



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 6, 2019

## THE ATHLETIC

### Wild GM search update: Hurricanes' Don Waddell, Penguins' Bill Guerin latest to interview

By Michael Russo

The Wild's search for a new general manager continued Monday in Racine, Wisconsin, with two more in-person interviews, and one is as unique as it gets in any offseason, let alone this late in an offseason.

Why?

Because believe it or not, he's a current NHL general manager.

In addition to the Wild interviewing Pittsburgh Penguins assistant GM Bill Guerin on Monday afternoon for the second consecutive offseason, multiple sources tell *The Athletic* that owner Craig Leipold and team president Matt Majka interviewed current Carolina Hurricanes president, general manager and alternate governor Don Waddell on Monday morning.

If you're a Wild fan, you should be familiar with Waddell.

Not only was he a GM of the Year finalist only seven weeks ago after managing those Cinderella "Bunch of Jerks" from Raleigh to the Eastern Conference Final, Waddell is the person who somehow snatched up Nino Niederreiter from the Wild in a trade for Victor Rask in January.

While it may surprise Caniacs that Waddell would be allowed to talk to the Wild, Waddell's contract expired June 30 and owner Tom Dundon has yet to sign his head of hockey ops and the business side of the team to a new contract.

That means Waddell is theoretically a free agent.

As unheard of as it was for the Wild to fire GM Paul Fenton so late in the offseason, it's equally abnormal that, five weeks before the start of training camp, another team's GM would be available to interview for a similar role with another team.

Waddell, 60, has 40 years of experience in professional hockey as a player, coach, general manager, scout and business executive. For the past five years, he has run the business side of the Hurricanes, including their arena, but he added general manager duties in May 2018. Prior to joining the Hurricanes, he was a consultant and scout for the Penguins for three seasons after spending 1998 to 2010 as the expansion Atlanta Thrashers' first GM, then their president.

It seemed everything Waddell touched last season turned to gold. Some of the other players Waddell and his staff acquired included Dougie Hamilton, Micheal Ferland, Calvin de Haan, Petr Mrazek, Curtis McElhinney and Jordan Martinook. They also drafted Andrei Svechnikov — who led all rookies with 20 even-strength goals last season — second overall in 2018, are coming off a lauded draft in 2019 and acquired former Wild forward Erik Haula from Vegas.

Guerin, 48, interviewed for the Wild job in May 2018, but the Wild were already well down the path toward eventually hiring Fenton.

Now ... they meet again, and like Waddell, Guerin is a very legitimate candidate.

Guerin has been a Penguins' assistant GM for five seasons and a member of the front office for eight after doing player development from 2011-14. A lot of the players he worked with were key contributors on their 2016 and 2017 Stanley Cup-winning teams. He has also managed the Penguins' AHL affiliate in Wilkes-Barre the past two seasons.

As a player, Guerin played 18 seasons and won Stanley Cups with New Jersey and Pittsburgh. The three-time Olympian scored 429 goals and 856 points in 1,263 career games.

Hall of Famer Mike Modano is assisting Leipold and Majka in hiring the Wild's fourth GM in history.

Modano has ties to both candidates. He played for the United States in the 2005 world championships and 2006 Olympics. Waddell was the GM of both of those teams. And Modano was teammates with Guerin on the Dallas Stars from 2002-06 and on the 1998, 2002 and 2006 Olympic teams.

This is still considered the early stages of what could be a process that lasts much of the month, but it's very much expected that Waddell and Guerin will be two of the candidates who go right down to the wire.

Leipold has great respect for both men, sources say, and was impressed with each of the candidates Monday.

Here's a breakdown of what, according to sources, are the other potential candidates beyond Waddell and Guerin.

The former GMs

Ron Hextall: The winningest goaltender in Philadelphia Flyers history, the former Flyers GM and Los Angeles Kings assistant GM has already had his initial in-person interview and sources say interviewed very well. Considered a smart hockey man, Hextall is somebody who left the Flyers in good shape with a top-notch prospect pool, coincidentally inherited by former Wild GM Chuck Fletcher. However, as Leipold works to change the culture of the Wild, Hextall seems to have a lot of the same personality traits as Fenton. In Philly at the end, Hextall had a very small inner circle and apparently had strained relationships before his dismissal. But there's no B.S. with Hextall, something that Leipold typically likes.

Peter Chiarelli: It's going to be awfully hard for Chiarelli to land this job. 1) He is tight with Fenton, so much so that Fenton hired Chiarelli's brother's son as a scout this summer two years after Chiarelli gave Fenton's son, P.J., his first shot at being an NHL scout. 2) Despite the fact he managed the Boston Bruins to a Stanley Cup, the perception of the job he did in Edmonton led to a radioactive reaction last week by Wild fans when *The Athletic* reported that Chiarelli and Hextall were the first two people interviewed.

Brian Lawton: The No. 1 pick in the 1983 draft by the North Stars managed the Tampa Bay Lightning from 2008-10 after years as a player agent. While the tenure may have been



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panned, the following season, the Lightning went to the Eastern Conference Final. Lawton currently works as an analyst at NHL Network and has a lot of friends that have called Leipold on his behalf. It's believed he has had a phone interview and will end up meeting with Leipold, Majka and Modano.

### The current assistant GMs

**Scott Mellanby:** The Wild have gotten permission to interview the five-year Montreal Canadiens assistant GM, who is coincidentally moving 20 miles from Xcel Energy Center to Hudson, Wisconsin, in a few weeks. The former Badger's wife, Sue, is from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, so he has a ton of family in the area and already planned to move to Minnesota from St. Louis so it'd be easier to scout with MSP being a major Delta hub. The former Florida Panthers and Atlanta Thrashers captain played over 1,500 regular-season and playoff games and is well-liked throughout the NHL.

**Tom Fitzgerald:** It's unclear if the Wild have yet sought permission to speak again to the New Jersey Devils assistant GM, who was considered the runner-up to Fenton last go-around. The very respected "Fitzy" was actually the first captain in Nashville Predators history starting in 1998 after Leipold purchased the expansion team in 1997. Of the No. 2's up for the Wild job, Fitzgerald may be the most experienced. Between Pittsburgh and New Jersey, he has worked in NHL front offices since 2007.

**Bill Zito:** Like Fitzgerald and Guerin, the Wild interviewed Zito, the Columbus Blue Jackets' associate GM, last year and it's believed they've sought permission to talk to him again. It's unclear if they will end up meeting. Zito has a lot of experience,

is a huge part of Columbus' front office, especially when it comes to negotiating contracts. He's a former player agent that represented several players, including former Wild forward John Madden. He has been a candidate for several GM jobs in the past few years.

**Basil McRae:** The Wild have received permission to talk to the Blue Jackets assistant GM and former North Stars bruiser, and that will come initially via phone interview. McRae, who also owns a piece of the Ontario Hockey League's London Knights, made a cameo in the movie "The Mighty Ducks" with Modano.

**Mike Futa:** While it's not believed the Wild have yet sought permission to speak to the Los Angeles Kings assistant GM, he is extremely respected and it's believed the Wild are getting a lot of calls on his behalf. He was part of two Stanley Cup championships when Lombardi was Kings GM, and he remains close with the Flyers executive. Futa has done it all in L.A., running both the amateur and pro scouting sides since coming there in 2007 and helped manage Manchester to a Calder Cup.

### One more potential candidate

**Mark Hunter:** Expected to be interviewed after the Toronto Maple Leafs denied permission last offseason, Hunter has co-owned the London Knights with his brother, Dale Hunter, since 2000 and is their current GM after four years of being with the Maple Leafs, two as assistant GM. Last May, Hunter was passed over for Kyle Dubas to become the Maple Leafs' next GM. He subsequently left the organization. Hunter has been a candidate for the GM jobs in Edmonton and Seattle and is a respected hockey guy.



## Inside look at Carolina Hurricanes

Haula, Dzingel provide forward depth in bid to build off playoff run

by Tom Gulitti

NHL.com is providing in-depth roster, prospect and fantasy analysis for each of its 31 teams throughout August. Today, the Carolina Hurricanes.

The Carolina Hurricanes will try to prove that reaching the Eastern Conference Final last season wasn't a fluke.

The Hurricanes surprised many -- if not themselves -- by qualifying for the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2009, eliminating the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals in seven games in the Eastern Conference First Round and sweeping the New York Islanders in the second round before getting swept by the Boston Bruins in the conference final. Proud but unsatisfied, they quickly began looking ahead to what they had to do to get back to that point, and beyond, this season.

"For sure, we don't want to be a one-and-done team," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said.

Carolina's history shows how difficult that challenge can be: It has qualified for the playoffs in consecutive seasons once in its 21 seasons since moving from Hartford (2000-01 and 2001-02). After the Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup in 2005-06, they missed the playoffs the following season.

Carolina also has seen how teams have taken a step back after returning to the postseason following a long drought. The New Jersey Devils qualified for the playoffs in 2017-18 after missing for five consecutive seasons but didn't returning last season.

"That's why we felt like we couldn't just bring the same group back," Waddell said. "We had to make some changes. I look at our roster right now and I think we're a better team at the start of this year than we were at the start of last year."

The Hurricanes improved their depth at forward by acquiring forward Erik Haula in a trade with the Vegas Golden Knights



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on June 26 for forward prospect Nicolas Roy and a conditional fifth-round pick in the 2021 NHL Draft, and by signing unrestricted free agent forward Ryan Dzingel to a two-year contract on July 12.

