around the world have been hosting exhibition games to get back in the swing of things. Hockey Canada, in particular, has been hosting U-17 and U-18 camps over the past few days, just shortly after USA Hockey finished their summer select camps.

Now, four of the world's top junior teams – Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States – will take part in a week-long tournament in Plymouth, Michigan, at USA Hockey Arena, with an American split-squad game opening the action on Friday evening. The Hockey News' prospect expert Ryan Kennedy will be in Plymouth to take in the action next week after all the teams cut down their final rosters.

For many fanbases, this is the first time to see their 2019 draft picks in action since the June selection process. With that in mind, here are some of the top NHL prospects to keep an eye on in Plymouth:

Colten Ellis, G, Canada (St. Louis)

With no clear favorite at this point, Canada's goaltending situation for the real tournament is wide open. This makes this summer tournament so important for someone like Ellis, a promising youngster coming off a great season with Rimouski. Ellis was unspectacular with Canada's U-18 team in 2018 but he's proven through his QMJHL play that he deserves a shot. If he can replicate how he played during the playoffs this coming season, he'll have the edge between the pipes.

Liam Foudy, C, Canada (Columbus)

Foudy had a 28-point increase in London this season despite the departures of some key forwards. Foudy, who was a late

cut from Canada's world junior team last season, should factor into the top six after some solid showings with the AHL's Cleveland Monsters at the end of this past season. He'll be counted on to create offense, both next week and during the big event in the winter and Foudy should have no issue stepping up to the plate.

Jett Woo, D, Canada (Vancouver)

Woo performed well during last summer's showcase, as his physical play was very noticeable throughout the tournament. Woo fell short of expectations in his draft year due to injuries but his 66 points in 2018-19 were good for fifth among WHL defensemen. Woo will be utilized on the power play and will be responsible for generating offense from the point – something that Canada will need especially at the summer showcase with Noah Dobson and Ty Smith missing out. Canada's defense won't have an issue scoring in the Czech Republic and Woo will only make them better.

Oliver Wahlstrom, RW, USA (NY Islanders)

Wahlstrom has a lot to prove after a disappointing freshman season with Boston College, electing to go pro after just one year. Wahlstrom is a serious contender to make the Islanders out of training camp, especially after a nice stint with Bridgeport to finish off 2018-19. He was noticeably quiet for the Americans at last year's World Junior Championship with four points in seven games but he'll be a big catalyst for the Americans this season as an older player with pro experience under his belt.

Marshall Warren, D, USA (Minnesota)

Warren is considered a longshot to make USA's roster after getting added as a fill-in for Alec Regula, but that's exactly what makes him one to watch. The summer showcase is a perfect time for players to rise through and earn consideration to make the final WJC roster, which won't be easy for the 18-year-old given how Team USA will likely stack the back end with older defenders. Warren, set to play with Boston College next season, is a slick passer and was an underrated member of USA Hockey's National Team Development Program last season due to the prominence of Cam York on the point.



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Warren's offensive flair from the point and ability to outskate most forwards makes him one to keep an eye on in Plymouth.

Alex Turcotte, C, USA (Los Angeles)

The L.A. Kings were big winners at the 2019 draft, with Turcotte being the real prize after many expected him to go to Chicago two picks earlier at No. 3. The University of Wisconsin commit has been a top player at every international tournament he has participated in and with Jack Hughes out of the picture, Turcotte has a chance to steal the spotlight. In fact, Turcotte already looks capable of taking the No. 1 center role and could lineup beside Wahlstrom and Matt Boldy, so the WJSS will be used to see how he handles the pressure.

Patrik Puistola, LW, Finland (Carolina)

Finland has already been busy this month, hosting a tournament back home against the Czech Republic and Switzerland. Puistola was one of the most noticeable players with three goals in two games, using his speed to force turnovers and create breakaway opportunities often. Puistola, a Carolina draft pick last month, is the early favorite to play on the top left-wing spot this year for the Finns and momentum seems to be on his side. Will he challenge for the scoring lead in Plymouth? Absolutely. He never seems to disappoint when representing his country – his five goals in as many games were vital during Finland's run at the world under-18s in April – and this summer tournament will be no exception.

Lassi Thomson, D, Finland (Ottawa)

Thomson was in the news recently after deciding to re-join the Ilves organization for 2019-20 ahead of his pro debut in a few months. This will be a big year for Thomson: he was

underwhelming in his seven games with Finland's U-20 team last year and was ultimately left off the world junior roster. The Finns could see Ville Heinola, Anttoni Honka and Toni Utunen return to the blueline in December so Thomson will need to prove he's worthy of big minutes on a team with good depth throughout the lineup. He was good at the exhibition tournament in Finland this past week, but there's still work to be done.

Samuel Fagemo, RW, Sweden (Los Angeles)

Despite a disappointing world junior effort last year with one assist in five games, Fagemo was one of the top overagers for the 2019 draft, giving the Kings an absolute steal at No. 50. With 25 points in 42 games with Frolunda in the SHL, Fagemo adjusted to the pro game well and often put his terrific wrist shot on display. Fagemo, who had plenty of chances to shine on a team that won SHL and Champions League titles last season, will be Sweden's top right winger in Plymouth and for the real event in the Czech Republic a few months from now.

David Gustafsson, C, Sweden (Winnipeg)

The Jets love their Europeans, and Gustafsson isn't far from his big shot in the NHL. Set for his third season in the SHL, Gustafsson was a good supporting cast member of Sweden's 2019 world junior team, recording three assists. This time, though, he projects to play top-line minutes and Plymouth will be a good chance for the Swedes to gauge how well that's going to work. Sweden will miss a bit of the star power it has had over the past few years (but it seems like the better they are on paper, the worse they do) so Gustafsson will need to step up to the plate.

## TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.nhl.com/news/hurricanes-gm-don-waddell-discusses-offseason/c-308355266>

<https://www.tsn.ca/carolina-hurricanes-gm-don-waddell-decision-to-match-aho-offer-sheet-was-made-within-two-minutes-1.1343565>

<https://thehockeynews.com/news/article/expansion-plan-projecting-the-carolina-hurricanes-protection-list-for-the-2021-expansion-draft>

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## SportScan

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

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The NHL — Seattle's team included — strives for diversity growth to offset 'white sport' label

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

State lawmaker Eric Pettigrew remembers growing up as one of the few black children in South Central Los Angeles who enjoyed watching hockey over other sports.

So, when the World Hockey Association (WHA) formed as a rival league to the NHL in 1972, Pettigrew and a fellow L.A. Kings-loving pal would go see the new circuit's L.A. Sharks. Partway through the Sharks' first season, they traded for Canadian-born winger Alton White, only the second player of color in a major professional hockey circuit.

"I didn't see very many black people at the hockey games, let alone black players," Rep. Pettigrew, 58, (D-Seattle) said. "So, we're standing near the entrance where the players come on the ice and we saw him — and I was about to lose my mind. We were two black kids screaming at Alton White, going 'Alton! Alton!'"

"And he looked over and winked at me. It was the best moment ever for a 10- or 11-year-old kid having this hockey player — a black hockey player — acknowledge me."

Pettigrew said White's wink "was probably one of the biggest moments of my life" and inspired him to "think outside the box of South Central L.A." He moved from the city to his grandparents' home at 14 to avoid gang life, eventually earning college degrees at Oregon State and the University of Washington and by 2003 was elected to Washington's state legislature.

But it took years after the wink for black players to truly start integrating within pro hockey, saddling the NHL with a "white sport" label it's spent decades trying to shed with various diversity initiatives. The Boston Bruins' Willie O'Ree broke the NHL color barrier in January 1958 — a decade-plus after Jackie Robinson in baseball — and it took 16 more years for a second black player, Mike Marson, to join the Washington Capitals.

Of 89 black players throughout NHL history, only six — O'Ree, Marson, Bill Riley, Tony McKegney, Bernie Saunders and Ray Neufeld — debuted before the 1980s. Future Hall of Fame goalie Grant Fuhr joining the Edmonton Oilers in 1981 slowly led to more, as did NHL-sponsored community programs starting in 1995 that got youths from nontraditional hockey backgrounds playing the game.

Kim Davis, hired in 2017 as NHL executive vice president for social impact, growth initiatives and legislative affairs and overseeing the league's "Hockey is for Everyone" diversity, gender and LGBTQ inclusion effort, said this isn't merely about doing "the right thing" but cultivating younger, more multicultural fans.

"We understand that for us to continue to thrive and survive as a sport, we have to ensure our sport is welcoming to all audiences," Davis said.

Black players from the U.S., Canada and with Caribbean heritage comprise the largest chunk of players of color in an increasingly diverse NHL, alongside other athletes of Latino, Asian and Middle Eastern descent.

The NHL had 27 black players last season and 20 more with rights held by teams. It's had at least 20 black players since 2015-16 and is hiring a senior executive to monitor off-ice job candidates and help team offices and boardrooms better reflect the league's changing personnel.

Still, given players of color exceed 80% in the NBA, 70% in NFL and 40% in MLB, the NHL has work ahead mirroring those leagues.

NHL Seattle last month hired Lakeside High School history teacher Kyle Boyd, 29, to spearhead local outreach efforts as director of youth and community development/training. And his sister, Kendall Boyd-Tyson, 32, is now an NHL Seattle vice president for strategy and analytics.

The siblings grew up in Minnesota, where their father, Dr. Joel Boyd, had been the NHL's first black team physician, with the Wild. Kyle Boyd played youth hockey there as one of few black players.

"There wasn't a ton of diversity," Kyle Boyd said. "I think there are still things that aren't stereotypically associated with people of color, and hockey is one of those things."

Part of Boyd's job is changing that through NHL initiatives like "Learn to Play" programs for first-time players, or implementing street hockey leagues in areas without rinks. He said reaching diverse communities is a reason NHL Seattle picked Northgate Mall for its future training facility, where three ice sheets for public use will be regionally accessible with light rail.

"There are so many kids that want to give this a try," he said. "And our job is to kind of lower those barriers of entry."

State legislator Pettigrew's childhood hockey hero, White, 74, who retired from the WHA in 1975 without playing in the NHL, agreed access is critical. White, living in British Columbia, sounded elated his long-forgotten wink at Pettigrew was so impactful, adding he'd often speak to black youths whom a rink attendant brought to Sharks games in L.A.

"There was a lot of hockey being played, but there wasn't a lot of black participation," White said. "Hockey's a sport where you start



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very young. You have to get a lot of your basic skating and all that stuff in at a young age.”

At that time in L.A., children didn’t have many places to play.

“Now they have great programs where kids are getting to start at a young age and really honing skills,” White said. “And there’s more black participation because black players like Mike Marson, Ray Neufeld and Grant Fuhr came along. Once kids identify with these players, they say, ‘Well, if he can do it, so can I.’”

The same 1981-82 season as Fuhr’s debut, Buffalo Sabres forward Val James became the NHL’s first U.S.-born black player. Mike Grier in 1996 became the first U.S.-born black player developed in this country, while Canadians Jarome Iginla — one of three black captains in NHL history — Anson Carter and Jamal Mayers also debuted that year.

Two years ago, ex-Philadelphia Flyers alternate captain Wayne Simmonds replicated Fuhr in being named All-Star Game MVP.

NHL pioneer O’Ree, 83, inducted into the Hall of Fame last year, has been the league’s diversity ambassador since 1998. He said there are 36 programs across North America helping grow the game compared to five when his role began.

“There are more boys and girls playing hockey today than ever — especially girls,” O’Ree said. “I can tell you, these kids are just hungry to get on the ice and play.”

He said it matters that black youths see NHL stars that “look like them” — having had no black NHL role models growing up in New Brunswick and leaning on an older brother who preached the value of working hard and ignoring racist taunts.

O’Ree played in a six-team NHL and felt diversification would eventually come after the league’s expansion to 12 squads in 1967 and 21 following its 1979 merger with the now-defunct WHA.