Haula, who was limited to 15 games last season because of a knee injury, had NHL career highs with 29 goals, 26 assists and 55 points in 2017-18 when he helped Vegas reach the Stanley Cup Final in its inaugural season. The 28-year-old, who can play wing, is expected to center the third line, giving Carolina a strong top three down the middle with Sebastian Aho and Jordan Staal.

Haula played on a line with Hurricanes forward Nino Niederreiter with the Minnesota Wild, so a reunion on Carolina's third line is possible.

Dzingel, who set NHL career highs with 26 goals, 30 assists and 56 points in 78 games with the Ottawa Senators and Columbus Blue Jackets last season, could play on the second line, and the 27-year-old's speed will enhance the attacking game the Hurricanes play under coach Rod Brind'Amour.

"We want to be a high-tempo offense, and watching them last season, I thought it was a perfect fit for the way I play," Dzingel said. "Obviously, [I] want to go somewhere where I fit with their style, and that's obviously one of the biggest reasons I think I'd fit right in."

Carolina's top four defensemen remains its strength with Jaccob Slavin, Dougie Hamilton, Brett Pesce and Justin Faulk. Defenseman Calvin de Haan was traded with forward

prospect Aleksi Saarela to the Chicago Blackhawks on June 25 for goalie Anton Forsberg and defenseman Gustav Forsling. That opened a spot on the third defense pair that Forsling and Haydn Fleury will compete for during training camp.

There also will be a competition for the backup to goalie Petr Mrazek (re-signed for two seasons on July 1) among Forsberg, James Reimer, who was acquired in a trade with the Florida Panthers on June 30, and rookie Alex Nedeljkovic.

Other than unrestricted free agent forward Justin Williams, the Hurricanes captain who will turn 38 on Oct. 4 and has yet to decide whether to retire or return for a 19th NHL season, Carolina's core remains intact. And matching the Montreal Canadiens' five-year, \$42.27 million restricted free agent offer sheet to Aho (average annual value \$8.454 million) locked up their most important player and prevented a possible prolonged contract negotiation that could have carried into training camp.

That puts the Hurricanes in good position to build off last season's surprising run.

"I can't say that anyone I talked to believed in what they did," Haula said. "It was kind of similar to what we did with Vegas, and that's one thing that I'm excited about is there's a bunch of talent on this team and it looks like the team is well rounded and get along well, and I think those are very important in a successful team organization."

### Carolina Hurricanes key statistics

Mrazek must excel in No. 1 role; Dzingel should boost offense by Rob Reese

NHL.com is providing in-depth analysis for each of its 31 teams throughout August. Today, three key statistics for the Carolina Hurricanes.

#### 1. Shot attempts

The Carolina Hurricanes were the best team in the NHL last season in SAT at plus-750, meaning as a group they attempted 750 more shots (on goal, missed, blocked) than their opponents. It was the best ratio dating to 2015-16, when the Los Angeles Kings had an SAT of plus-922. The Hurricanes' positive shot attempts theme carried into the Stanley Cup Playoffs, when they led the NHL with a ratio of plus-133. It's worth noting unrestricted free agent Justin Williams led Carolina forwards, and was fifth in the NHL, with a plus-375 SAT. The potential loss of Williams could be offset by additional ice time for forward Andrei Svechnikov, who was fourth among Hurricanes forwards with a plus-258 SAT despite being seventh in average time on ice per game among forwards (14:39).

#### 2. Games for Mrazek

Petr Mrazek, who signed a two-year contract with Carolina on July 1, will be the No. 1 goalie this season after Curtis McElhinney signed a two-year contract with the Tampa Bay Lightning on July 1. Mrazek was 23-14-3 with a 2.39 goals-against average, .914 save percentage and four shutouts in 40 starts last season; McElhinney was 20-11-2 with a 2.58 GAA, .912 save percentage and two shutouts in 33 starts. Without McElhinney, Mrazek will have to assume the majority of the workload; Mrazek was 18-21-9 with a 3.04 GAA and .901 save percentage in 50 games (44 starts) in 2016-17, the last time he played more than 40 games. It's worth noting the Hurricanes acquired goalie James Reimer in a trade with the Florida Panthers on June 30.

#### 3. Dzingel's goals

Center Ryan Dzingel signed a two-year contract with Carolina on July 12 after he had an NHL career-high 56 points (26 goals, 30 assists) in 78 games with the Ottawa Senators and Columbus Blue Jackets last season. Dzingel was minus-236 in shot attempts last season, but much of that could be explained by his time with the Senators, who finished last in the NHL with a shot attempts ratio of minus-818. His goal-scoring presence should fit in the Hurricanes' top six and potentially the top power-play unit. Dzingel should help offset the loss of forward Micheal Ferland, who signed a four-year contract with the Vancouver Canucks on July 10.



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## Three questions facing Carolina Hurricanes

Impact of Aho's contract, goaltending highlight concerns

by Tom Gulitti

NHL.com is providing in-depth analysis for each of its 31 teams throughout August. Today, three important questions facing the Carolina Hurricanes.

### 1. Will Sebastian Aho's new contract impact his play?

Although he led Carolina with an NHL career-high 83 points (30 goals, 53 assists) last season, Aho usually flies under the radar as one of the most underrated players in the League. The 22-year-old center jumped into the spotlight when he signed a five-year, \$42.27 million restricted free agent offer sheet (average annual value \$8.454 million) with the Montreal Canadiens on July 1.

The Hurricanes matched the offer sheet to keep Aho, which he said was always his hope. But there's pressure that will come with being Carolina's highest-paid player and the publicity of being the first player to sign an offer sheet since center Ryan O'Reilly signed one with the Calgary Flames on Feb. 28, 2013 (matched by the Colorado Avalanche).

How Aho handles that pressure will be critical for him and the Hurricanes in their quest to build on last season, when they qualified for the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2009 and reached the Eastern Conference Final before losing to the Boston Bruins in four games.

### 2. Is their goaltending good enough?

Last season, Petr Mrazek and waiver pickup Curtis McElhinney gave the Hurricanes some of the best goaltending in the NHL.

Mrazek, who was 23-14-3 with a 2.39 goals-against average, .914 save percentage and four shutouts, will be back after the

27-year-old signed a two-year contract July 1. McElhinney, who was 20-11-2 with a 2.58 GAA, .912 save percentage and two shutouts, signed a two-year contract with the Tampa Bay Lightning on July 1.

Carolina general manager Don Waddell said veteran James Reimer, Alex Nedeljkovic and Anton Forsberg will compete in training camp to back up Mrazek. Reimer was acquired in a trade with the Florida Panthers on June 30 after the 31-year-old was 13-12-5 with a 3.09 GAA and .900 save percentage last season.

Nedeljkovic was 34-14-1 with a 2.26 GAA, .916 save percentage and four shutouts last season with Charlotte and the 23-year-old was named the American Hockey League's top goalie. Forsberg was acquired in a trade with the Chicago Blackhawks on June 24. The 26-year-old was 15-17-1 with a 2.64 GAA and .919 save percentage with Rockford of the AHL last season.

### 3. Will Justin Williams return?

Although the signs point toward Williams returning rather than retiring, he has yet to tell the Hurricanes of his plans and remains an unrestricted free agent. The forward, who turns 38 on Oct. 4, has been contemplating retirement after playing 18 seasons in the NHL.

If the three-time Stanley Cup winner retires or unexpectedly signs with another team, he will leave a significant hole in Carolina's locker room and its lineup.

Williams' leadership last season, his first as captain, was invaluable in helping the Hurricanes qualify for the playoffs and guiding younger players such as Aho, a potential future captain, and 19-year-old forward Andrei Svechnikov. Williams also showed he can play at a high level, finishing second on Carolina with 23 goals and third with 53 points.

## Top prospects for Carolina Hurricanes

Necas, Nedeljkovic, Bean could make mark in NHL this season

by Tom Gulitti

NHL.com is providing in-depth prospect analysis for each of its 31 teams throughout August. Today, the top five prospects for the Carolina Hurricanes, according to NHL.com.

### 1. Martin Necas, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 12 pick in 2017 NHL Draft

Last season: Carolina: 7 GP, 1-1-2; Charlotte (AHL): 64 GP, 16-36-52

Expectations were high for Necas entering last season, but his adjustment to North American hockey after playing in the Czech Extraliga proved challenging and he spent most of it in the American Hockey League. The 20-year-old played in the first seven games with Carolina, averaging 10:01 of ice time per game before he was sent down on Oct. 17 to get more playing time and work on his play away from the puck.

Necas (6-foot-2, 189 pounds) has the offensive skill to play among the Hurricanes' top nine forwards. They plan to shift him from center to right wing to start the season to help him to simplify his game and give him a better opportunity to make the team in training camp.

Projected NHL arrival: This season

### 2. Alex Nedeljkovic, G

How acquired: Selected with No. 37 pick in 2014 NHL Draft

Last season: Carolina: 1 GP, 1-0-0; 2.00 GAA, .923 SV%; Charlotte (AHL): 51 GP, 34-14-1, 2.26 GAA, .916 SV%

Nedeljkovic appears to be NHL ready after winning the Aldege "Baz" Bastien Memorial Award as the AHL's best goalie last season and helping Charlotte win the Calder Cup by going 10-4 with a 2.34 GAA, .916 save percentage and one shutout in the playoffs. Carolina plans to give the 23-year-old an opportunity to compete in training camp to be its backup goalie (behind Petr Mrazek) with veteran James Reimer and Anton Forsberg.