“There were just too many good players out there not getting a chance,” O’Ree said.

The league’s historical lack of black players is often blamed for a similar dearth of executive representation. Following repeated pledges of a commitment to diversity, NHL Seattle hired six women and two employees of color — including Kendall Boyd-Tyson — among 11 vice-presidents.

Dartmouth graduate Kyle Boyd moved here last year and landed his NHL Seattle role after a chance on-ice meeting with CEO Tod Leiweke while skating in Kent.

They met again for coffee, during which time he told Leiweke his sister, Boyd-Tyson, was also a Seattle resident and Topgolf executive. She’s now an NHL Seattle vice president focusing on analytics encompassing both the team and KeyArena — including strategies for sponsorships, marketing, ticket sales and arena operations.

Boyd-Tyson played Division III basketball at Emory University, but her college hockey was limited to captaining a non-varsity club while attending Yale University’s business school. She described it as “one of the best leadership positions I ever had” helping dozens of second-year classmates and future business leaders of varying on-ice skills with skating and hockey basics.

But it was her business skills NHL Seattle coveted, particularly having vetted Topgolf growth opportunities like computer applications and new technology. And though her father was a racial pioneer in hockey, Boyd-Tyson doesn’t view herself that way.

“What I’m most impressed about,” she said, “is everyone who’s been hired (by NHL Seattle) — male, female, minority — is a rock star.”

She added: “I strive to get hired on my merits and experience, and my education has always been a big piece. The diversity piece, for me I see it as the skin I live in. An example to others, but I certainly don’t lead with it.”

NHL executive vice president Davis said the league is now a global business requiring the same non-hockey executive skills as major companies like Amazon. And teams must be inclusive, she added, to attract top executives.

“We know from data that people are going to be more apt to be interested in being recruited into any organization where they see someone that looks like themselves and can envision and imagine and see a trajectory for themselves in that talent pool.”

Davis said NHL teams employ about 29% female administrative staffers, which is high relative to other leagues. But ethnic diversity numbers “are not as robust.”

Ex-players, traditionally white males, comprise most NHL coaching and hockey operations hires. But that’s slowly changing — for example, NHL Seattle recently hired analytics specialist Alexandra Mandrycky as hockey operations director.

Given that, and with NHL players of color now more frequent, the game’s administrative ranks could soon look significantly different.

Davis said NHL street hockey programs have been very successful attracting athletes of color from nontraditional markets like Las Vegas and Southern California. Also, NHL-backed financial subsidies help offset expensive equipment and travel costs that similarly impact families of white hockey players and those of color.

Washington lawmaker Pettigrew never played his favorite sport because of cost and no rink access. But the self-proclaimed “hockey geek” is exactly the fan the NHL’s diversity efforts are cultivating. He loves his hometown Kings, keeps a Simmonds jersey from when he broke in with that team and routinely enjoys Canucks games in Vancouver with his legislature buddies.

Pettigrew can’t wait for the NHL’s arrival here and sees growth potential beyond traditional hockey communities.

“Who knows?” he said. “There might be an Eric Pettigrew out there that gets winked at by a Wayne Simmonds and the next thing you know, they’re a top-notch player.”

Seattle Times LOADED: 07.27.2019

1150265 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames counting on freshly re-signed Rittich to be alpha dog in net

Eric Francis

July 27, 2019, 2:19 PM

Despite being surrounded by champagne, dancing family members and five-star food, David Rittich said Saturday he wasn’t in the mood to celebrate the biggest payday of his life.



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Mere hours after putting the final touches on a two-year contract extension with the Calgary Flames, announced early Saturday morning at \$2.75 million annually, the colourful Czech netminder said he needed to catch up on sleep before raising a glass in his honour.

"I don't have the energy to celebrate today," chuckled Rittich, from a family member's wedding an hour outside his hometown of Jihlava, Czech Republic.

"I packed my bag and was ready for the flight to Toronto early (on Saturday) for my arbitration (scheduled for Monday). I didn't sleep until 2 a.m. and had set my alarm early. No sleep. Maybe I'll celebrate with my friends later on."

Some believe fatigue has been an issue with Rittich the last two seasons, as his numbers have dipped in the second half of both his first two full NHL campaigns.

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

With that in mind, Rittich has embarked on a more rigorous training regimen this summer with an eye on suiting up for more than the 45 games he played last season.

"I would like to play more than last year, but it's up to how I play," said Rittich, 26, a free-agent signing by the Flames out of the Czech Extraliga four years ago.

"I'm working really hard so I think I can play more than 60 games."

That will almost certainly not be necessary, especially on a Western Conference team in a league moving more and more toward 50-50 splits like the Flames did last year with him and Mike Smith.

Smith is in Edmonton now, replaced by former Oiler Cam Talbot (also for \$2.75 million) who is looking to turn his career around as the Flames backup.

Many believe it's Rittich crease to lose, but no one should be expecting him to carry the load.

Goaltending will very much be a shared responsibility in Calgary this year, with hopes Rittich will show enough to be deemed the starter come playoffs.

Part of why Smith wasn't re-signed was it is time for Rittich to be an alpha dog, more of a go-to guy.

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

Thankful for all Smith did to help him evolve the last two years, Rittich was happy to give up one year of unrestricted free agency to sign a two-year deal that gives him financial security he couldn't have fathomed four years ago when he toiled for Mlada Boleslav.

"I'm happy with two years – I can prove I can be a starting goaltender," said the six-foot-three, 206-pound goalie whose progression in North America saw him take the NHL by storm before steadily progressing as an NHLer.

"In my head, I just want to be better than last year – I want to be stronger and faster, that's my progress. If you look back three years, every year is better and that's how I want to work. I just want to be better this year than last year."

His 27-9-5 record last season with a 2.61 goal against average and .911 save percentage suggests he's earned the trust of teammates who are empowered and amused by the fun-loving joker.

As the backup, he has been an overwhelmingly pleasant surprise. As a starter, filling in for injured Smith two years ago, he faltered – something GM Brad Treliving believes will aid Rittich in the long run.

Treliving is the first to reiterate he doesn't believe it's a question of whether Big Save Dave can be The Man.

"We're not putting a whole bunch on him to be the starting goalie – we think he has a chance to be a really good goalie in this league," said Treliving.

"If you look at him since he joined our team, he's taken a step every year. We believe he is a really good developing goaltender and we still think he has another step or two he can take. I like how the tandem sets up."

Rittich will drink to that ... eventually.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 07.29.2019

1150251 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Garret Sparks reflects on 'emotionally taxing' Maple Leafs exit

Mike Johnston

July 26, 2019, 5:55 PM

Garret Sparks described his final season with the Toronto Maple Leafs as "emotionally taxing" several days after being traded to the Vegas Golden Knights for a fourth-round pick and the contract of David Clarkson.

"I mean, you realize your dream of playing in the NHL, and then you know, as the season goes on, it gets harder day by day," the backup netminder told Tracey Myers of NHL.com. "It's a grind, physically and emotionally. You could be on the best team in the league, but you're going to face adversity at certain points."

The 26-year-old was technically the longest-serving player in the Maple Leafs organization at the time he was traded. He was selected in the seventh round of the 2011 draft, however he toiled away in the AHL and ECHL for years and only saw action in 37 total regular-season NHL games.

The 2018-19 campaign was a tumultuous tale of two seasons for Sparks.

He beat out Curtis McElhinney and Calvin Pickard for the backup role behind Frederik Andersen thanks to a strong showing in training camp and pre-season, which resulted in both McElhinney and Pickard being placed on waivers and claimed.

Sparks made 20 appearances this past season. During his first 10 outings the Elmhurst, Ill., native went an impressive 6-2-1 despite posting a less-than-stellar .905 save percentage.

In early January, though, he took a puck off his head at practice that resulted in a concussion and his season went downhill from there.



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"I felt I was finally starting to build some momentum and get my chance," Sparks said. "I just felt like I got cut down, and it's hard to regrow after you get your progress chopped off like that."

His final 10 appearances were rough as he went 2-7-0 with a .899 save percentage and eventually wore out his welcome.

Sparks now gets a fresh start in Vegas where he'll compete against Malcolm Subban and Oscar Dansk for the opportunity to back up Marc-Andre Fleury.

"All I've wanted is a fair opportunity, come camp, to try and make the team and I think that I'll get a better opportunity [with the Golden Knights] than I would have in Toronto," Sparks said. "At the end of the day, that's what you're looking for as a player."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 07.28.2019

1150252 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 21 fun things we learned at Smashfest VIII: Patrick Eaves can't lose

Luke Fox

July 26, 2019, 1:49 PM

TORONTO – A warm, clear summer's evening, a bottomless supply of beverages, and the opportunity to play a little table tennis with some NHL stars...

Smashfest may be getting old (eight years running), but it never feels that way.

As Dominic Moore's annual charity event disguised as a gigantic ping-pong party set a new fundraising benchmark for fun, the energy of the night was palpable. Hockey fans mingled, rallied and made merry with more than 20 NHLers as balls bounced and music blared.

Indeed, Smashfest VIII was a raucous success featuring its usual champion. (Spoiler alert: Patrick Eaves, whom Moore describes as ping-pong's Novak Djokovic, is officially a dynasty.)

Over the course of the evening, we had a chance to catch up with a bunch of the NHLers in attendance — Mark Scheifele, Frederik Andersen, Alexander Kerfoot, Jimmy Vesey, Brandon Tanev, Cam Talbot, Ben Harpur — and gathered a few on-the-record nuggets, both hockey and ping-pong related.

Here are 21 of them.

1. Frederik Andersen wants Mitch Marner to remain a Leaf 'really, really bad'

The Maple Leafs goalie was one of two surprise guests to participate in Smashfest unannounced (Calgary's Cam Talbot the other), and naturally he was asked about a certain teammate of his in need of a contract.

Andersen has been in touch with pal Mitch Marner but won't bore him about business talk.

"I think he's confident that he's gonna be here for camp. It's still a long time, so hopefully Kyle and him and his agent can get it done. I try not to interfere with him in that stuff," Andersen says.

"I want to see him back really, really bad, so hopefully it works out."

2. Mark Scheifele doesn't regret clapping a high shot past a little boy at his camp

A hilarious video of the Jets centre sniping a high, hard puck at close range past a little kid this summer went viral (watch below). And Scheifele heard a ton of responses.

"It was all fun," he smiles.

"Some people thought it was mean or I could've hurt the kid, but the kid was all the way over on the one post. I knew I wasn't going to miss. I actually heard from a friend that the parents said the kid still hasn't stopped talking about it. I like to think that I made him smile.

"The camp is all about having fun with the kids and interacting like that. When you see a smile like I saw after I shot that puck on that kid after, that's worth more than anything."

Mark Scheifele blasting bardown clappers on little ass kids @ his hockey camp. Teach 'em adversity young. #NHL  
pic.twitter.com/1XAVDBvqgA

— (@UpperCut\_Slut) June 24, 2019

3. Woo-hoo! Smashfest broke the million-dollar barrier

With the money raised for concussion and rare cancer research Thursday night, Smashfest has now raised more than \$1 million over its eight years.

"It's awesome," Moore says. "That's one of those moments where you look back and say, 'Wow. I feel good about where we're at and what we've been able to do.'"

4. Dominic Moore is a tennis champion

Moore, 38, quietly won the 35-and-over Ontario tennis championship this summer and will be representing his home province in the nationals next month in Toronto. Last year's 35-plus Canadian champ went on to capture the world senior men's title.

"Pretty legit," says Moore, who's always incorporated tennis into his off-season training. "I love the game, so for me it's just fun to compete."

5. It's Patrick Eaves's world... we're just living in it

Eaves started hitting ping-pong balls when dealing with post-concussion syndrome. His eyes had difficulty tracking objects, so he used table tennis as a method to regain his hand-eye coordination.

"It was actually huge in my recovery," Eaves says.