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Nedeljkovic (6-0, 189) can be sent down to the AHL without clearing waivers to begin the season, so the Hurricanes have that option if there isn't room for him on their opening night roster.

Projected NHL arrival: This season

3. Jake Bean, D

How acquired: Selected with No. 13 pick in 2016 NHL Draft

Last season: Carolina: 2 GP, 0-0-0; Charlotte (AHL): 70 GP, 13-31-44

Bean demonstrated his offensive skill in his first pro season, finishing second among AHL rookie defensemen with 44 points (behind St. Louis Blues prospect Mitch Reinke of San Antonio). The 21-year-old needs to continue to improve his defensive-zone play to have a chance to play regularly in the NHL.

Bean (6-1, 186) likely will begin the season with Charlotte again, but he'll be a top candidate to be called up as an injury replacement.

Projected NHL arrival: This season

4. Ryan Suzuki, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 28 pick in 2019 NHL Draft

Last season: Barrie (OHL): 65 GP, 25-50-75

A playmaking center who led Barrie in points and assists last season, Suzuki potentially could combine with Sebastian Aho to someday give the Hurricanes a formidable one-two

punch down the middle. The younger brother of Montreal Canadiens forward prospect Nick Suzuki (selected No. 13 by the Vegas Golden Knights in the 2017 draft), the 18-year-old is likely at least two seasons away from being NHL ready.

The Hurricanes were familiar with Ryan Suzuki (6-0, 176) from watching him as Barrie teammates in 2017-18 with forward Andre Svechnikov, whom they selected with the No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft.

Projected NHL arrival: 2021-22

5. Eetu Luostarinen, F

How acquired: Selected with No. 42 pick in 2017 NHL Draft

Last season: KalPa (Finland): 54 GP, 15-21-36

Luostarinen made the commitment to play in North America this season, signing a three-year, entry-level contract with Carolina on May 30, after playing with KalPa in the Finnish Liiga the past three seasons. The center, who turns 21 on Sept. 2, tied for the KalPa lead in goals last season and was second in points behind Columbus Blue Jackets forward prospect Alexandre Texier (41). Luostarinen helped Finland win the 2019 IIHF World Championship.

Still growing, Luostarinen (6-3, 184) is likely to begin the season in Charlotte and need some time to adjust to the smaller North American rink.

Projected NHL arrival: Next season

## **TODAY'S LINKS**

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## SportScan

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

1150590 Websites

The Athletic / Power rankings: Here are your top 10 NHL summer shinny games

By Sean Gordon Aug 5, 2019

If you live near an arena with decent ice, the odds are high there were NHL players jumping on this past weekend to limber up.

It could be in Thunder Bay, or Helsinki, or downtown Toronto — the first weekend of August is generally the unofficial date by which the world's top hockey players are back on the ice.

Generally speaking, the process involves sharing the rink with minor pro players, collegians and the occasional junior or two. There is no hitting. There are no stupid slap shots at ear level. There is chirping, but know your audience. You have to try, but not too hard.

And no matter the locale, everyone is expected to understand their place in the pecking order. My colleague Justin Bourne detailed the ethos beautifully in *The Athletic* last year (it remains one of my favourite pieces to appear on this site), and can tell firsthand stories about getting his hockey gear on and watching nervously while doing mental math as the NHL guys straggle into the room.

At some point, critical pro mass is reached, and that means the NCAA or junior guy gets to strip off his equipment and clear some locker room space.

In some cases, it takes the form of informal skates — and there are dozens if not hundreds of those all over North America and northern Europe. The calibre of those glorified pickup games is often stunningly good; the history of such on-ice sessions is also quite long.

Former NHLer Sergio Momesso told me last week about how he used to get on the ice with Guy Carbonneau and other Montreal-based pros in the 1980s once or perhaps twice per week starting in July; they'd ramp up the intensity as the summer wore on. That was a severe departure from the decade prior, when Henri Richard used to get a leg up on the competition in the offseason by switching from golf to tennis in late July (true story).

Momesso identified two major factors for the rapid evolution in offseason training three decades ago: players made real money and no longer had to work in the summer, and an influx of European players who were more accustomed to focusing on fitness.

In more contemporary instances, the summer shinny game has taken on new proportions.

As in, full-on league play, with All-Star games, playoffs, pro refs and live streaming. It's tempting to separate the more informal skates

(Kelowna, British Columbia, say) from the two-month summer leagues that sell tickets (i.e., Da Beauty League in Minnesota), into different divisions to compare apples to apples. But that feels unnecessarily complicated.

Herewith, a power ranking of the top 10 pro summer games and leagues.

It's probably a good idea to discuss the ranking mechanism at some point, so why not here.

I'd love to be able to say that I've come up with a sophisticated weighting system that takes account of the expected goals differential of the players involved, the quality of competition and relative merits of the arenas/fan experience and the frequency of play. I can't. Players drop in, they drop out, some games are forthcoming about who is playing in them, others prefer not to publicize their activities.

This is going to be a gut-based exercise based mostly on who we know is there, how well it's organized, and whatever else comes to mind. Vent your spleen in the comments if you feel the results are unjust.

Apropos of which, there is a heavy North American bias to this ranking. It's unfair, but also inevitable because Europe-based players often move around more in summer than North American-based players and it's harder to document who plays where. There are surely NHLers playing summer games in Turku and Örnsköldsvik and suburban Moscow that would be worth buying a ticket to see, and they could just as easily be included in the ranking. But life is about choices.

OK, so without further ado let's start with a group that works out of the suburbs north of Montreal.

10. Centre d'Excellence Sports Rousseau three-on-three pro league, Boisbriand, Quebec

It includes a whole bunch of bona fide NHL pros (Pierre-Luc Dubois, Jason Pominville, Antoine Roussel, Jonathan Bernier and Charles Hudon are regulars) and, importantly, a raft of up-and-coming junior stars and recent draftees. Alexis Lafrenière, the presumptive No. 1 pick in the 2020 draft, has been playing in the league, which is run by former NHLer Ramzi Abid, since he was 15.

There is a steady stream of Quebec-based NHLers passing through the Boisbriand complex, which is home to the QMJHL's Armada; the facility is the brainchild of Laval Rocket coach Joel Bouchard, who designed it as a hub for high-performance players. That's what it has become, as a quick survey of the parking lot will attest.

There are power-skating coaches on-site, and skills coaches. The fact it has a pro-level gym and sports medicine clinic attached to it is not a coincidence. The modern NHLer is in the gym five or six days per week in the offseason, and if it's possible to find a one-stop shop to work out and/or get treatment and then hop on the ice with one's peers, the players will hang out there.



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Similar setups have proliferated all over the league, most notably in Ottawa and Calgary. The quality of the summer skates in those places is generally very high. We'll use Boisbriand as the proxy for all those places.

### 9. The Halifax guys

There aren't very many NHL regulars from Nova Scotia (six at last count), but you might say they punch above their weight.

#NOVASCOTIA'S FINEST COMBINED FOR 299 POINTS LAST #NHL SEASON. THE BIG 3 ARE BACK TRAINING TOGETHER AGAIN. #MACKINNON #CROSBY #MARCHAND @SPITTINGCHICLETS [HTTPS://T.CO/H7VWLCGDM7](https://t.co/H7VWLCGDM7) PIC.TWITTER.COM/DPOP51OQS1

— JOHN MOORE (@RINKRANT) AUGUST 4, 2019

Sidney Crosby and Nathan MacKinnon are summertime neighbours, and they share a fitness coach, Andy O'Brien (more on him later). Brad Marchand is also a reasonably good NHLer. But the game is unquestionably top-heavy. Quality-wise, this is a top-three, if not top-one, summer game. It could use greater depth, though.

Maybe that's why the gang invited the top pick of the 2019 draft, Jack Hughes, to come out for a skate this past week at BMO Centre in Bedford, Nova Scotia.

That was mighty neighbourly of them.

Anyway, the other problem is these guys look like they're actually working, which earns them a rankings deduction. Summer is about hot-dogging and playing half-speed, backchecking-optional hockey. Come on, Sid, live a little.

Side note, they're also wearing their NHL practice jerseys the regular way, and not inside-out, as colleague Bourne said is the way the West Coast guys do it. That's another deduction. Everybody knows whom you guys play for, fellas.

### 8. The Eastside Elite league, Mount Clemens, Mich.

There are multiple summer pro games to choose from in Michigan, including an annual get-together in Plymouth that is attended by most of the Team USA types. Another group of Detroit-area pros train out of Little Caesars Arena. It's an embarrassment of riches.

Our choice has the benefit of actually being founded and run by a player — Stanley Cup winner Steven Oleksy, a 33-year-old who finished up last year with the Toronto Marlies of the AHL. He's listed as the CEO on the league's website. It's a good site. And a pretty great league, featuring some truly amazing players (Dylan Larkin, Zach Werenski, Alex DeBrincat, etc.)

It's also among the older organized summer leagues of its type (Oleksy founded it in 2008), it runs through July and August, and it involves elite junior and even AAA midget-aged players. The Eastside gang gets bonus points for development.

One of the things about summer hockey is the most dominant players sometimes aren't the guys you'd expect. Because there's no hitting and only sorta-trying, it allows dudes like 2020 draft-eligible Antonio Stranges of the London Knights to do stuff like this.