The Anaheim Ducks winger won his fifth consecutive Smashfest title Thursday defeating perennial contender Jeff Skinner in the singles final.

"There's always a bit of buzz about is Eaves is beatable or is he unbeatable," Moore says. "My personal opinion is he's pretty much unbeatable."

If you come at the king, you best not miss @Patrick\_Eaves @\_Smashfest | #SmashFestVIII | @NHLPA  
pic.twitter.com/DzIGfmEI5B

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) July 26, 2019

6. CuJo convinced Moore to play in the 2018 Spengler Cup

A free agent training daily with the Harvard hockey team and trying to stay ready in case an NHL club called last winter, Moore didn't even have the Spengler Cup on his radar. Then he bumped into Curtis Joseph at a Hometown Hockey event, and the goalie raved about his experience playing for Team Canada at the end of his



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career. How beautiful Switzerland is, how the city of Davos rallies around the event, how enjoyable it is to wear the Red and White when you feel like your career is nearing its end.

"You should look into that," Joseph encouraged Moore.

So Moore placed a call to Hockey Canada's Tom Renney, who'd coached Moore when he was a rookie on the New York Rangers. A spot opened up a couple days prior to the tournament, and Moore hopped on an overseas flight.

"It was an amazing experience — just as CuJo had advertised," Moore says. "I'd never played for Team Canada before. That alone was an awesome moment, to be able to represent Canada."

7. Moore went straight from the Spengler to Auston Matthews' old pad

After Canada lost the gold-medal game to KalPa Kuopio in an eight-round shootout, Moore was recruited by the Zurich Lions to play the second half of the Swiss season. He'd never thought he'd play in Europe — "I'm passionate about winning the Stanley Cup," he says — but after speaking to so many Canadians who took pro deals in Switzerland, Moore and wife Mary decided to give it a shot.

"We could go back, wait it out and see if something breaks, or we could embrace this and live abroad," says Moore, who would venture up the Alps or hop on a \$60 flight to Venice and sightsee during days off. "We wouldn't have traded it for anything. We went thinking we'd stay for two weeks and ended up there for four months."

The Lions own apartments outside Zurich that they use to house their imported players.

"So when I moved in, I sent Auston a picture of the place—and it's where he lived. He was like, 'Oh! He loved it there,'" Moore says. "It's kind of in the suburbs of Zurich in a town called Winkle. Nice little place. He has fond memories of it. My wife and I loved it."

8. Adam Fox is unlike any other defenceman Moore has seen

In his 15 years and 897 games as an NHLer, Moore has never seen a defenceman quite like Rangers rookie Adam Fox, with whom he practised for four months at Harvard.

"Foxy, I was skating with him all fall. He's an incredible player, this guy. He's an incredibly unique player. I know he's your namesake so you're rooting for him," Moore tells me.

"I've never seen anyone play like him. He slows the game down the way he reads angles and gives misinformation, where he's looking and the passes he makes. The angles he takes with his feet, it's a little bit like [Erik] Karlsson, the way he works the blue line on the power play and sets people up and finds a way to get pucks through.

"But there's something about Fox that's different. It's hard to pinpoint. I'm really rooting for him. He's a really nice guy, quality person, and it's awesome for him to come to the event. The Rangers have a really good player in him."

Can he make an impact right away?

"I think so. I'm very interested to see how his game progresses and translates at the next level, but he's a unique player. He's going to fun to watch."

9. Smashfest aims to expand beyond Toronto

After eight summers at Steam Whistle, Moore is finally ready to expand Smashfest and throw ping-pong parties in at least one more city in 2020. He's had offers in L.A., New York, Montreal and Vancouver.

"We are ready to expand," the self-described professional ping-pong event organizer proclaims. "I'm hopeful that we're able to bring Smashfest to more people in different places next summer."

10. "He goes by Alexander, not Alex"

Heads up: If you wish to abbreviate new Maple Leaf Alexander Kerfoot's name, go with "Kerf," not Alex.

Ready to take the tables at #SmashfestVIII

The annual tournament raises funds for concussion and rare cancer research. [pic.twitter.com/GitUTxUH6k](http://pic.twitter.com/GitUTxUH6k)

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) July 25, 2019

11. Scheifele will only sign your face if you're too young to drive

A grown-up Winnipeg Jets fan handed the all-star a Sharpie and asked him to autograph his face.

"I'm not going to do that here," Scheifele said. "Maybe if you were a little kid."

Heartbreaker.

12. Andersen is exhausted by your workload narratives

As he was being asked a question about the possibility of curtailing his high number of starts for the Maple Leafs next season, Andersen said, "Oh, here we go."

13. The highlight of Andersen's summer? Partying at Zach Hyman's wedding

Andersen had never attended a Jewish wedding until Hyman's, and he loved it.

"That was a lot of fun," Andersen smiles. "It was a little different when you lift everyone up in the chairs and break the glass and stuff. It was a lot of fun."

14. Kerfoot believes fellow Avalanche-turned-Leaf Tyson Barrie is a better defender than you think

"He's an extremely dynamic defenceman. He can change the game with what he brings on a day-to-day basis — his pace, his ability to make plays in the offensive end, and he's a great teammate in the locker room," Kerfoot says.

"There's not many D-men that put up the types of numbers he has — and he's more than that. People have critiqued his defensive game at times, but we've seen it firsthand. He's a good defensive player as well. Sometimes people are too hard on him in that sense, but he's a good defensive player and one of the best offensive defencemen in the league.

"Just his skill level — top guys in the league want to play with players like him."

The kid's got skills!

Team @Kerfy14 takes the @Smashfest Doubles Pro-Am! #SmashfestVIII | @NHLPA | @MapleLeafs [pic.twitter.com/vABH9VUdzz](http://pic.twitter.com/vABH9VUdzz)

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) July 26, 2019

15. Andersen picked up Kerfoot and drove him to the Maple Leafs practice rink the day he arrived

Kerfoot has been impressed by the warm welcome he's received in Toronto, where he's already getting recognized more often in a couple days than in a whole winter in Denver. Moore suggested



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neighbourhoods he should go home-hunting, and Andersen offered to drive him to the Leafs' rink for the first time.

"He told me how great it is to play here. The fans here are unlike anywhere else in the league," Kerfoot says.

The Sabres' Jimmy Vesey, who was centred by Kerfoot for three seasons at Harvard, believes his pal is well-equipped for the spotlight and scrutiny that awaits.

"I do. I think he has a loosey-goosey attitude — not in a bad way. Things don't seem to bother him much. He just goes out and plays his game. He did that in college, and he's done that the past two years. He'll do just fine," Vesey says.

"The way he can control the puck and see the game, his vision on the ice is, for me, some of the best I've seen. I was a benefactor of that in college. The way he sees the ice and controls the game, that's his biggest strength."

16. Vesey wasn't surprised at all by his trade to Buffalo

"Rumblings, rumours, agent... this day and age, it's hard to keep stuff hush-hush. A couple weeks before the trade, I had people sending me stuff online," says Vesey.

The new Sabre was touched that respected veterans Kyle Okposo and Zach Bogosian reached out to him right away to welcome him into the fold.

17. Look out: Jack Eichel is already in beast mode

Vesey has been training daily and hitting the ice three times a week with new teammates Evan Rodrigues and Jack Eichel.

"He's a specimen of an athlete. That maybe shows more true in the gym. Not a lot of guys can keep up with what he does in the gym. Last year was bittersweet with that good start, but he wants to be in the playoffs. You might use the word frustration, but knowing Jack for a while, he's just a competitor. He's the captain of the team. He was drafted second overall, and he wants to be the best," Vesey says.

"His weights are off the chart, but it's his athleticism. His running and his jumping is on par with a lot of guys in other sports, and we play on skates. He's a world-class athlete."

18. Poutine tastes even better when smothered in mushrooms and bacon

Facts.

19. Ben Harpur feels Cody Ceci gets a bad rap

Packaged together in an intraprovincial trade from Toronto on Canada Day, defenceman Ben Harpur has spent his entire NHL career with Cody Ceci.

In some circles Ceci's \$4.5-million contract with the Leafs was ripped for being too rich, but Harpur believes his PK partner deserves more respect than he's gotten lately.

"Just playing with him and seeing him grow as a player, he's really good. I feel he's underrated in that sense. He doesn't get a lot of credit for the minutes he plays and the opponents he plays against, especially in Ottawa," Harpur says.

"I'm really excited for him to have a fresh start here in Toronto. I know he's excited about it as well."

A few familiar faces here at #SmashfestVIII  
pic.twitter.com/tXnTmUmtLB

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) July 26, 2019

20. Brandon Tanev is jacked to join Sidney Crosby

Crosby and Matt Murray were the first Penguins to welcome the former Jet to the Eastern Conference once the free agent inked an eye-popping \$21-million deal on July 1.

Tanev vows to earn his keep by being "physical, fast and tenacious."

"It's going to be a nice change of pace going to Pittsburgh," Tanev says. "Any chance to go out on the ice with the best player in the world is something very special. To learn from him and take things from his game is going to be interesting and good for my game as well."

21. Carter Hart called Cam Talbot before his first NHL start

By the time Talbot was dealt to Philadelphia last season, he figures young Carter Hart didn't need any of his advice.

The two trained together last summer and formed a bond strong enough that Hart wanted to talk to Talbot before his first career start, a win, on Dec. 18.

"He can always lean on me if he needs to. He knows I'll be there for him, but he showed what he can do. Everyone knows what he's capable of now," says Talbot.

The newest Calgary Flame goalie was asked to project the 20-year-old's ceiling.

"Honestly, he could do something really special," Talbot says. "He's got that kind of potential. He's very cerebral when he's in there. He thinks the game. He's a student of the game. He always wants to get better. The sky's the limit for that kid."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 07.28.2019

1150218 Websites

The Athletic / Helping us capture the spirit of the thing: The NHL All-Interview team

By Craig Custance Jul 26, 2019

Sometimes we're a bit hard on hockey players when it comes to interviews and the tendency to give vanilla answers. And it's true, they do often seem to loathe to say anything interesting. They lean too much on clichés. I'll be the first to admit that I occasionally feel media envy watching an NBA press conference.

But I also realized just how good we have it when I asked the NHL writers at The Athletic to help out with an All-Interview team as part of our Lineup Week package of stories. The request was made to name the three forwards, goalies, defensemen and coaches they enjoying interviewing the most. In all, 36 writers responded and over 120 different players were mentioned. That's crazy. Everybody seemed to have different favorites and players they go to for insight and information. And so, this All-Interview team is part appreciation, part recognition and a glimpse for subscribers to see just who we enjoy chatting with the most when the dressing rooms open up.

The panel: 36 of our NHL writers who aren't on vacation right now. Total votes in parenthesis.

Forwards



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Top line:

Nick Foligno (6) – Sidney Crosby (7) – Justin Williams (6)

The top vote-getter amongst the forwards also happens to be the best player (arguably!) in the NHL and one of the best to ever play the game. Crosby has continued a lineage that started with Gordie Howe, was passed to Wayne Gretzky and exists now with him where he understands his stature in the game. He knows he's going to be asked about league issues. He knows his quotes are going to become headlines. And he still makes an effort to give thoughtful, extended answers to nearly every question thrown in his direction. He also earns points here because of his accessibility. I've covered a million playoff games involving the Penguins and you can always count on Crosby to answer questions after, win or lose... Nick Foligno is just a beautiful human being. He's funny. He's insightful. He'll take every last question. One of the all-timers.

Sara Civian's scouting report on Justin Williams: Williams is thoughtful and isn't afraid to call you out on your cliches in a way that actually makes you better. You have to spar with him for a minute but if you make it out alive, you have something more substantial than anything in the NHL these days that is just so original. Anyone who has interviewed him even twice knows he's going to be a stellar coach when the time comes because of the way he articulates his answers and everything he knows. Not that this is about media members feeling validated, but he will address you by name and look you in the eye — something colleague Eric Duhatschek has essentially called a lost art between media and players.