□□□

AT LAST NIGHT'S @ESEHOCKEY ALL-STAR CHALLENGE, @STEVENOLEKSY MADE SURE THE FANS WOULD BE TREATED TO MULTIPLE SHOOTOUTS.@ANTONIOSTRANGE3 MADE SURE TO DELIVER. PIC.TWITTER.COM/TX9MKWWVWP

— MIHOCKEY (@MIHOCKEYNOW) JULY 24, 2019

The Eastside league has 12 teams this year (it has had as many as 15), an All-Star game, sponsors and helmet-cams and HD highlights. It raises and gives away a lot of money to local causes. It's very cool and should probably be ranked higher on that basis alone, but them's the breaks.

7. Hockey Etcetera Montreal Pro League, Ville Mont-Royal, Quebec/Octagon Pro Training Camp, Westmount, Quebec

These two games, both of which are in Montreal (oh, should have added there's also a distinct regional bias to these rankings, sorry), are among the early exemplars of another kind of summer game: They're run by agencies.

Octagon's Allan Walsh has been running a twice-per-week summer shinny game for his clients for years, and it's regularly attended by such players as Jonathan Huberdeau, Marc-André Fleury, Michael Frolik, Jonathan Drouin and David Perron. For many years they divvied up sides between Quebec players and the Czech contingent; it was known to occasionally get heated.

The Hockey Etcetera rink complex is operated by Quartexx, a hockey agency whose clients include Kristopher Letang, Patrice Bergeron, Anthony Beauvillier and Anthony Duclair, among a great many others.

There's some cross-pollination between these two groups, partly because of the weekly Montreal Pro League three-on-three games at Hockey Etcetera (the proceeds from ticket sales go to charity). The league also attracts a bunch of players who aren't affiliated with either agency, like Anthony Mantha, Alex Killorn and Derick Brassard. Speaking of whom:

QUEL BUT DE DERICK BRASSARD! WHAT A GOAL! @RDSCA @TVASPORTS @TSN\_SPORTS @TSN690 @SPORTSNET @SEANRCAMPBELL @RENLAVOIJETVA @NHL #HIGHLIGHTOFTHENIGHT #SUMMERLEAGUE 🍷 PIC.TWITTER.COM/CVC42HZWEA

— MTL PRO LEAGUE (@MTLPROLEAGUE) JULY 25, 2019

The Montreal Pro League, which is in its third summer, streams its games live. They're not the only ones, but bonus points are awarded for technical savvy and accessibility to fans.

### 6. The London, Ontario, guys

Speaking of towns that punch above their weight, the summer pro game in London, Ontario, (pop. 404,699, or smaller than Halifax) is pretty, pretty good.

Partly because the city is home to a consistently excellent junior team, which has an upper-echelon facility and the financial capacity to keep its top players around for the summer (there's no shortage of shinny fodder, in other words), also because it is one of those smallish cities where NHLers seem to congregate.

In that sense, it stands in for many other places that might not be home to an NHL or AHL team, but nevertheless boast a high-quality summer shinny scene. I'm thinking here of cities like Saskatoon, or Thunder Bay, Ontario, which for a number of years had a kickass game with a whole lot of Stanley Cup winners in it (lots of Staals, along with Patrick Sharp and Matt Murray).

The London game's big dogs are Drew Doughty, Logan Couture and Corey Perry, who recently upgraded his digs in the city; but there are a lot of NHL players who summer in the area. The group includes Nazem Kadri, Bo Horvat, Olli Maatta, Greg McKegg — as the summer wears on, the calibre of the game increases.



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Again, many NHL players also work out of high-performance gyms in the city, including at Western University. It helps that the school also has a full-fledged orthopedic centre and a teaching hospital.

"It's a really good place to train in the summer, the pro skate is full of really high-level guys and it gets going pretty early in the summer," said Montreal Canadiens farmhand Michael McCarron, a former first-round pick and former Knight who has made the area his offseason home (although he's been known to turn up for the Eastside league in his native Michigan from time to time). "And I literally can't go to the golf course in the summer without running across an NHL player."

5. Da Beauty League, Edina, Minn.

Check out some of the names playing in this four-on-four loop in 2019: Jake Guentzel, Brock Boeser, Dustin Byfuglien, Anders Lee, Zach Parise, Nate Schmidt, James Van Riemsdyk, Jason Zucker, Brady Skjei, Derek Stepan, Ryan McDonagh, Casey Mittelstadt.

There are some guys who can play. And they're joined by a bunch of NCAA and minor pro players who get to measure their games against top NHLers.

"It's the highlight of my summer every year," Canadiens prospect Ryan Poehling said after Montreal's development camp in June.

The quantity of Poehling brothers rivals the Eastside league's Larkin content (there are four Larkin siblings in that league, however, to three Poehlings).

The Beauties have celebrity coaches, live webcasts, sharp uniforms, a super slick website. They even keep updated stats! Boeser is leading the league with 16 goals and 18 assists in nine games for Team Bic. Nifty.

This is another league whose founders include agents (Chris McAlpine and Ben Hankinson of Octagon), who teamed up with a trio of local business figures, including a lawyer who owns a minor-league baseball team.

And its social media presence is tiptop.

#DABL TOP 10 IS BACK!! 😊

10 @BRENNANMENELL @ROBBYJACKSON23

9 TEDDY BLUEGER

8 @BNELSON @LEDPIPE08

7 @BOGO\_GADGET

6 @ZACHPARISE

5 @JAKENBAKE20 @BNELSON

4 @NBJUGSTAD72

3 @19LETTIERI95 @STEVIEJ5

2 @JAKENBAKE20

1 ALEX STALOCK USES HIS HEAD@BUCCIGROSS  
PIC.TWITTER.COM/XFYQXNMWFD

— DA BEAUTY LEAGUE (@DABEAUTYLEAGUE) JULY 28, 2019

There's not that much more to say about Da Beauty League. It has outrageous depth, top-end talent, a borderline fanatical following in a hockey hotbed, and helps out the community. Easily a top-five contender, and could have switched places with our next entrant.

4. FSC/EPS Summer Pro League, Foxboro, Mass.

This is another summer circuit based out of a full-service sports complex, where multiple New England Patriots players work out under the watchful eye of Edge Performance Systems guru Brian McDonough. He's one of the founders of the Summer Pro League, along with a couple of well-known agents (Matt Keator and Kent Hughes, who also coach teams in the six-franchise league).

There is some serious talent on the ice, thanks to the dozens of NHL players who live in the Boston area. People like Jack Eichel, Charlie McAvoy, Johnny Gaudreau, Kyle Palmieri, Noah Hanifin, Matt Grzelcyk, Brian Boyle, Charlie Coyle, Ryan Donato.

It's not as accomplished PR-wise as Da Beauty League, but has been around for longer. Even if, as The Athletic's Joe McDonald wrote last year, it's mostly been happy to be a well-kept secret where players can be free to work out like "savages."

The training environment is serious, the calibre of players is as high as anywhere. This is an NHL-style game for NHL players.

Old school. We like.

Canadiens forward Jordan Weal, who has played in Foxboro in each of the past three summers, said "in the final last year the top three lines and top two defence pairs were all NHL players. It's pretty crazy how good the games are."

Alrighty then. Now for the top three.

3. The Vail guys

OK, Crosby has already been mentioned once in this ranking but it's not unreasonable to include the best (or very close to it) player in the NHL twice. Particularly when you consider the second game he hosts in the mountains of Colorado each August.

It's an invitation-only affair, and though it's held over a fairly short period of time (a week to 10 days), it is the biggest collection of NHL stars and superstars outside of an Olympics. And given the murky status of the NHL's participation in the five-ring circus, maybe Crosby's Vail residency has already slid into the top spot.

Essentially, it's a Team Canada reunion sprinkled with all manner of All-Stars and the odd NHL MVP (Taylor Hall is a frequent guest). Thus, it is kind of a best of all the other summer NHL games, compressed into a week or so. Except with altitude training, which was O'Brien's original justification for relocating Crosby there in late summer earlier this decade.

And like a few of the other events on this list, it stands in for a genre of summer skate: the intensive, short-term training camp-style skate at the most critical time of the offseason. Mid to late August is the final tuneup before everybody returns to their respective NHL cities for the pre-camp skates with teammates. In other words, the Vail skate is important.

The BioSteel camp, also held in late August, has become the uber-example of this type of event. It involves a select group of 40 NHL players, there are captains and a draft and a mini-tourney.

But it's held in Toronto, which doesn't have a view of the Rockies. Or Crosby. Vail gets the edge.

2. The Toronto guys

A tiny sample of NHL players who live and work out in and around Toronto during most or all of the offseason: Connor McDavid, Mitch Marner, Steven Stamkos, Mark Scheifele, Max Domi, P.K. Subban, Mark Giordano, John Tavares, Hall.

There is no question that no other geographical region on the planet can rival Canada's largest city in terms of the sheer number of





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incredibly talented players. Our own Down Goes Brown assembled a veritable assassin's row of Ontario-based talent in The Athletic's exercise in regional Dream Team one-upmanship this summer; he could easily have restricted it to players from the Toronto area only.

The fact there are so many means there is no need to bring them together in a summer league.

"If you're doing a power ranking, Toronto has to be right at the top, it's absolutely the best, no contest," said Domi. "On any given night you can go and play with top guys."