Second line:

Steven Stamkos (4) – Matt Duchene (5) – Brian Boyle (4)

Stamkos is another player who earns points for his stature in the game and willingness to answer questions with courtesy and consideration. He doesn't lean on cliches. He listens while you're asking the question and tries to share his insight. You never feel rushed and it ends up feeling more like a conversation than an interview... Matt Duchene was in my top three. He's a hockey nerd and I mean that as a high compliment. He's a great guy to talk to about anything league related or to get insight into opposing players. He can explain things about the game that only a player who sees the game at a high level can do. He's great.

Scott Burnside's scouting report on Brian Boyle: I think what draws people in our business to Brian Boyle in terms of being a go-to guy for interviews is what draws teams like the New York Rangers, Tampa Bay Lightning, New Jersey Devils and most recently the Nashville Predators to Brian Boyle when it comes to leadership and creating a culture of winning. It's the honesty that Boyle brings to all the moments of the game whether it's taking punishment in front of the net on the power play or building relationships in the dressing room as was obviously the case when he made his emotional departure from New Jersey prior to last year's trade deadline. That honesty extends to reporters as well. It's the willingness to really consider a question before preparing an answer. It might seem like a small thing but how often do we say this is a details game and Brian Boyle understands that the details are important on every level, even if it's talking to ink-stained wretches like us.

Third line:

Ryan Reaves (3) – Joe Thornton (3) – Nathan MacKinnon (3)

Joe Thornton brought us one of the greatest hockey quotes of all time, sharing his thoughts on how he'd celebrate a four-goal game. That alone puts him on the team. He also seems to prefer doing every interview without a shirt on, so he has that going for him... MacKinnon is great because he's not afraid to say something interesting. He speaks honestly, with confidence and insight. When Colorado starts going on long playoff runs here in the next several years, he's going to be a media favorite.

Jesse Granger's scouting report on Reaves: Ryan Reaves is as brash off the ice as he is on it, and it makes for a fantastic interview. He's witty enough to crack a joke or two but more importantly, in the end, he will

talk very candidly about the game, not using cliches to censor his thoughts.

Fourth line:

David Backes (2) – Auston Matthews (2) – Taylor Hall (2)

Backes is just an absolute pro. Great guy. Great conversationalist. But also willing to share information and insight so that you leave the conversation feeling like you've learned something. When he was with the Blues and you were covering a playoff series you had to consciously make a point of going elsewhere for quotes or else every story had a Backes quote in it... I was certainly concerned that Matthews would go to Toronto and lose his personality under the spotlight and that hasn't happened. He's got a bit of an edge to him at times, which I like. He can be engaging, funny and interesting.

Corey Masisak's scouting report on Taylor Hall: One thing that stands out about Taylor Hall is his willingness to be objective about his team's play. Another thing is his grasp of what is going on around the NHL (and other sports, considering his tweet about the NBA during the playoffs) and his ability to provide context and insight on issues large and small. And he might be the most fluent player in the sport when it comes to analytics — conversations with him can (and usually do) go well beyond the basic concepts like Corsi and PDO.

Others receiving multiple votes: Gabriel Landeskog, Jason Spezza, Brad Marchand, Brad Richardson, Patrick Kane, Vincent Trocheck, Brandon Dubinsky

Defense

Drew Doughty (12) – Brent Burns (8)

Ian Cole (6) – P.K. Subban (5)

Nate Schmidt (4) – Victor Hedman (4)

Keith Yandle (4) – Ben Lovejoy (4)

The defense is loaded. Oh man. Drew Doughty is the best. I'll let Lisa break him down further but he always delivers. He seems to enjoy the process more than any player in the league... You never know where a conversation with Brent Burns is going to end up. I once interviewed him and accidentally ended up buying a 35-foot Winnebago... Ian Cole might be the best in the league when it comes to talking about his teammates. A great guy to go to for insight into the player sitting next to him. Ben Lovejoy and Nate Schmidt are very similar... Subban is smart, fun, entertaining, not afraid of making a statement. If there's something controversial in a game, you want him involved because you know he's going to say something interesting about it afterward... Hedman is a bit low key but incredibly smart and articulate. If you want to know what makes an opposing player great, and really get specific about it, you ask Hedman.

Lisa Dillman's scouting report on Drew Doughty: Drew Doughty would have been on an All-Interview Team in any decade, really. Think of him as an unplugged, unfiltered throwback in a day where cliched caution seems to be the operating philosophy. I remember him telling me last season that he loved the Jimmy Butler story, of Butler calling out the Timberwolves. Doughty: "I could see myself doing something ridiculous like that. But not to that extent." If he decides to ... well, we'll be waiting.

Others receiving multiple votes: Torey Krug, Ryan Suter, Seth Jones, Mark Giordano, Zdeno Chara, Connor Murphy, Kevin Shattenkirk, Kris Letang, Erik Karlsson

Goalie

Marc-Andre Fleury (7)

Henrik Lundqvist (5)

Pekka Rinne (3)

Ryan Miller (3)



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Cory Schneider (3)

Antti Raanta (3)

This list could have been about 20 deep. Goalies are fascinating because so many of them are students of the game. From a media perspective, one of the worst trends has been the limitation of their media access in the morning of games because every guy on this list is insightful, thoughtful and a blast to chat with.

Rob Rossi's scouting report on Marc-Andre Fleury: Marc is funny. He likes to have fun. He acts in the same manner with the media as he does with his teammates — accountable in tough times, but always focusing on something positive. He's does that with his self-deprecation and a wit that is quicker than his glove.

He has been through enough to provide insight on almost any issue, and he is happy to serve as a voice for a story about teammates or league issues. His experience as the face of a couple of franchises gives him a unique perspective on the role media plays in framing a narrative. And he came up at a time when media and players playfully bantered, so he is comfortable building relationships with reporters. As he has often said: "It's a game, you know. We play it, you write about us playing it. We have good jobs."

Probably also helps he doesn't read the stories. A lot of players say they don't. He doesn't. Frees him to be expansive and engaging.

Coach

Head coach: Paul Maurice (9 votes)

Assistants: John Tortorella (6 votes), Bruce Boudreau (3 votes), Barry Trotz (3 votes)

Others receiving multiple votes: Bruce Cassidy, Jon Cooper, Peter DeBoer

These are the guys we deal with the most. There are conversations every morning. There are press conferences after every game. You don't make it as an NHL head coach without having an advanced hockey mind and an ability to communicate and that's what makes most coaches such an interesting conversation. You've seen the Tortorella highlights but he's also extremely engaging when he wants to be and brutally honest. It's a great combo... Boudreau is funny, a fantastic story-teller and good for at least two great one-liners in every conversation... Trotz is a teacher. Ask him a good question and you'll definitely learn something new.

Murat Ates' scouting report on Paul Maurice: By now, everyone knows that Paul Maurice is charismatic, clever and quotable whether he's offering insight or just shooting the shit. That said, I think what's most unique about Maurice is how quickly he reads the room — how well he makes reporters feel understood. Personally, Maurice and I went from zero to him joking about stealing my laptop and slashing my tires in an awful hurry and I think that's a great example of Maurice knowing his audience and speaking directly to it.

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The Athletic / Tulloch: The NHL's top 10 regression candidates for 2019-20

By Ian Tulloch Jul 25, 2019

A few days ago I published my top 10 breakout candidates for 2019-20, which seemed to generate a lot of buzz. With that being the case, I thought it would be fun to take a look at the opposite end of the

spectrum. Which players are most likely to take a step backwards next season?

If we're going to look for indicators that a particular type of player is going to break out, we need to be looking for signs of regression the other way. Answering this question is never fun, but it's an important aspect of predicting future performance. The best predictors tend to be shooting percentage-based; we know that players aren't likely to continue shooting well above their career average. The same logic applies to goaltenders, although I didn't include many of them on the list due to the volatility of save percentage from year to year (it's much more difficult to predict).

When you see one of your favourite players listed here, please try to remember that this isn't a reflection on their play; it simply means they're unlikely to produce as well as they did in 2018-19. Since most players are unlikely to repeat career years (or spikes in shooting percentage), that opens the door for a lot of big names to make the list. There are bound to be disagreements over which players were and weren't included, which I genuinely enjoy; they can lead to some great discussions in the comments section (we'll try our best to keep things civil, though, since I know this can be a touchy topic).

Without further ado, let's dive into things!

1. Andrew Shaw, RW, Chicago Blackhawks

We're going to start with Shaw because he's the best example of what we're discussing. He'd always been a player who produced roughly 30-40 points per season, but he exploded in 2018-19 with a career-high 47 points in only 63 games.

Something doesn't add up here. I could see this making sense if he was playing on a line with Sidney Crosby or Connor McDavid for the first time, but his most common linemate was Max Domi (who we're going to talk about later). We've seen Shaw play with talented players like Jonathan Toews and Brandon Saad in the past, so I don't think linemate quality is a strong enough argument to justify such a big increase in points.

Looking at it more closely, power-play time wasn't a factor either; he only put up six points with the man advantage in 2018-19, which is exactly his career average. This all comes down to even-strength production, and there's one simple explanation for his meteoric rise last season: a shooting percentage bender.

Here's a look at how Shaw's team has shot with him on the ice at five-on-five throughout his career (we call this On-Ice Sh% — the team's shooting percentage while Shaw was on the ice).

To help explain how unsustainable those numbers are, Crosby's Penguins have only shot 8.7 percent with him on the ice at five-on-five since 2013. We just don't see players sustain on-ice shooting percentages north of 11 percent — even the best players in the world — which is why we should expect some serious regression for Shaw in 2019-20 (and his linemates, which we're going to discuss later).

2. Leon Draisaitl, C/LW, Edmonton Oilers

Let me start by saying that Draisaitl is a phenomenal player (I wouldn't be surprised if he puts up 35 goals and 55 assists next season). With that being said, his 50-goal total from last year seems unsustainable when we take a look underneath the hood.

A 20 percent shooting clip isn't a sustainable number moving forward. Even the best snipers in the league don't convert on that many of their shots at five-on-five (Steven Stamkos hovered around 16 percent in his prime). We could make the argument that Draisaitl's going to spend a solid chunk of next season alongside McDavid, who can help inflate his shooting percentage, but those two have actually shared the ice for most of Draisaitl's career — where he was shooting 11 percent prior to last season.

Realistically, we should expect him to regress to his career average in 2019-20 (which is now closer to 13 percent after last year's 50-goal season). If he can find a way to keep generating shots at a high volume, especially on the power play, he can help stave off some of that



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regression (with his talent, I wouldn't put it past him). If he spends most of the season running Edmonton's second line, however, it's likelier he takes on more of a playmaking role and finishes the season closer to 35 goals – which is still superb when you're capable of generating 50-plus assists like Draisaitl.

### 3. Morgan Rielly, LD, Toronto Maple Leafs

If there were any concerns about my Leafs bias, I hope this will help dispel them. Much like Draisaitl, Rielly is a great player who I expect to perform well in 2019-20. The issue is that he shot well above his career average last year, resulting in a 20-goal season that he realistically won't be able to repeat.

The biggest question last season was whether Rielly had drastically improved his shot quality. We can look into that using a metric called "Expected Goals", which determines how often a particular shot should result in a goal. For example: a three percent shot from the blueline is worth 0.03 expected goals, whereas a 20 percent shot from the slot is worth 0.20 expected goals.

Looking at the numbers, we can see that Rielly increased his shot volume last season, but his shot quality remained roughly the same. It's possible he generated a few more open looks off the rush, but nothing that would justify the shooting percentage boon we saw last year. Realistically, we should expect him to regress closer to his career average shooting percentage moving forward, which is probably going to cost him about eight goals at five-on-five.

Try to keep this in mind when you're reading the "What's wrong with Morgan Rielly" articles a few months into the 2019-20 season. He's still the same player, he just went on a shooting percentage bender last year.