On a random weekday he might join Jason Spezza's gang for a skate. The next evening he might jump on with Josh Anderson and his crew. Or text his former junior linemate Marnier to check whether he's got any ice time booked.

There are regularly scheduled skates, of course. There's one at St. Michael's College, where trainer Matt Nicol (he of the BioSteel camp) puts his clients through their paces. The members of the famed Gary Roberts training group also spend time on the ice throughout the summer.

"If you're looking for a game, you'll find one. The options aren't exactly limited," Roberts client James Neal, then of the Flames, told me this past season.

Toronto is a moveable hockey feast. There's nowhere quite like it.

That said, Domi's opinion is not borne out by the facts. Before unveiling the top spot in our ranking, let's go through a few honourable mentions.

First up: the small-town guys. They're all over the hockey world, albeit not as numerous in the NHL as they have been.

"There aren't a whole lot of NHL players from my town, but we make do," said Chicago Blackhawks forward Andrew Shaw, who hails from Belleville, Ontario, and spends his summers at his cottage in nearby Prince Edward County. "I'll skate with (now Montreal forward) Nick Cousins, and (Arizona's) Brad Richardson, but that's about it for NHL guys."

Working out in a place with few or no NHL-calibre players isn't ideal — anyone who has ever shared a sheet of ice with even a marginal NHLer understands the gulf between the best and the rest — but it can also have its charms. For Shaw, it's doing his thing away from prying eyes. That's something more than a few players appreciate.

Next: the nontraditional-market guys. Lots of hockey players live in places like Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Henderson, Nev. If you look at the local arena, you will probably find them and it will almost certainly be worth watching.

Finally, it's worth pointing out there are some very serious summer games in places like Winnipeg (Jonathan Toews doesn't mess around, even in July and August), Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa and Quebec City. The cold weather NHL markets (and most hot weather ones) all have their year-round training groups, and just because they aren't in this ranking doesn't mean they couldn't be.

So what's the best game of them all?

### 1. The Kelowna guys

If there is a place that checks every conceivable box it's the Okanagan. Great weather, mountains, crystalline lake, vineyards, NHL-sized rink, pro gyms and a concentration of hockey players so dense it's become a selling point for local real estate agents.

The residents include three-time Stanley Cup champion and two-time Olympic gold medalist Duncan Keith; you have All-Star

goaltender Devan Dubnyk; you have the Schenn brothers. Oh, and Carey Price and Shea Weber and Blake Comeau and Brent Seabrook. That's just to name a few.

When NHLPA head Don Fehr did his summer listening tour ahead of the 2012 labour talks, he stopped in Kelowna. Estimates vary, but the accepted wisdom holds there are between 100 and 300 active and retired NHL players living in the Okanagan Valley.

As befits the general vibe around town, the summer skates are informal; they're generally preceded by a workout. Those can vary with their seriousness; there is a story, and it might even be true, that one former NHL player used to skip leg day to go wakeboarding, which he figured was pretty much the same thing.

Anyway, there's no time for dillydallying when the ice time is up, tee times await.

It's a very good life, and the game players of the highest quality. Also, I'm putting Kelowna first because Weber basically instructed me to do so on Montreal's locker clear-out day.

When I mentioned the idea of a power ranking for offseason shinny, he cut me off.

"Stop right there. Kelowna is No. 1," quoth the Man Mountain. "I mean, we have the best goalie."

The Athletic LOADED: 08.06.2019

1150591 Websites

The Athletic / Pronman: Standout prospects at the World Junior camps

By Corey Pronman Aug 5, 2019

I spent a week at the World Junior Summer Showcase in Plymouth, Michigan, watching some of the best U20 players for Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States. Here are some of my thoughts on the players who stood out to me.

Philip Broberg, D, Edmonton/Tobias Bjornfot, D, Los Angeles

The Broberg-Bjornfot pair came together toward the second half of the tournament and was excellent. Broberg was arguably the best defenseman at the camp, making a ton of plays with his skating and skill particularly off the rush. His first game he had a rough couple of turnovers in bad spots, but the rest of the way his play was very strong. Bjornfot was his typical not flashy self, but with his great skating and brain he made stops and enough offensive plays to help drive play. This could be a possible pairing at the tournament in December.

Cole Caufield, RW, Montreal

Caufield was the best player at the camp. He was a standout in nearly every game I watched, generating a bunch of scoring chances whether on his stick or for others. There were the highlight reel snipes that quickly made their way around the internet, but he also generated a lot with his skill and vision. He didn't score 72 last season by shooting 40 percent; he gets a lot of chances every game because of how many dimensions his skill set has aside from his frame.



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Joel Farabee, LW, Philadelphia

Farabee had a lot of good stretches throughout the camp, driving play when he was on the ice. Farabee had an excellent season, where he was a top player in Hockey East and signed right after the season ended. Farabee's skill stood out more consistently in the last 12 months, rather than during his time at the USNTDP, often landing on highlight reels at Boston University.

"At BU I played a different role than at the NTDP. I was asked to score goals, as opposed to make plays for [Oliver] Wahlstrom or [Jack] Hughes, to try and take over my line and score more," said Farabee.

Farabee created a lot of chances at the camp by way of his skill, vision and compete level, winning a lot of 1-on-1 battles.

Nolan Foote, LW, Tampa Bay

Foote was one of Canada's better players, and it became clear watching him at this camp and looking at more video of him after the camp, that I was too harsh at the draft. His skating is better than I thought, albeit probably just about average, and he's more skilled than I thought. He was in on a lot of chances for Canada, both as a scorer and playmaker. I could see him being one of their better forwards come December, and it was clear they liked him given how they used him at the camp.

Ryan Johnson, D, Buffalo

Johnson stood out to me consistently through the camp, and even as a 2001 in the 2000 age group, he looks like a strong candidate for the World Junior team this winter. His skating and hockey sense looked very good. "He was a pleasant surprise for us. He has quickness and elusiveness," said USA general manager John Vanbiesbrouck. The skating was always evident when I watched Johnson last season, but the offense was inconsistent. He was a second power play guy on the eventual USHL champion and some games I didn't see him make a ton of plays. He was very good down the stretch, though, and made a lot of tough plays in this camp.

"I believe I have a lot of potential, especially on the offensive side. Being deceptive with the puck is a big part of my game," said Johnson.

Arthur Kaliyev, RW, Los Angeles

Kaliyev didn't have the highlight reel plays of Caufield in the tournament, but like Caufield, Kaliyev created a lot of offense and was one of USA's better offensive players. He's got his bullet shot, which led to one goal, but he had a ton of other chances as a product of his skill and sense. He showed how well he can move the puck around the offensive zone. His skating looked very average at this pace, but he did show he can keep up.

K'Andre Miller, D, New York Rangers

Miller looked like a returning player, being a quality player at both ends of the rink. His size, physicality and skating has always stood out. What I noticed at the camp was his ability to jump up into attacks, to make plays and to impact the transition game more than I did when he was with the USNTDP. He had a good year at Wisconsin, getting power play time and providing a fair amount of offense. "Being quick in transition is a huge part of my game, whether it's jumping up into a rush or breaking up plays," said Miller.

"He's a high-end prospect," said one scout of Miller.

Nick Robertson, LW, Toronto

Robertson was a top forward for the Americans, continuing his strong international performance from the previous summer at the Hlinka Gretzky. Robertson showed his high skill level and his great offensive instincts consistently. He competed hard, and despite not being the biggest guy, he was able to win and control pucks with his effort. His skating still stood out as a flaw, particularly for a smaller forward, but the skill is legit and could propel him to making the U20 team in December.

Anttoni Honka, D, Carolina/Ville Heinola, D, Winnipeg

The Honka and Heinola pair emerged as the top defensive pair for Finland throughout its two camps in the past two weeks, as one would expect of two returning members from last year's U20 team. Heinola isn't going to pop at any point, but he's a very smart and efficient defenseman. His straight-ahead speed could use work, but he showed great elusiveness on his edges and skated pucks up the ice well. Honka had some amazing moments, showing his high-end skill and vision, and being deadly on the power play. His defensive miscues weren't noticeable at the summer showcase, although the week prior in friendlies versus U20 teams from Switzerland and the Czech Republic, he had some significant ones. Given he's not that big and isn't an elite skater, Honka needs to be perfect to be effective, and for the summer showcase, he was that for the most part. That Honka needs to show up more consistently.

Spencer Knight, G, Florida

Knight was the clear best goalie at the camp, looking like a first-round pick caliber netminder in most of his starts. Knight has elite sense in how he anticipates plays and tracks pucks, which combined with his 6-foot-3 frame, strong quickness and high-end puck playing skills makes him a true top goalie prospect. In talking to scouts at his starts, they didn't feel he was 4-5 years away from making the league – the Sergei Bobrovsky signing in Florida notwithstanding.

Trevor Zegras, C, Anaheim

Zegras was up and down during the camp. He had some very good games and some just OK ones. You saw the flashes of his elite skill and brain but some plays weren't connecting. I wanted to highlight something he did that speaks to what Zegras is capable of. This play was in the first half of the camp. He gets a pass behind the net and then makes this play.

I had to watch that a few times over and ask Zegras to verify what happened, but what he did was scoop the puck up on his stick and flung it behind his back to the defenseman at the point, or as Zegras put it, "there was a defender on my back so I was let's just try it." This kind of imagination is why I believe so much in his potential.