### 4. John Carlson, RD, Washington Capitals

What's interesting about Carlson is that he and Rielly had very similar seasons last year. Both finished in the top five of Norris voting after putting up monster point totals and a high plus-minus in big minutes (plus-minus is a terrible stat, but it's typically a major consideration for Norris voting).

Unlike Rielly, I doubt Carlson's goal totals are going to drop dramatically. My bigger concern is how well he's going to impact goal differential at five-on-five, not to mention his assist totals (for fantasy owners out there). In 2018-19, Carlson was on the ice for a lot of goals, which helped prop up his assist numbers and plus-minus. The problem is that those numbers aren't sustainable when you look at the Capitals' shooting percentage with him on the ice.

I've heard the argument that Carlson gets to play with some extremely talented finishers in Washington's top six, but that also would have been the case in his previous seasons with the team. If we're looking at this objectively, we shouldn't expect the Capitals to shoot north of 10 percent with Carlson on the ice next season, let alone 12 percent.

It's worth noting that I still think Carlson and Rielly are effective top-pairing defencemen, but everything went right for them in 2018-19. That isn't likely to repeat itself next season (especially in the shooting percentage department), which is why I doubt either player finishes in the top five of Norris voting in 2019-20.

### 5. Elias Lindholm, RW, Calgary Flames

The Dougie Hamilton trade worked out nicely for both teams last season, with Carolina adding a top-pairing defenceman en route to their first conference final appearance since 2009, and Calgary getting 78 points out of Elias Lindholm (not to mention Noah Hanifin's strong year on the second pairing). The question I keep asking myself is: how much of Lindholm's production is sustainable?

He was roughly a 40-45 point player in Carolina the previous four seasons, but skyrocketed into a near point-per-game forward with Calgary in 2018-19. I understand that he turned 24 (which research suggests is when most players peak) and got to play big minutes with elite talent (Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan), but something still

feels a bit off. His most common linemates were Sebastian Aho and Jeff Skinner in 2017-18, both of whom had excellent seasons the year after without Lindholm. That makes me wonder how much the "quality of linemates" argument should factor into the equation here.

When I try to isolate for Lindholm's individual impact on offence, it's hard to see much that screams point-per-game player.

He doesn't touch the puck that often in transition, isn't a high-volume shooter and generates shot assists (passes leading to a shot) at a slightly above league-average rate. That doesn't explain Lindholm's offensive explosion in 2018-19.

The better explanation is that he shot well above his career average at even strength (11.9 percent compared to 7.3 percent in the five years prior) and generated a bunch of secondary assists, which we know aren't as repeatable. Neither of those aspects are likely to repeat themselves in 2019-20, which is why Lindholm finds himself on this list.

### 6. Max Domi, C, Montreal Canadiens

Remember when I brought up how Andrew Shaw's line had an unsustainably high shooting percentage at five-on-five? Max Domi was another major benefactor of that, potting 28 goals last season despite only scoring five the year before when you exclude empty-netters. The reality is probably somewhere in between those two figures, so let's try our best to work this out.

Prior to last season, Domi scored on 7.8 percent of his shots at five-on-five. In 2018-19, that number jumped to 14.7 percent – almost double what he was shooting before). If we add everything together (all of his five-on-five shots throughout his career), we get a career average of 10 percent. If he takes roughly the same number of shots next year (152), we should expect him to shoot at his career average shooting percentage, scoring 15 goals (seven fewer than the 22 he had last year at five-on-five). There's also the Shaw factor we have to consider (his most common linemate last season).

It's unlikely that both Domi and Shaw repeat career years in shooting percentage, which is why it's a safe bet for both of them to take a significant drop in five-on-five point production. Now, there's a chance that Domi's overall point totals don't take too much of a hit if Montreal can fix its power play, which finished second last in the NHL last season. We know he's an excellent passer, so if the Canadiens can find a way to take advantage of it at five-on-four, there's a chance Domi doesn't drop off as much next year.

### 7. Phil Kessel, RW, Arizona Coyotes

What's interesting about Kessel is that he doesn't fit the same criteria as the players ranked above him. His shooting percentage last year was right in line with what he's done throughout his career and he hasn't been relying heavily on secondary assists. So why does he find his way on the list?

It really comes down to two words: Evgeni Malkin.

Malkin has been Kessel's most common linemate over the past two seasons, which has helped him produce at an elite rate (92 points in 2017-18 and 82 points in 2018-19). He's also been a staple on Pittsburgh's stacked power play with Malkin, Crosby, Kris Letang and one of the best net-front players in the league, Patric Hornqvist.

Now that Kessel has been traded to Arizona, he's going to be playing with significantly less talented players. I'd imagine his power-play production takes a big hit (especially considering Arizona hasn't shown as much willingness to play their top unit as often as Pittsburgh).

Image from Dom Luszczyzyn's article

I'm a big fan of Clayton Keller's game, but he isn't in the same tier as Malkin when it comes to inflating his wingers' point totals. When you combine that with Kessel's age (32 in October), it's a safe bet that we see his production decline in 2019-20.



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Another concern is just how one-dimensional Kessel has become at even strength over the past few years. In his prime, he used to impact shot differential but Pittsburgh has actually been getting shelled at five-on-five when Kessel was on the ice. After adjusting for his usage, here's a look at his impact on driving play at even strength.

CF: Shot impact

xGF: Expected Goal impact

GF: Goal impact

As a longtime Kessel fan, it hurts to say this, but age (and context) is going to catch up with him sooner rather than later.

## 8. David Perron, RW, St. Louis Blues

You're probably wondering why Perron is on this list considering how well he's produced over the last two seasons (66 points in 70 games with Vegas two years ago, followed up by 46 points in 57 games with St. Louis). Initially, I was in the same boat. I assumed that a player who produced at a 77- and 66-point pace would continue that level of production unless there were some major red flags.

I ended up finding quite a few.

The biggest thing that stood out was his shooting percentage on the power play; he shot over 39 percent with the man advantage last year, which is wildly unsustainable (his career average was 11 percent heading into 2018). That's obviously not going to repeat itself, but it's his five-on-five play that I find even more concerning.

As you can see, he generated shot assists at an elite rate when he was in Vegas, which helps explain why his assist numbers were so strong in 2017-18. Fast forward a year, and he isn't generating nearly as many passes in the offensive zone (the sample size isn't the greatest, but as the graphic indicates, these microstats tend to normalize around 30 games).

That helps explain the drop-off in his assist rate last season. The only reason Perron's decline hasn't been more prominent is because he's been propped up by an unsustainable shooting percentage; he converted on 16.7 percent of his shots at five-on-five last year despite being a 10 percent shooter in his previous six seasons. When you combine that with his five-on-four shooting percentage, it becomes clear that his goal totals are going to take a big step backwards.

If you're thinking about drafting Perron in your fantasy league this year, I'd strongly urge you to reconsider. All signs point to his production falling off a cliff in 2019-20, which might sting for the St. Louis Blues fans reading this. Then again, I can't imagine they're going to be too worked up about it.

(Winslow Townson / USA Today)

## 9. Ben Bishop, G, Dallas Stars

I was thinking about putting a section where I would list off half of the league's netminders – since save percentage is so volatile from year to year. The best goalies tend to perform worse in the following year and the worst ones tend to do better. I ended up deciding against it (the joke that's going to get me in trouble comes in the next section), but I thought that I needed to include at least one goalie on the list.

I ended up going with Ben Bishop based on the fact that he turns 33 in November, has a history of groin injuries (which is concerning when you're 6-foot-7), but most importantly: he drastically outperformed his career averages last season.

Here's a quick comparison of his actual save percentage at five-on-five over the last few years compared to his "expected" save percentage (a metric that determines the percentage of saves we would expect a goaltender to make based on the shots he faced).

There's no denying that Bishop was phenomenal in 2018-19 – he probably would have won the Vezina if he got a few more starts. The

issue is that he's extremely unlikely to repeat that performance in 2019-20. He's much likelier to regress closer to his career average, which is roughly a league-average starter when you adjust for shot quality.

The good news is that Dallas has done an excellent job of limiting high-quality shots under Jim Montgomery, so Bishop should be able to hover around the .915-.920 SV% range if the team continues to prevent shots from the dangerous areas like they did last season. I just wouldn't count on him being the second-best goalie in the league again next year.

## 10. The 2018-19 New York Islanders

There were so many regression candidates on last year's Islanders team that I decided to bunch them all into one section (I'm sure this will go over well in the comments). Again, this isn't to say that all of the following players are going to play terribly next year, the evidence just suggests that they aren't likely to perform as well as they did last season.

Now that we've got that caveat out of the way, let's start with the goaltenders.

Robin Lehner, G, Chicago Blackhawks: After putting up a career-high save percentage, it's unlikely that Lehner is going to have the same kind of success behind Chicago's defence (which has been notoriously weak over the past few seasons, even despite their veteran additions this offseason). It's never a great bet to assume a goaltender is going to repeat a career-high in save percentage, which is why I'd put my money on Lehner regressing closer to league average next season. As we all know, though, goaltending is voodoo (so don't actually put money on this).

Thomas Greiss, G, New York Islanders: I've loved Greiss as a goaltender for a while now which is why I hate saying he's going to regress next season, but we just don't see goalies repeat career years. Very few goalies have put up a .927 save percentage in back-to-back seasons (and the ones who have are probably headed to the Hall of Fame). As much as I like Greiss, I don't think he's in that echelon, which is why I expect him to regress closer to .915 next season – which would still be very solid.

Valtteri Filppula, C, Detroit Red Wings: I couldn't believe Filppula's numbers when I first looked them up – he scored 17 goals at age 35 last season. A lot of that was smoke and mirrors. He shot over 20 percent at five-on-five, which is well below his 11.5 shooting percentage over the last seven years. I always root for aging players like him to stay productive in their later years, but I don't think he's likely to repeat his performance from last year.

Leo Komarov, RW, New York Islanders: Individually, Komarov's shooting percentage wasn't that high (it was actually below his career average), but he benefitted from wildly unsustainable percentages at the team level. When you add up the team's shooting percentage with him on the ice (9.6 percent) and save percentage (94.5 percent), you get a PDO of 104.1, which is bound to regress closer to 100 next year. This means he's unlikely to keep outscoring the opposition, since he was only controlling 45 percent of the shots and scoring chances at five-on-five. The same can be said of Filppula.

Casey Cizikas, C, New York Islanders: I always root for my fellow Mississauga natives, but I have to point out that Cizikas shot well above his career average last year at five-on-five. We know that fourth-liners aren't going to repeatably shoot above 15 percent at even strength, so realistically, he probably drops down closer to 13 goals next season (despite putting up 20 last year).

## Honourable Mentions

Cody Eakin, C, Vegas Golden Knights: He just missed the cut for this list, shooting over 18 percent at five-on-five last season (double his career average heading into 2018). It's always fun when a player breaks the 20-goal barrier for the first time, but it doesn't look likely that Eakin will hit that plateau again.



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Esa Lindell, LD, Dallas Stars: This isn't so much about Lindell's point production as it is his play-driving ability. He's actually been one of the worst puck-movers in the NHL over the last few seasons, relying heavily on John Klingberg to do the heavy lifting. With Miro Heiskanen likely to get more minutes with Klingberg on the top pairing next season, I'm not sure how much I trust Lindell to drive his own pairing.

Jordan Binnington, G, St. Louis Blues: This isn't to take anything away from his magical 2018-19 season. I just don't think it's a safe bet for a rookie goaltender to repeat a .927 save percentage across a larger sample. If his playoff numbers are any indication, regression to the mean is probably the safest bet for Binnington (and all goaltenders if we're being realistic).

Pekka Rinne, G, Nashville Predators: Speaking of regression to the mean, it's unlikely that Rinne outperforms his career averages again next season (after accounting for shot quality), especially considering he turns 37 in November.