Projected Rosters

And now for a very early Team USA and Canada projection based on what I saw at the camp.

Projected Team USA

Forwards:

Joel Farabee-Alex Turcotte-Cole Caufield

Matthew Boldy-Jack Drury-Oliver Wahlstrom

Nick Robertson-Trevor Zegras- Arthur Kaliyev

John Beecher-Jon Gruden-Bobby Brink

Parker Ford

Defensemen:

K'Andre Miller-Cam York



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Mattias Samuelsson- Ryan Johnson

Jordan Harris- Ty Emberson

Bode Wilde

Goaltenders:

Spencer Knight

Dustin Wolf

Projected Team Canada

I'm presuming that Barrett Hayton, Bowen Byram, Noah Dobson and Ty Smith will be in the NHL and unavailable.

Forwards:

Alexis Lafreniere-Joe Veleno-Kirby Dach

Nolan Foote-Ty Dellandrea-Dylan Cozens

Liam Foudy-Peyton Krebs-Serron Noel

Alex Newhook-Ryan Suzuki-Akil Thomas

Raphael Lavoie

Defensemen:

Jared McIsaac-Calen Addison

Thomas Harley-Jett Woo

Kevin Bahl-Justin Barron

Braden Schneider

Goaltenders:

Olivier Rodrigue

Alexis Gravel

The Athletic LOADED: 08.06.2019

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The Athletic / Projecting a current Team North America — under the salary cap

By Shayna Goldman Aug 5, 2019

Team North American caught the attention of the hockey world in the World Cup of Hockey in 2016. An under 23 team of Canadian and American players made its debut among the usual heavyweights of international tournaments — Team United States and Team Canada, as well as Sweden, Finland and a combined Team Europe featuring players from countries not represented in the tournament.

While Team North America ultimately didn't reach its goal, it left a lasting impression with its exciting play that gave a preview into the future of the NHL.

So what would that Team North America look like today?

Using Sean Tierney's WAR lineup creator, which features data from Evolving-Hockey and prospect data from Manny Pery, we can put the original roster together into 12 forwards, six defenders and two-goaltenders.

Today, they'd project to have around 115 points in a full 82-game regular season, even if some of the extras were switched out with those listed in the lineup above.

The problem is that most of these players would no longer qualify for Team North America because they're older than 23. The other issue is that this team would be far from cap compliant, with a cumulative cap hit of over \$130 million. If we add in the players listed as extras, that grows to more than \$148 million.

The question now is, can another iteration of this team be formed today and would it be as competitive as the original group looks to be today? Let's find out.

The original Team North American had a cutoff of October 2, 1992; our version is going to have a birth date cutoff of October 2, 1996, so all players must still be 22 when the puck drops on the 2019-20 season. But we're going to add in another twist: this team also has to be cap compliant.

That means there can't be more than \$34 million dedicated to the top three centers, like if we lined up Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and Jack Eichel. Even though all three are eligible, all three more than likely couldn't make it. For our purposes, we're dropping more than \$8 million salary by replacing Eichel with Mathew Barzal, who is in the final year of his entry-level contract.

So, let's dive into today's cap-compliant version of Team North America.

Forwards

When the best player in the league is still eligible for Team North America, he's a slam dunk to make the team. McDavid is one of the few original members to make it, but it's also his last year eligible for the team. Few players are as skilled as McDavid and even fewer are able to create at the speed that he can. So the question here isn't where the elite center fits, but who fits along with him on the top line.

To his left will be Mathew Tkachuk, a winger who scores at the rate of a first liner. He makes his team better on both sides of the ice and can be a pest to opponents. On his right will be Canucks' winger Brock Boeser. Boeser's wrist shot should be complementary to McDavid's speedy playmaking and Tkachuk's net-front play.

Last time around, McDavid and Matthews skated together. This time, we're going to split up the two pivots for lineup balance. Instead, we'll pair Matthews with a playmaker in his current Maple Leafs' teammate Mitch Marner. Marner's playmaking shouldn't just help Matthews, but Alex DeBrincat who netted 41 goals this past season.

This is a line that'll be more than willing to get the puck on the net. All three were some of the most frequent shooters on their respective teams. While Marner's more of a passer, he's very willing to shoot the puck, which has helped him reach the 20-goal mark in two of his three NHL seasons. On the other hand, Matthews and DeBrincat can also send their linemates passes that end up in the net; both of them reached the 20-assist mark in each of their NHL seasons.

Barzal's ability to transition the puck up the ice with speed to create room for his teammates makes him such a valuable pivot, so the inclusion of him here isn't just because he comes at a low cost — he's that skilled and more than deserving of a place on this roster. That playmaking should pair well with Kyle Connor, who led the Jets last season in individual expected goals, high-danger chances and rebounds created; and ranked highly in shots taken.

To round out that line, we're shifting center Pierre-Luc Dubois to the wing. When Dubois shifts to the wing, it's typically to the left, but



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we're making an ask of a talented forward to switch to the right. His size and physical play was complementary to scorers like Artemi Panarin and Cam Atkinson in Columbus. Dubois challenges his opponents' defenses, and tries to make the most of passes and rebound opportunities created by his linemates. Those skills should translate well to a line with Connor and Barzal.

On each line, we've made sure to have a playmaker. On the fourth line, that's Jack Hughes. He's been shifted to wing, as other centers have been as they acclimate to the NHL. Hughes is down on the fourth line to spread out our four speedy playmakers, instead of stacking him with a similar player in Barzal on the third line.

Down the middle of this line is Anthony Cirelli, an up-and-coming center from the Tampa Bay Lightning. Not only does he contribute to his team's offense, but he's excellent in his own zone. Cirelli gives Team North America another dimension as a shutdown center and is a great asset for the penalty kill.

We're shifting one more center to the wing to complete this line in Dylan Strome. His scoring abilities really broke through after the trade to Chicago last season, but his underlying numbers could use improvement. To deal with that, we've shifted him from center to wing to alleviate some responsibility, and paired him with a two-way pivot in Cirelli.

### Defense

Not a single defender from the original Team North America is eligible to return this year, so we've got a completely new-look blue line. That starts with Thomas Chabot and Charlie McAvoy on the first pair.

Chabot and McAvoy both were up to first pair minutes in their NHL seasons in 2018-19, and both scored at the rate of a first pair defender in that time.

Chabot's Goals Above Replacement (GAR), according to Evolving-Hockey, of 16.6 ranked sixth among defenders this past season. His team was also much better in shots for with the left-handed shot back on the ice, but they still struggled in the Senators' own end. Context is important here, considering how awful the Senators were this past season.

McAvoy, on the other hand, according to the model by The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn, is one of the more well-rounded defensemen in the league. He projects to be in elite territory over the next few seasons.

Up next, we have a pair that actually plays together in Sam Girard and Cale Makar of the Avalanche. While it was only for a limited sample in the postseason, the two excelled together and are a major reason why the future for Colorado's blue line is so bright.

In terms of GAR, Girard ranked second-best on the Avalanche and ranked 26th among defenders in the league. Though undersized, his fluid skating and offensive upside adds to the left side of this defense — as does his disciplined play; he finished the 2018-19 season with just three penalties taken and 19 drawn.

Makar, on the other hand, has little NHL experience with zero regular season games and 10 postseason games to his name. But his fast-paced puck-possession style and vision, which led to him being named a Hobby Baker Memorial Award finalist last spring, translated to his first taste of NHL action.

Zach Werenski's mainstay NHL partner, Seth Jones, was a key part of Team North America the first time around. Since Jones aged out, it'll be Werenski representing the Blue Jackets' defense this time around.

Had this team been drawn up a year ago, he likely would have ended up on a higher pair. But his third season that was a bit of a drop-off for the budding offensive defenseman. Still, in Werenski, the team is adding a puck-moving defenseman who can excel on the power play. We just need some balance on his right side.

Like Werenski, Dante Fabbro has offensive upside. But his dependable two-way play makes him the right fit for the third pair. He's smart and effective in his own end, even under pressure, which should refine and round out the third pair of Team North America.

### Goaltenders

We have few goaltending options to choose from who are both North American and under 23. Luckily, two NHL-ready goaltenders stand out for us in Mackenzie Blackwood and Carter Hart.

Blackwood, in his 23 NHL appearances this season, saved 2.16 goals above average at 5-on-5. He also slightly outperformed his save percentage based on the likelihood of the shots he faced becoming goals. Hart's numbers were slightly below average in his 31 appearances, which is why he'll be Blackwood's backup.

Since both goaltenders are young, it's best that both get to play as much as possible, so the backup will still play 40 percent of the games, while the starter still takes the majority.

So how would this team perform in a full 82-game season? Using Tierney's lineup creator again, we can find out.

This lineup combines for a team WAR of 32.9, which translates to approximately 115 standing points — which is tied with the original Team North America would perform if reunited today.

But how does it compare in terms of the salary cap?

Using @EvolvingWild's projections for restricted free agents, the total cap hit comes in at less than \$80 million.

There's two issues, though, if we're being super technical. This group doesn't leave us as much room for extra forwards to fill out a 23-man roster. Though there could be room if any actual contracts come in lower than the RFA projections, some might come in higher — like Marnier's next deal.

The easiest solution is to move out one expensive contract for an inexpensive one, and hope it doesn't lessen the team's potential.

One option is pulling Werenski and his \$6.8 million projection since there are a number of other left-handed options for the defense. We can replace him with Quinn Hughes, who takes up less than \$1 million in cap space, for a cumulative \$73.2 million cap hit, which gives room for error with the contract projections and allows us to add extras.

Up front, those extras could include Clayton Keller and Robert Thomas, plus Vince Dunn on defense. Spencer Knight and his eventual entry-level contract in net could be added, too, if one replacement for each position is preferred to two forwards and a defender. With three more players added as extras, we're still under \$76 million in cap, giving us over \$6 million in space to account for any differences in contract projections and have some breathing room.

On the ice, with Hughes over Werenski, the third pair's value would slightly decrease to a projected full season WAR of 0.1, but that would only cost them one standing point. An 114-point team that's over \$6 million below the cap? Seems too good to be true.

So with Team North America at 2.0, not only is the future bright for a team of young stars, but so is the present.



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

By Ian Tulloch Aug 5, 2019

Earlier this summer, I broke down the NHL's top 10 breakout candidates and top 10 regression candidates for the 2019-20 season, which led to some great discussion. This week, we're going to look at regression from a positive perspective: Which players are most likely to bounce back from their disappointing seasons in 2018-19?

Much like last week's article on regression candidates, the best thing to look for in this regard is a player whose shooting percentage was drastically different from his career average last season. The difference is instead of looking for players who unsustainably outperformed their true talent, we're going to break down the players who produced significantly worse than usual (but showed signs they're due for a bounce back). This is where regression to the mean can work the other way — you can regress upward to your career average after an outlier of a down year.

I tried my best to find players who met that description, though it was difficult narrowing the list down to 10 names. If you don't see a player from your favourite team on this list, it doesn't necessarily mean he won't improve next season; it just means I ran out of room (I had a list of about 40 players that I had to chop down to 10 for this piece). Much like anything I write, this list simply reflects a personal opinion on which players are likely to bounce back next season, but I'm very curious to hear any disagreements you may have in the comments section (which should be a bit friendlier this time around since this is more of an optimistically themed article).

Without further ado, let's dive into things!

## 1. William Nylander

This was the first name that came to mind when I thought about writing a bounce-back-themed article. After a lengthy contract negotiation, William Nylander started his season on Dec. 6 and clearly wasn't in game shape. The next month and a half was proof of that, with him playing well below the level we've come to expect from him. He wasn't as dynamic with the puck on his stick, which is a big part of the reason he produced only four points in his first 20 games.

The good news for Leafs fans is Nylander started to look much more like himself toward the end of February: slicing through the neutral zone with consistency, creating lots of passes off the rush and generating plenty of scoring chances in the offensive zone. He scored at a 55-point pace in the following 34 games (without relying on a high shooting percentage) despite spending most of that time on the third line with either Patrick Marleau or Connor Brown.

I expect him to spend the majority of 2019-20 alongside Auston Matthews in the top six, where the two have proved to bring out the best in each other. With a boost in minutes and linemate quality, it's realistic to project him in the 65- to 70-point range for next season. He generates zone entries and passes at an elite rate, which are

exactly the kind of qualities you want on a line with the best five-on-five goal scorer in the league.

Throw in some improved power-play production (which shouldn't be hard considering how much of a disaster PP2 was last year in Toronto) and it's fair to expect a much stronger season from Nylander than we saw in 2018-19.

## 2. Mathew Barzal

Much like Nylander, Mathew Barzal is one of my favourite players to watch with the puck on his stick in transition. He's so good at weaving his way through the neutral zone and setting up his teammates in the offensive zone. None of that changed in 2018-19; Barzal was one of the NHL's best forwards last season at generating shot assists (passes leading to shots), not to mention clean zone exits and zone entries.

(Image from CJ Turtoro; Data from Corey Sznajder)

That doesn't look like a 62-point player to me.

The reason I love using metrics like shot assists, zone entries and zone exits is because they tend to indicate which players are best at impacting the game (they're excellent predictors of future performance). The closest comparables we have to Barzal in those areas are Taylor Hall, Nathan MacKinnon, Artemi Panarin and Patrick Kane, all of whom scored over a point per game last season.

I expect Barzal to land much closer to that level of production in 2018-19 compared to his 62-point rate from last season. His teammates' shooting percentage should regress upward with the passes he's feeding them (at even strength and on the power play), which should help bring Barzal back up to the 80-plus-point player we all see when watching him play.

## 3. Tyler Toffoli

I know everything went wrong in Los Angeles last year for the Kings, but it was still surprising to see just how little Tyler Toffoli produced offensively considering how many chances he was generating. He scored only 13 goals and 34 points despite playing all 82 games, which just doesn't sound right if you've ever watched Toffoli play.

He's always generated shots at a high volume without sacrificing shot quality. This past year he fired 175 pucks on net, but only 3.4 percent of them actually went in (which is comically below his career average). You could argue that he might not have been generating as many good looks as usual (taking lots of shots from the outside), but we can actually measure that using a metric like expected goals, which takes shot location into consideration.

For example, a 3 percent shot from the blue line would be worth 0.03 expected goals, while a 20 percent shot from the slot would be worth 0.20 expected goals. Keeping that in mind, here's a look at how well Toffoli has generated offence at five-on-five over the past few seasons:

This is clearly an example of a player who's due for some shooting percentage regression in 2019-20. He should have scored 11 more goals last season, according to MoneyPuck, which is the largest difference between expected and actual goals over the past four seasons. The closest is Nazem Kadri, who scored 10 fewer goals than expected in 2015-16 (he set a career high the following season with 32 goals, 15 more than the previous year).

## 4. James Neal

Just when we thought the Milan Lucic contract was untradeable, Ken Holland was able to flip him for another less-than-ideal contract in James Neal (which I like to call the "none-for-none" trade). In all



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seriousness, Neal has significantly more upside in Edmonton than Lucic does in Calgary, thanks in large part to his scoring ability.

He might not drive play at a high level anymore, but Neal still has that deadly wrist shot that helped make him a perennial 20-goal scorer throughout his career. His seven goals last season can be mostly attributed to his unsustainably low shooting percentage.

It's fair to say he isn't going to shoot 3.7 percent again next season at five-on-five, especially when you consider whom he's going to be playing with. Last year, Neal spent most of his minutes with Mark Jankowski and Sam Bennett, whereas he's probably going to spend most of 2019-20 with either Connor McDavid or Leon Draisaitl, who are elite playmakers, on his line.

That's easily the biggest uptick in linemate quality we're going to see for a forward next season, which is a big reason I expect Neal to hit the 20-goal mark again in 2018-19. Edmonton's winger depth is so weak right now that I wouldn't be shocked to see him rank third in ice time behind McDavid and Draisaitl. He's going to have plenty of opportunities to shoot the puck from good areas, both at five-on-five and five-on-four, which is why I expect him to have a much stronger season than he did last year.

### 5. P.K. Subban

There's an argument to be made that Subban had the worst year of his career last season, considering how high he's set the bar for himself. He produced points at his lowest rate since his sophomore season in 2012 while driving shot differential at the lowest rate of his career. Descriptively speaking, it wasn't a very good year for Subban (by his standards), so why do I have him on this list?

It really comes down to context. Subban suffered an upper-body injury in 2018-19 that I'm not sure he ever fully recovered from. Here's a look at how well he was driving play before and after the injury, which took him out from Nov. 13 to Dec. 27.

As you can see, Subban was a dominant player prior to the injury; the Predators were crushing the opposition with him on the ice. After returning from the injury, though, he wasn't nearly as effective (especially if you look at the expected goals, which were essentially the same with or without Subban on the ice).

This is where a full offseason of rest could really help Subban, allowing him to come back much stronger in 2019-20 and looking closer to the player we've all seen over the past decade (a top-five defenceman in the world). You could argue that injuries like these are what make players in their 30s more susceptible to the impacts of aging, but I have a hard time believing Subban is no longer an elite defenceman.

Now that he's going to be the key piece on his team's blue line, I expect his point totals to skyrocket (assuming he gets PP1 duties alongside Taylor Hall and Jack Hughes, with Wayne Simmonds wreaking havoc in front of the net). The opportunity is going to be there for Subban to have a huge bounce back in 2019-20; it just comes down to whether or not you think the injury he suffered last season is going to have a long-term effect on his performance.

I would bet on a talent like Subban working his way back into form with a full offseason under his belt, which is why he finds himself on this list.

### 6. Patrik Laine

I'm not sure if I can recall a stranger season than Patrik Laine's 2018-19 campaign. He scored 60 percent of his goals in one month: 18 of his 30 goals came in November. It was so bizarre to see an all-world shooter go cold for five consecutive months after he had gone

supernova, but sometimes that's how shooting percentage works. We've seen players go on peaks and valleys before (sometimes for full seasons), and unfortunately for Laine, last season was quite the valley from December onward.

Regression to the mean is an important concept for us to grasp (players aren't going to consistently shoot way above or below their career average), but Laine's mean is significantly higher than most NHL players'. He shot 17.6 percent in his rookie season and 18.3 percent the following year. We haven't seen a player with his kind of pure shooting ability since prime Steven Stamkos and Ilya Kovalchuk, which makes him a difficult player to project.

Our natural tendency is to assume a player will regress closer to league average in shooting percentage — and most of the time we'll be right — but Laine is such an outlier given his finishing ability that those rules don't really apply to him. With his otherworldly release, it's fair to expect him to score on at least 16 percent of his shots next season (his career average after taking 2018-19 into account).