Viktor Arvidsson, RW, Nashville Predators: I hate including players that I love on these lists, but I have to be objective. Arvidsson converted on over 16 percent of his shots at five-on-five last year despite being a career 8.2 percent shooting coming into the year. He was on pace to score 47 goals across 82 games, which everyone in their right mind knew wasn't sustainable, but even 40 seems like a stretch. He's always been a high-volume shooter, but I'd imagine his shooting percentage drops back closer to the 9-10 percent range.

Nikita Kucherov, RW, Tampa Bay Lightning: I feel evil for even bringing him up, but after a magical season where everything went right, it's unlikely for that to happen again. If he put up 40 goals and 65 assists next season, I wouldn't bat an eye, but I don't think he approaches the 128-point pace he was on last season considering the power play's sky-high shooting percentage and the number of secondary assists he was able to put up at even strength.

The Hyman-Tavares-Marner line, Toronto Maple Leafs: Removing myself from my Leafs bias, this is another situation where everything went right (which isn't likely to repeat itself). The Leafs shot over 11 percent with these players on the ice, John Tavares converted on over 20 percent of his shots at five-on-five en route to a 47-goal season, Mitch Marner's primary assist rate was one of the highest we've ever seen and Zach Hyman scored six empty net goals. I don't think any of those things are going to happen again in 2019-20, but I still expect them to be one of the better lines in hockey.

Jeff Skinner, LW, Buffalo Sabres: Part of me wonders if Jack Eichel can inflate his linemates' production the same way we've seen players like Malkin and Tavares do it. The other part of me looks at the fact that Skinner has consistently underperformed his expected goals throughout his career (scoring less than we would expect based on his shot locations) and then drastically outperformed them in 2018-19. The answer probably lies somewhere in the middle, but it's a safe bet that he doesn't approach 40 again next season.

Dylan Strome, C, Chicago Blackhawks: As fun as it was to see Strome finally break out, it's worth noting Chicago shot 12.9 percent with him on the ice at five-on-five. That number is going to drop significantly next season, which is going to lead to a lot of questions about Strome (when realistically, we probably shouldn't expect him to keep scoring at a near point-per-game rate).

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The Athletic / Team Bounce Back vs. Team Fade: Who wins a matchup of players poised to rebound or regress?

By Scott Burnside Jul 25, 2019

Last week's trade of Milan Lucic for James Neal may be the ultimate in wishful thinking deals.

Both players have shown in the past they are elite players. But the elite bus seems to have left the station for both of them. Or is it just idling around the corner? The Calgary Flames are banking that Lucic can bounce back and provide a much-needed blend of scoring touch and truculence (sorry, Brian Burke, for appropriating your oft-used term) for a team that followed up a dynamic regular season by laying a five-game playoff egg against the eight-seed Avalanche. The Oilers are projecting that Neal, 10 times a 20-goal scorer, hasn't jumped the goal-scoring shark after producing a paltry seven goals last season in Calgary, his first after signing a five-year deal worth \$28.75 million, and following that up with a forgettable postseason that saw him a healthy scratch by the time the series ended.

It's a compelling story either way but certainly far more compelling if both or one of these players can channel their former selves (or each other's former selves for that matter). But they aren't alone in searching for a bounce-back season — there are lots of players looking forward to putting the past firmly in their rearview mirror. Here's a look at our Team Bounce Back. For the sake of brevity, we've included a bounce-back forward line and a couple of spares, a bounce-back defensive pairing and a spare and two bounce-back netminders. For what it's worth we don't have either Lucic or Neal on our squad.

And then, since Team Bounce Back has to have someone to play against just like those guys who showed up in the Iowa cornfield in Field of Dreams, what about having our bounce-back squad face off against players who might be poised to take a step back? You know there are going to be a handful of players who have built up unreasonable expectations with exemplary play last year who will regress or find it impossible to regain the level of play/production they established last season. With that in mind, further below we give you Team Fade.

Team Bounce Back

Goaltenders

Cory Schneider, New Jersey Devils

Henrik Lundqvist, New York Rangers

We recall a conversation with Brian Boyle shortly after Boyle was traded from New Jersey to Nashville. He was talking with great affection and admiration about his close pal Schneider, who was battling his way back from hip surgery and trying to resurrect his promising career. Never complained, completely focused on getting his game back, Boyle said. It was, he added, inspirational. By the end of last season, Schneider, limited to 26 games and just six wins, started to show signs that he had indeed turned a corner. While youngster MacKenzie Blackwood, 22, showed last season he has the goods to be the heir apparent to the New Jersey goal if the Devils are to bounce back from a miserable 2018-19 campaign, Schneider, 33, will be critical in providing consistent quality starts and mentoring the talented Blackwood.

Across the river it was a similarly distressing campaign for Lundqvist, whose Hall of Fame career is winding toward its conclusion. He did not endure the injury issues that Schneider did but Lundqvist is looking to rewrite his current narrative after posting his worst-ever GAA (3.07) and a .907 save percentage that was likewise his worst since arriving in the NHL in 2005. Perhaps more troubling than the stats were the number of games where Lundqvist seemed overwhelmed, completely unlike the Lundqvist that has made him one of the most popular Rangers of all-time. Lundqvist allowed four or more goals 18 times last season and often those games came in clumps. By the end he had been replaced by Alexander Georgiev as the team's starter if not in name certainly in deed. Lundqvist, among the most forthright of players, admitted as much at the end of the season. But this is a Rangers team that has quickly cast aside the 'rebuild' label with Jacob Trouba locked in on defense along with



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collegiate star Adam Fox. No. 2 pick Kaapo Kakko joins Artemi Panarin up front and should provide more than a little offensive cushion for a team that now has a renewed sense of playoff purpose under sophomore head coach David Quinn. Lundqvist is going to be a significant factor in managing and, in theory, meeting those elevated expectations. The venerable netminder who declined to entertain thoughts of leaving the Rangers to try and hunt down an elusive Stanley Cup ring is one season removed from a .915 save percentage and two seasons removed from the last of a remarkable seven-season run with a save percentage of at least .920. He'll be back. Book it.

## Defense

Aaron Ekblad, Florida Panthers

P.K. Subban, New Jersey Devils

Since winning the Calder Trophy in 2014-15, Ekblad has seen his developmental arc at best flat-line and at worst decline. His point totals may not reflect this necessarily but he has not ascended to become either an elite defender and/or elite offensive producer the way a first-overall pick should be expected to evolve. Whether it's an issue of conditioning or commitment, last season Ekblad had point droughts of six, six, nine and seven games and the Panthers missed the playoffs for the fourth time in five seasons since Florida took him No. 1 in 2014. Under Joel Quenneville, though, expect Ekblad to resume the career ascendancy his rookie season promised with improved play defensively and his point totals edging into the high 40s or low 50s. In fact, one source familiar with the team said one of the main reasons the team was so keen to bring in Quenneville was to reshape the blueline – the Panthers were 28th in goals allowed per game – and to get Ekblad back on track.

As for Subban, the reality is that the high-energy, high-profile defenseman isn't for everyone and maybe he's not built to last a long time in any one place. The New Jersey Devils won't care as they're getting Subban at just the right time, highly motivated after he struggled through an injury-plagued 2018-19 in Nashville and then was a mess, as was the entire Predators team defensively, in getting knocked off by Dallas in the first round of the playoffs. With just three years left on his contract, this seems to be the perfect time for both Subban to rebound and the Devils to take advantage. Look for head coach John Hynes to get the most out of Subban, assuming Subban remains healthy, with top-end power-play minutes and lots of even-strength ice time. Given the plethora of young talent GM Ray Shero has collected, including 2019 No. 1 pick Jack Hughes, Subban should see his goal totals should get back to the 20 mark after registering just nine a season ago and his point totals should edge into the 50s if not higher after a pedestrian 31 last season.

Josh Manson, Anaheim Ducks

It wasn't so long ago the Ducks and their stable of young defensive talent was the envy of the league. But Brandon Montour, Shea Theodore and Sami Vatanen have all found new homes and last season was a difficult one for young defensive mainstays Hampus Lindholm and Manson. The two had been steady partners two years ago when Manson, son of longtime NHL defender Dave and the 160th overall pick in 2011, hit a career-best 37 points and was an impressive plus-34. Last season Manson, separated from Lindholm by former coach Randy Carlyle, slumped to 16 points and he was a minus-eight as the Ducks crashed and burned their way out of the playoffs chase early on. Big, rangy with above-average offensive smarts Manson figures to return to a productive top-four role and it will be a surprise if Dallas Eakins, who comes in as head coach to replace Carlyle, won't at least reunite Lindholm and Manson for a look-see. We're guessing the results will help the Ducks back into the playoff picture in the Pacific Division.

## Forwards

Evgeni Malkin, C, Pittsburgh Penguins

Tanner Pearson, LW, Vancouver Canucks

Corey Perry, RW, Dallas Stars

After winning back-to-back Stanley Cups in 2016 and 2017 and then advancing to the second round in '18, last season was a largely forgettable one for the Pittsburgh Penguins and specifically their Hall of Fame-bound center Malkin, who saw his goal totals cut in half year over year to 21 and his point total drop from 98 to 72. Yes, injuries were an issue but Malkin admittedly was out of sorts and that carried into a four-game sweep in the first round at the hands of the New York Islanders. There's no doubt in our minds that after an offseason that saw Phil Kessel ushered out of town and talented young forward Alex Galchenyuk coming in to fill the offensive void that Malkin will reverse the trend this season and be back in the 100-point realm.

As for the wingers on our bounce-back squad, for the briefest of times Pearson was actually a teammate of Malkin's in Pittsburgh and if memory serves sat near the Russian great in the Pens' dressing room. The problem for Pearson, a one-time 24-goal scorer in Los Angeles where he won a Cup in 2014, the Penguins were one of three teams for whom the 26-year-old toiled last season and his paltry nine goals reflected that. But having settled into Vancouver, where the Canucks added J.T. Miller and Tyler Myers to bolster a push to the playoffs, we're looking for Pearson to eclipse career highs in goals (24) and points (44) for the emerging Canucks.

Finally, it's fashionable to write off Perry, the former Hart Trophy and Rocket Richard Trophy winner who was bought out of his contract by Anaheim in the offseason, as having hit the end of the runway. And there's lots of reason to believe it is so as injuries and age have left Perry a shadow of his former self. He scored just six times in 31 games last season. But Perry will find lots of help in Dallas in terms of production and leadership after signing a one-year deal with the Stars. Under Jim Montgomery, and given Perry's obvious motivation, we don't think hitting the 20-goal mark will be that big a surprise and he could be closer to 30 when all is said and done for a Dallas team that has emerged this offseason as a viable Stanley Cup contender.

Evgeny Kuznetsov, Washington Capitals

Nazem Kadri, Colorado Avalanche

We recall a conversation with Washington head coach Todd Reirden just before training camp last September about his high expectations for the gifted Kuznetsov on and off the ice after Kuznetsov had played a critical role in the Capitals' first-ever Stanley Cup triumph in the spring of 2018. It didn't really happen for Kuznetsov, who fell from 27 to 21 in the goal department and recorded 11 fewer points before scoring once in a seven-game first-round defeat to Carolina (he did add five assists). For a guy who looked to be stepping into the Hart Trophy conversation, it was a pedestrian season. He should be highly motivated to resume that arc this season and we're projecting him to be north of 80 points.

Speaking of motivation. After putting the kibosh on a trade to Calgary, Kadri ended up in Colorado in a blockbuster deal that saw Tyson Barrie head to the Leafs. Last season was a forgettable one for the gritty, gifted pivot as Kadri saw his role diminish with the arrival of John Tavares and his goal totals drop by 50 percent from 32 to 16. Kadri then found himself suspended for the second playoff season in a row for a reckless hit as the Leafs once again lost in seven games to Boston. The change of scenery should benefit Kadri, who should be north of 30 goals as part of a high-powered Avs offense. Look for him to be a key part of a team many including this author believe is destined for a deep run in the spring of '20.