He might not be a player who provides much value with his play-driving ability (he's replacement-level in that department), but he's probably the best active shooter in the league right now with his ability to beat goaltenders from distance. I wouldn't bet against him scoring 40 goals next season, especially if he takes a step forward in his ability to generate shots at even strength (which most players do at age 21).

### 7. Martin Jones

I've been getting a lot of complaints that I say "goaltending is voodoo" too often, but I don't know how else to explain Martin Jones. He was a league-average starter for three consecutive seasons between 2015 and 2018 (starting 60-plus games with a solid save percentage in each season) but somehow became a .896 goaltender last season. We can't attribute that drop-off to age (he's 29) or injury (he's been healthy for the past four seasons), which leaves me wondering how it happened.

We still don't have a great answer for it, which is why it's a safe bet he regresses to the mean next season. The fact that Aaron Dell also suffered a career low (after two strong seasons in 2016-17 and 2017-18) makes me more confident that last year was an outlier in San Jose. It's possible there's something to Tyler Dellow's theory that Erik Karlsson significantly drops his goaltender's save percentage, but I still have a hard time believing any one player can impact it this much.

My rule of thumb is that I never bet on goaltenders (they're far too unpredictable), but if I'm going to, I always bet on them regressing to their career average. With Jones, we have a large sample of him stopping pucks at a league-average rate and one season of him performing below replacement level. I always like going with the larger sample, which is why it's likely we see Jones bounce back closer to league average in 2019-20.

### 8. Jason Zucker

For my money, Jason Zucker might be the most underrated player in the league. He's always driven play at an elite rate and combines it with elite shot generation, which was the case in 2018-19. The problem was his shooting percentage fell off a cliff, resulting in a 21-goal and 42-point season that made Minnesota think about moving his \$5.5 million AAV contract this offseason.

Realistically, we should expect that to bounce back next season. Zucker was generating plenty of shots from dangerous areas last season (like he always does) by driving to the net like the Brendan Gallagher and Patric Hornqvists of the world. If he converts on his



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chances like he did in the previous six years of his career, he's probably going to score 30 goals again like he did in the 2017-18 season.

When you throw in the fact that he impacts the game in a way that the box-score numbers don't show, it's clear Zucker is a player the Wild should be looking to hold on to.

### 9. Jaden Schwartz

I didn't expect to have anyone from the Blues on this list after their magical 2019 — how could they possibly improve on what the team accomplished from January onward?

Then I looked at Jaden Schwartz's numbers and realized he was due for some serious regression (in a positive way). Much like everyone else on the Blues, he got off to a rough start in 2018-19, but unlike the rest of the squad, his numbers didn't revert back to his career average under Craig Berube.

A lot of hockey fans don't realize how effective Schwartz has been over the past few seasons, so here's a look at how well he's performed over the past six seasons:

I don't think he's as great as his 2017-18 season suggested, but at age 27, I also doubt his 2018-19 season is indicative of his true talent level. He's proved to be a legitimate 25-goal, 60-point player throughout his career, which is why I expect him to have a much better season in 2019-20, especially in the goals department.

Schwartz shot only 4.8 percent at five-on-five last season, which is well below his average over the previous five seasons (11.6 percent). We should also probably expect him to convert on much more than 5 percent of his shots on the power play, which should help lift him closer to the 20- to 25-goal mark next season if he can stay healthy.

### 10. Nazem Kadri

Kadri had a strange season on Toronto in 2018-19, seeing a significant drop in minutes with the addition of John Tavares. Playing in a third-line role behind Tavares and Matthews, Kadri's most common linemates were Brown and Marleau, whose production fell off a cliff at age 39. He also spent a lot of time with Nylander, but most of that came in his first two months after signing his contract in December (when he was clearly not the same player).

Combine all of that with a big shooting-percentage dip on the power play (and a slight dip at five-on-five), and you have all the makings of a disappointing season. What's interesting is if you look at his ability to generate shots and passes, he was actually doing both at an elite rate. The issue is when you're playing fewer minutes alongside weaker linemates, you're not going to produce as much.

As you can see, Kadri generated more shot assists than Mitch Marner last season. Now that he's going to be getting consistent top-six minutes with some better linemates, there's a strong case to be made that the production should follow. It will be interesting to see whom he plays with in Colorado (e.g., whether or not he gets to play with one of Gabriel Landeskog or Mikko Rantanen), but even if it's Joonas Donskoi and Andre Burakovsky on his wings, that's going to be a substantial improvement from what he had to work with last season.

### Honourable Mentions

The Kings' Big Three: After a down year for Anze Kopitar, Drew Doughty and Jonathan Quick, there's a strong case to be made that all three will have much better seasons in 2019-20. Kopitar should benefit greatly from Toffoli's shooting percentage regressing upward. Doughty's too talented to perform like he did last year (much like

Subban). Quick probably isn't going to be a .888 save percentage goaltender forever. I'm not sure if the Kings will make the playoffs next year, but they should be much closer to the bubble than they were last season.

Rickard Rakell: Anaheim was a bit of a disaster last year despite John Gibson doing everything he could to save it, and Rakell was no exception. After back-to-back 33-goal seasons, he scored only 18 goals in 2018-19, but most of that was a product of poor shooting luck (he shot only 6.3 percent at even strength despite shooting 12.6 percent throughout his career prior to last season). With some shooting regression and a positive boost from the Carlyle effect, we should see him inch closer to that 30-goal mark again next season.

Alex Wennberg: I know he doesn't shoot very often, but he scored only two goals in 75 games last year, which is extremely low even for him. He literally shot 0 percent at even strength, which is obviously going to regress upward (closer to his career average of 8 percent). His assist totals should also go up with him being the primary playmaker on Columbus' power play now that Artemi Panarin is gone.

Robby Fabbri: If he can stay healthy, Fabbri has the talent to be a 50-point player. That's always been the struggle with him, having played only 32 games in the past two years. I always root for my fellow Mississauga-born players, so I'm hoping we get a full season out of Fabbri and see what the 23-year-old can do with consistent top-six minutes.

Jamie Benn: It felt like we were in the Bizarro World last year with Dallas struggling to score and winning games with elite goaltending. Benn managed to put up only 53 points in 78 games last year, which I have to think is going to turn around. On a power-play unit with Tyler Seguin, Alex Radulov, Joe Pavelski and John Klingberg, there are going to be opportunities for him to rack up assists. He also won't be tasked with running his own line again in 2019-20, which should help him generate significantly more offence than he did last year.

Wayne Simmonds: I didn't think I was going to have Simmonds on this list, but then I started thinking of his situation in New Jersey. He's probably going to play net-front on PP1, and he's going to play alongside some skilled players who can transition the puck up the ice and make backdoor passes to him (whether it's Hall, Hughes, Nico Hischier or Nikita Gusev). Simmonds might not be the player he once was, but it's fair to say he scores more than 30 points for the Devils next season.

Sean Couturier: This doesn't refer to point production (since Couturier scored 76 points again last season) but more so his impact on goal differential. In 2018-19, the Flyers goaltenders stopped only 89.2 percent of the shots at five-on-five when Couturier was on the ice (which is well below the league average of 91.9 percent). This resulted in him having a negative goal differential at even strength despite being one of the best play-drivers in hockey. With Philadelphia's goaltending likely to regress closer to league average (especially with Carter Hart in net), I expect Couturier to have an elite goal differential in 2019-20, which should make him one of the front-runners for the Selke Trophy.

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Sportsnet.ca / Kevin Shattenkirk on Rangers buyout: 'I was pretty pissed off about it'



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Sportsnet Staff | August 5, 2019, 2:20 PM

It's been a tumultuous couple years for Kevin Shattenkirk since that sterling 2016-17 campaign.

After starting that career-best campaign with a dominant 42 points through 61 games for St. Louis, Shattenkirk went on a whirlwind trip that saw him traded to the contending Washington Capitals, signed by his hometown New York Rangers, enduring two underwhelming seasons with the club, and eventually bought out.

The 30-year-old signed on with the Tampa Bay Lightning via a one-year, \$1.75-million deal Monday, speaking to reporters soon after to reflect on his disappointing exit from New York.

"I was pretty pissed off about it," Shattenkirk said of the Rangers' decision to buy out his contract, according to The Associated Press' Stephen Whyno.

"I think I have a huge chip on my shoulder right now. It didn't work out with injuries and performance and with the way the direction of the team, the way that kind of deteriorated from when I signed on July 1 to now."

Lightning GM Julien BriseBois on Kevin Shattenkirk: "He brings experience. ... He's played in a lot of games. He's a young veteran that's played in a lot of meaningful games."

— Stephen Whyno (@SWhyno) August 5, 2019

The New Rochelle, N.Y. native said he doesn't regret signing with the Rangers, but called his tenure in New York "not a success story."

Shattenkirk: "I think I'm pissed off at myself for not taking advantage of the opportunity to play at home better and give them a reason to make it a no-brainer that this wouldn't be their decision."

Adds he's no fan of Rangers going into rebuild.

— Stephen Whyno (@SWhyno) August 5, 2019

He now joins a well-stocked Lightning club whose blue line also includes Norris Trophy winner Victor Hedman and former Ranger Ryan McDonagh.

Shattenkirk had offers from six or seven teams in total, according to Whyno — reportedly including the Toronto Maple Leafs and Winnipeg Jets — but opted to sign with the Bolts.

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