Greg Thompson / Icon Sportswire

## Team Fade

### Goaltenders

Robin Lehner, Chicago Blackhawks

Darcy Kuemper, Arizona Coyotes



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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OK, a pretty easy pick here to suggest that after having a career year coming off immense personal battles that Lehner might take a step back in his evolution. And would there be any shame in that? None whatsoever. Lehner, who shared the Williams Jennings Trophy for allowing the fewest goals in the NHL with Thomas Greiss and who was also a finalist for the Vezina Trophy as the league's best goaltender, is going to face significantly greater challenges in Chicago where the Blackhawks last year were 30th in the league with a 3.55 combined GAA compared to first overall under Barry Trotz with the New York Islanders. Lehner remains one of the feel-good, nay, empowering stories of last season. But it's going to be mighty hard for the 27-year-old to replicate what happened on the ice this coming season.

The same might be said for another terrific, if undertold, story from last season which was the emergence of Darcy Kuemper as the man between the pipes for a plucky Arizona squad. Beset by injuries to key personnel all season the 'Yotes hung tough in the playoff race far longer than expected due in large part to the commitment to team defense under head coach Rick Tocchet and the stellar goaltending provided by Kuemper. The 29-year-old, drafted 161st by Minnesota in 2009, eclipsed career marks in games played (55) and wins (27) by a country mile while turning in a sparkling .925 save percentage which saw him tied with Vezina Trophy winner Andrei Vasilevskiy of Tampa. The Coyotes should be better just by sheer dint of being even a little bit healthier not to mention adding point machine Phil Kessel. But what is realistic for Kuemper, who stepped in admirably for the injured Antti Raanta but who will have to re-establish himself as the team's goalie of record? Maybe Kuemper is Tim Thomas redux peaking well into his career. More likely is that he finds his number regressing.

## Defense

Erik Gustafsson, Chicago Blackhawks

Ryan Suter, Minnesota Wild

Maybe last season wasn't an aberration for Gustafsson who jumped from five goals total in his first 76 NHL games split over two seasons to 17 last year. And maybe his 60 points, sixth among all defensemen, will become the norm for the offensively gifted defender. But that's a pretty big mouthful for the 27-year-old who was a fourth-round pick back in 2012 and who still needs to work on his all-around game to claim elite status. More likely is that there's more than a little settling in terms of his offensive production, maybe a lot.

As for Suter, the veteran defenseman is coming off one of the most impressive performances we've seen in a long time. Suter returned from a gruesome ankle injury that doctors thought might end his impressive career and instead the 34-year-old not only returned for the start of the season but played in all 82 games. He recorded 47 points, the seventh time in his career that he's had at least 40 points. And, oh yeah, he led all NHLers in average ice time per game at 26:42. Remarkable. But now what? Surely it is asking too much for Suter to replicate his workload and his production. Isn't it?

Alexander Edler, Vancouver Canucks

The Vancouver back end was fortified this offseason by the addition of Tyler Myers and Jordie Benn and there are important young pieces like Quinn Hughes on the cusp but it's easy to argue that veteran defender Edler remains one of the most important pieces of the Canucks puzzle. The Canucks believed so much that this was so that they signed the 33-year-old to a two-year deal worth \$6 million per year even though he played in just 56 games last season after missing close to a month with a concussion. He still led Vancouver in ice time at 24:34 and chipped in an impressive 34 points. Even if he takes a slightly reduced role with the emergence of Hughes and the arrival of Myers can he still be the kind of difference-maker that has made him one of the team's most popular and important players? The Canucks have gambled heavily that they're ready to jump into the playoff picture in the Pacific Division. Having Edler at his best is key to that happening. Just not sure it's asking too much of him at this stage of his career and with his questionable durability.

## Forwards

Elias Lindholm, C, Calgary Flames

Jeff Skinner, LW, Buffalo Sabres

Mitch Marner, RW, Toronto Maple Leafs

After maxing out at 17 goals in his first five seasons after Carolina made him the fifth-overall pick in 2013, Elias Lindholm exploded for the Calgary Flames last year with 27 goals. Part of a draft weekend blockbuster in 2018, Lindholm garnered lots of Selke Trophy love not to mention his 26 power-play points were just one behind team leader Johnny Gaudreau. Is that the real Lindholm? Or is his real production level more in keeping with his previous life in Carolina? We're suggesting it's the latter and he's going to be under considerable pressure to show that last year was not a blip on the radar.

On Lindholm's left side maybe it's the eight-year, \$72-million deal that Buffalo handed Skinner. Maybe it's how determined Carolina was to move on from the gifted winger and former rookie of the year and how the Canes ended up going to a conference final while Skinner once again played on a team that didn't make the playoffs. But the fact is there's just something that screams 'danger Will Robinson, danger' about the coming season in spite of the fact Skinner lit it up with 40 goals. The problem was that during a 22-game stretch when the Sabres might have asserted themselves as a playoff team from mid-February to the end of March, Skinner scored just once. Our gut tells us that even with a master of schemes and team-builder like Ralph Krueger behind the bench this could be a tough road for Skinner living up to last year and the monster contract that it yielded.

Finally, we know Leafs fans won't like this much but even if the Marner deal does get done in a timely fashion, and who knows if that happens or not given how the William Nylander negotiations bled well into the regular season, there is bound to be some fallout. With all of the attention focused on the deal and the fact that Marner went six straight games in the first round without scoring a goal in the Leafs' seven-game loss to Boston, he's about to enter uncharted territory in terms of pressure and scrutiny. No one is suggesting he needs to get back to the 94-point plateau he achieved last year but the potential for a whopper drop-off is very much real.

Max Domi, Montreal Canadiens

Tomas Hertl, San Jose Sharks

Domi, not unlike Lindholm, eclipsed previous goal-scoring highs in new environs last season. In Domi's case with Montreal. His 28 goals were 10 more than his career-best achieved during his rookie season in Arizona and more than three times the nine times he scored in his last season with the Coyotes. Having failed to bring in Sebastian Aho from Carolina via an offer sheet the Canadiens look very much the same as they did a year ago and it might be too much to ask Domi in terms of repeating his offensive output.

Meanwhile, with longtime Sharks center Joe Pavelski in Dallas there will be increased pressure on Tomas Hertl to show last year's 35-goal, 74-point explosion was a harbinger of things to come and not an aberration. Hertl is just 25 and critical to the Sharks remaining a Stanley Cup contender even as they continue to evolve by getting younger up front with Pavelski's departure and the decision not to repatriate Patrick Marleau. But his previous goal high was 22 and to expect him to return to the mid-30s or higher seems questionable.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.27.2019

1150221 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 21 fun things we learned at Smashfest VIII: Patrick Eaves can't lose



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 29, 2019

Luke Fox | July 26, 2019, 1:49 PM

TORONTO – A warm, clear summer's evening, a bottomless supply of beverages, and the opportunity to play a little table tennis with some NHL stars...

Smashfest may be getting old (eight years running), but it never feels that way.

As Dominic Moore's annual charity event disguised as a gigantic ping-pong party set a new fundraising benchmark for fun, the energy of the night was palpable. Hockey fans mingled, rallied and made merry with more than 20 NHLers as balls bounced and music blared.

Indeed, Smashfest VIII was a raucous success featuring its usual champion. (Spoiler alert: Patrick Eaves, whom Moore describes as ping-pong's Novak Djokovic, is officially a dynasty.)

Over the course of the evening, we had a chance to catch up with a bunch of the NHLers in attendance — Mark Scheifele, Frederik Andersen, Alexander Kerfoot, Jimmy Vesey, Brandon Tanev, Cam Talbot, Ben Harpur — and gathered a few on-the-record nuggets, both hockey and ping-pong related.

Here are 21 of them.

1. Frederik Andersen wants Mitch Marner to remain a Leaf 'really, really bad'

The Maple Leafs goalie was one of two surprise guests to participate in Smashfest unannounced (Calgary's Cam Talbot the other), and naturally he was asked about a certain teammate of his in need of a contract.

Andersen has been in touch with pal Mitch Marner but won't bore him about business talk.

"I think he's confident that he's gonna be here for camp. It's still a long time, so hopefully Kyle and him and his agent can get it done. I try not to interfere with him in that stuff," Andersen says.

"I want to see him back really, really bad, so hopefully it works out."

2. Mark Scheifele doesn't regret clapping a high shot past a little boy at his camp

A hilarious video of the Jets centre sniping a high, hard puck at close range past a little kid this summer went viral (watch below). And Scheifele heard a ton of responses.

"It was all fun," he smiles.

"Some people thought it was mean or I could've hurt the kid, but the kid was all the way over on the one post. I knew I wasn't going to miss. I actually heard from a friend that the parents said the kid still hasn't stopped talking about it. I like to think that I made him smile.

"The camp is all about having fun with the kids and interacting like that. When you see a smile like I saw after I shot that puck on that kid after, that's worth more than anything."

Mark Scheifele blasting bardown clappers on little ass kids @ his hockey camp. Teach 'em adversity young. #NHL  
pic.twitter.com/1XAVDBvqgA

— (@Uppercut\_Slut) June 24, 2019

3. Woo-hoo! Smashfest broke the million-dollar barrier

With the money raised for concussion and rare cancer research Thursday night, Smashfest has now raised more than \$1 million over its eight years.

"It's awesome," Moore says. "That's one of those moments where you look back and say, 'Wow. I feel good about where we're at and what we've been able to do.'"

4. Dominic Moore is a tennis champion

Moore, 38, quietly won the 35-and-over Ontario tennis championship this summer and will be representing his home province in the nationals next month in Toronto. Last year's 35-plus Canadian champ went on to capture the world senior men's title.

"Pretty legit," says Moore, who's always incorporated tennis into his off-season training. "I love the game, so for me it's just fun to compete."

5. It's Patrick Eaves's world... we're just living in it

Eaves started hitting ping-pong balls when dealing with post-concussion syndrome. His eyes had difficulty tracking objects, so he used table tennis as a method to regain his hand-eye coordination.

"It was actually huge in my recovery," Eaves says.

The Anaheim Ducks winger won his fifth consecutive Smashfest title Thursday defeating perennial contender Jeff Skinner in the singles final.

"There's always a bit of buzz about is Eaves is beatable or is he unbeatable," Moore says. "My personal opinion is he's pretty much unbeatable."

6. CuJo convinced Moore to play in the 2018 Spengler Cup

A free agent training daily with the Harvard hockey team and trying to stay ready in case an NHL club called last winter, Moore didn't even have the Spengler Cup on his radar. Then he bumped into Curtis Joseph at a Hometown Hockey event, and the goalie raved about his experience playing for Team Canada at the end of his career. How beautiful Switzerland is, how the city of Davos rallies around the event, how enjoyable it is to wear the Red and White when you feel like your career is nearing its end.

"You should look into that," Joseph encouraged Moore.

So Moore placed a call to Hockey Canada's Tom Renney, who'd coached Moore when he was a rookie on the New York Rangers. A spot opened up a couple days prior to the tournament, and Moore hopped on an overseas flight.

"It was an amazing experience — just as CuJo had advertised," Moore says. "I'd never played for Team Canada before. That alone was an awesome moment, to be able to represent Canada."

7. Moore went straight from the Spengler to Auston Matthews' old pad

After Canada lost the gold-medal game to KalPa Kuopio in an eight-round shootout, Moore was recruited by the Zurich Lions to play the second half of the Swiss season. He'd never thought he'd play in Europe — "I'm passionate about winning the Stanley Cup," he says — but after speaking to so many Canadians who took pro deals in Switzerland, Moore and wife Mary decided to give it a shot.

"We could go back, wait it out and see if something breaks, or we could embrace this and live abroad," says Moore, who would venture up the Alps or hop on a \$60 flight to Venice and sightsee during days off. "We wouldn't have traded it for anything. We went thinking we'd stay for two weeks and ended up there for four months."

The Lions own apartments outside Zurich that they use to house their imported players.

"So when I moved in, I sent Auston a picture of the place—and it's where he lived. He was like, 'Oh!' He loved it there," Moore says. "It's kind of in the suburbs of Zurich in a town called Winkle. Nice little place. He has fond memories of it. My wife and I loved it."

8. Adam Fox is unlike any other defenceman Moore has seen



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In his 15 years and 897 games as an NHLer, Moore has never seen a defenceman quite like Rangers rookie Adam Fox, with whom he practised for four months at Harvard.

"Foxy, I was skating with him all fall. He's an incredible player, this guy. He's an incredibly unique player. I know he's your namesake so you're rooting for him," Moore tells me.

"I've never seen anyone play like him. He slows the game down the way he reads angles and gives misinformation, where he's looking and the passes he makes. The angles he takes with his feet, it's a little bit like [Erik] Karlsson, the way he works the blue line on the power play and sets people up and finds a way to get pucks through.

"But there's something about Fox that's different. It's hard to pinpoint. I'm really rooting for him. He's a really nice guy, quality person, and it's awesome for him to come to the event. The Rangers have a really good player in him."

Can he make an impact right away?

"I think so. I'm very interested to see how his game progresses and translates at the next level, but he's a unique player. He's going to fun to watch."

9. Smashfest aims to expand beyond Toronto

After eight summers at Steam Whistle, Moore is finally ready to expand Smashfest and throw ping-pong parties in at least one more city in 2020. He's had offers in L.A., New York, Montreal and Vancouver.

"We are ready to expand," the self-described professional ping-pong event organizer proclaims. "I'm hopeful that we're able to bring Smashfest to more people in different places next summer."

10. "He goes by Alexander, not Alex"

Heads up: If you wish to abbreviate new Maple Leaf Alexander Kerfoot's name, go with "Kerf," not Alex.

11. Scheifele will only sign your face if you're too young to drive

A grown-up Winnipeg Jets fan handed the all-star a Sharpie and asked him to autograph his face.

"I'm not going to do that here," Scheifele said. "Maybe if you were a little kid."

Heartbreaker.

12. Andersen is exhausted by your workload narratives

As he was being asked a question about the possibility of curtailing his high number of starts for the Maple Leafs next season, Andersen said, "Oh, here we go."

13. The highlight of Andersen's summer? Partying at Zach Hyman's wedding

Andersen had never attended a Jewish wedding until Hyman's, and he loved it.

"That was a lot of fun," Andersen smiles. "It was a little different when you lift everyone up in the chairs and break the glass and stuff. It was a lot of fun."

14. Kerfoot believes fellow Avalanche-turned-Leaf Tyson Barrie is a better defender than you think

"He's an extremely dynamic defenceman. He can change the game with what he brings on a day-to-day basis — his pace, his ability to make plays in the offensive end, and he's a great teammate in the locker room," Kerfoot says.

"There's not many D-men that put up the types of numbers he has — and he's more than that. People have critiqued his defensive game at times, but we've seen it firsthand. He's a good defensive player as well.

Sometimes people are too hard on him in that sense, but he's a good defensive player and one of the best offensive defencemen in the league.

"Just his skill level — top guys in the league want to play with players like him."

15. Andersen picked up Kerfoot and drove him to the Maple Leafs practice rink the day he arrived

Kerfoot has been impressed by the warm welcome he's received in Toronto, where he's already getting recognized more often in a couple days than in a whole winter in Denver. Moore suggested neighbourhoods he should go home-hunting, and Andersen offered to drive him to the Leafs' rink for the first time.

"He told me how great it is to play here. The fans here are unlike anywhere else in the league," Kerfoot says.

The Sabres' Jimmy Vesey, who was centred by Kerfoot for three seasons at Harvard, believes his pal is well-equipped for the spotlight and scrutiny that awaits.

"I do. I think he has a loosey-goosey attitude — not in a bad way. Things don't seem to bother him much. He just goes out and plays his game. He did that in college, and he's done that the past two years. He'll do just fine," Vesey says.

"The way he can control the puck and see the game, his vision on the ice is, for me, some of the best I've seen. I was a benefactor of that in college. The way he sees the ice and controls the game, that's his biggest strength."

16. Vesey wasn't surprised at all by his trade to Buffalo

"Rumblings, rumours, agent... this day and age, it's hard to keep stuff hush-hush. A couple weeks before the trade, I had people sending me stuff online," says Vesey.

The new Sabre was touched that respected veterans Kyle Okposo and Zach Bogosian reached out to him right away to welcome him into the fold.

17. Look out: Jack Eichel is already in beast mode

Vesey has been training daily and hitting the ice three times a week with new teammates Evan Rodrigues and Jack Eichel.

"He's a specimen of an athlete. That maybe shows more true in the gym. Not a lot of guys can keep up with what he does in the gym. Last year was bittersweet with that good start, but he wants to be in the playoffs. You might use the word frustration, but knowing Jack for a while, he's just a competitor. He's the captain of the team. He was drafted second overall, and he wants to be the best," Vesey says.

"His weights are off the chart, but it's his athleticism. His running and his jumping is on par with a lot of guys in other sports, and we play on skates. He's a world-class athlete."

18. Poutine tastes even better when smothered in mushrooms and bacon Facts.

19. Ben Harpur feels Cody Ceci gets a bad rap

Packaged together in an intraprovincial trade from Toronto on Canada Day, defenceman Ben Harpur has spent his entire NHL career with Cody Ceci.

In some circles Ceci's \$4.5-million contract with the Leafs was ripped for being too rich, but Harpur believes his PK partner deserves more respect than he's gotten lately.

"Just playing with him and seeing him grow as a player, he's really good. I feel he's underrated in that sense. He doesn't get a lot of credit for the minutes he plays and the opponents he plays against, especially in Ottawa," Harpur says.



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"I'm really excited for him to have a fresh start here in Toronto. I know he's excited about it as well."

20. Brandon Tanev is jacked to join Sidney Crosby

Crosby and Matt Murray were the first Penguins to welcome the former Jet to the Eastern Conference once the free agent inked an eye-popping \$21-million deal on July 1.

Tanev vows to earn his keep by being "physical, fast and tenacious."

"It's going to be a nice change of pace going to Pittsburgh," Tanev says. "Any chance to go out on the ice with the best player in the world is something very special. To learn from him and take things from his game is going to be interesting and good for my game as well."

21. Carter Hart called Cam Talbot before his first NHL start

By the time Talbot was dealt to Philadelphia last season, he figures young Carter Hart didn't need any of his advice.

The two trained together last summer and formed a bond strong enough that Hart wanted to talk to Talbot before his first career start, a win, on Dec. 18.

"He can always lean on me if he needs to. He knows I'll be there for him, but he showed what he can do. Everyone knows what he's capable of now," says Talbot.

The newest Calgary Flame goalie was asked to project the 20-year-old's ceiling.

"Honestly, he could do something really special," Talbot says. "He's got that kind of potential. He's very cerebral when he's in there. He thinks the game. He's a student of the game. He always wants to get better. The sky's the limit for that kid."

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Sportsnet.ca / Garret Sparks reflects on 'emotionally taxing' Maple Leafs exit

Mike Johnston | July 26, 2019, 5:55 PM

Garret Sparks described his final season with the Toronto Maple Leafs as "emotionally taxing" several days after being traded to the Vegas Golden Knights for a fourth-round pick and the contract of David Clarkson.

"I mean, you realize your dream of playing in the NHL, and then you know, as the season goes on, it gets harder day by day," the backup netminder told Tracey Myers of NHL.com. "It's a grind, physically and emotionally. You could be on the best team in the league, but you're going to face adversity at certain points."

The 26-year-old was technically the longest-serving player in the Maple Leafs organization at the time he was traded. He was selected in the seventh round of the 2011 draft, however he toiled away in the AHL and ECHL for years and only saw action in 37 total regular-season NHL games.

The 2018-19 campaign was a tumultuous tale of two seasons for Sparks.

He beat out Curtis McElhinney and Calvin Pickard for the backup role behind Frederik Andersen thanks to a strong showing in training camp and pre-season, which resulted in both McElhinney and Pickard being placed on waivers and claimed.

Sparks made 20 appearances this past season. During his first 10 outings the Elmhurst, Ill., native went an impressive 6-2-1 despite posting a less-than-stellar .905 save percentage.

In early January, though, he took a puck off his head at practice that resulted in a concussion and his season went downhill from there.

"I felt I was finally starting to build some momentum and get my chance," Sparks said. "I just felt like I got cut down, and it's hard to regrow after you get your progress chopped off like that."

His final 10 appearances were rough as he went 2-7-0 with a .899 save percentage and eventually wore out his welcome.

Sparks now gets a fresh start in Vegas where he'll compete against Malcolm Subban and Oscar Dansk for the opportunity to back up Marc-Andre Fleury.

"All I've wanted is a fair opportunity, come camp, to try and make the team and I think that I'll get a better opportunity [with the Golden Knights] than I would have in Toronto," Sparks said. "At the end of the day, that's what you're looking for as a player."

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Sportsnet.ca / Ben Chiarot says it took little persuading to sign with the Canadiens

Canadian Press July 26, 2019, 6:16 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — High taxes, obsessive fans, blanket media coverage and the French language are all reasons invoked to explain why NHL free agents tend to steer clear of Montreal. But Ben Chiarot isn't worried about any of that.

"Guys have their reasons for not wanting to come here, but for me it's a great city, a place that loves hockey and a team that, like I've said, is close to making the playoffs," Chiarot told reporters Friday at the Canadiens' training facility. "There wasn't anything negative in my mind that would make me not want to come to Montreal."

He noted that he knows Canadiens forward Joel Armia from their days together in Winnipeg, and Montreal's Nate Thompson also contacted him. But there wasn't much of a sales job needed before Chiarot signed a three-year deal with the club.

"When someone says you have a chance to play for the Montreal Canadiens, it's pretty special," he said. "I didn't need to be sold on anything to come here and play here."

Chiarot, who tried on the No. 8 jersey he will wear for the Habs, had few criteria when it came to choosing his next team after six seasons in Winnipeg.

"Playing on a good team was important to me," the 28-year-old defenceman said. "To get to play in a city like Montreal, on an Original Six team, it was a great opportunity for myself and for my family."

He was also looking for a big market where hockey matters.

"I enjoy the pressure that comes with having to perform every night," Chiarot said. "Playing Saturday night at the Bell Centre, there's nothing in hockey that's quite the same."

Chiarot repeatedly praised the quality of the Canadiens team, in particular the presence of Carey Price and Shea Weber.



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"When we came in here with Winnipeg, they absolutely skated us into the ground. I think both in Winnipeg and in Montreal, both times they beat us. This is a fast team and a young team," he said, praising Price as "the best goalie in the world."

He said he is confident the Canadiens are headed for the playoffs, and he wants to do his part to help on the blue line.

"All the pieces are here," he said. "It a little bit reminds me of where we were in Winnipeg a few years ago."

The six-foot-three, 219-pound defenceman has come on strong in recent seasons with the Jets, averaging nearly 20 minutes of ice time per game, despite the presence of defencemen like Jacob Trouba, Tyler Myers and Dustin Byfuglien on the team. He has had some discussions with coach Claude Julien, but his exact role with the Habs remains to be determined.

"I'm a big believer that you need to earn what you get, especially when you're new to a team," he said. "There's nothing given. You have to come in and earn your opportunities, earn your ice time."

Last season, Chiarot had a career-high five goals and 15 assists while playing in a defensive role.

"I don't feel like I'm done developing," he said. "I feel like I've got more levels to go and I'm hoping to do that here in Montreal under Claude and be able to learn from some of the guys, like a Shea Weber. There wouldn't be a better guy for me to watch and learn from in the way he conducts himself."

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