



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Canes Revisionist History: Welcome to the 2011 Playoffs

The Hurricanes had one job on the evening of April 7, 2011. What could life have been like if they had completed it and ended the playoff drought after just one season out?

By Liam Goff

For the better part of the past decade, the Carolina Hurricanes franchise has been mired in near misses. Points lost at inopportune times, draft picks that never panned out and star players that were supposed to save the floundering hockey club have all combined to pile up the misery. But when you look up the definition of "so close yet so far" in the Hurricanes dictionary, the 2010-2011 team may very well have its team photo next to the phrase.

The arrival of a (still) baby-faced Jeff Skinner was a shot in the arm to a team that already had established veterans in the likes of Eric Staal, Erik Cole, Tuomo Ruutu and Cam Ward. The Canes were feeling good and had already passed their point total for the season prior before the end of March. All the team had to do in order to qualify for the playoffs for the first time since the 2008-2009 season and only the second since hoisting Lord Stanley's Cup was win a game against a Tampa Bay Lightning team that had already clinched its spot in the postseason.

It was, as it turned out, easier said than done.

On the final day of the season, the club laid an egg to the tune of a 6-2 drubbing that ended their shot at playoff glory and continued a trend that we know all too familiar to this day.

An important rule change was made prior to the season that had big implications. The Canes finished the season with 91 points, good for third in the now defunct Southeast Division. That point total was two short of the New York Rangers, but the NHL had just changed the previous tie-breaker rules so that shoot-out wins would no longer count into your win total during the season when comparing two teams. With the Hurricanes entering game 82, they had two fewer points than New York but the same number of regulation/overtime wins (ROW). A victory would catapult the Hurricanes over the Blueshirts into the playoffs. We all know what happened next but what if...

In an alternate universe, the Hurricanes pulled off a thrilling 4-2 win with Chad LaRose (great hockey name) icing the game with an empty-netter. The Hurricanes, in as the East's eighth seed, would go on to play the high-powered and top-seeded Washington Capitals in the first round of the playoffs. It's my humble opinion that our hockey club would have fought hard but ultimately fallen short of closing out a series against Alex Ovechkin and company.

However, that isn't as important as what happens after.

At the end of the season, Joe Corvo was shipped out to Boston for a draft pick and Erik Cole signed a deal with Montreal for four years and \$18 million. Corvo was shipped out because management probably felt the team was farther away than the standings indicated and Cole most likely felt the same individually. But what if both players stayed and helped stabilize a burgeoning young-core and assist in taking the team yet another step forward?

Now, neither players are offensive juggernauts, but both play a specific role very well and could have aided the team moving forward. Instead of the team struggling out of the gate and Paul Maurice being replaced by (eye roll) Kirk Muller in November, Maurice is still at the helm, enabling Skinner to be used properly, and helps the Hurricanes return to the post-season for a second year in a row in 2012.

Suddenly, Carolina isn't scaring off big name free agents and Jim Rutherford doesn't have to scrounge for players. I'm not saying the tandem Zach Parise/Ryan Suter signing would've taken place in Raleigh but hey, a guy can dream right?

The biggest change from game 82 of the 2010-2011 season would be the culture change. You know, the same culture change that you've been hearing about all summer? Yes, that one. A win over Tampa could have possibly righted the ship before it got so far off course that we are still waiting on playoff hockey to return in 2018.

Or maybe it just would have resulted in another year of Kirk Muller.



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THE ATHLETIC

Stanley Cup blueprint: How the Metropolitan teams stack up to Capitals' best assets

Craig Custance

There are a lot of ways to win hockey games. There are also a lot of ways to build a team that can contend for a Stanley Cup. But when chatting about the blueprint that tends to work the best, Capitals GM Brian MacLellan said there's usually one common thread.

"You're always, forever going to want depth down the middle. You want to be as strong as you can," MacLellan told The Athletic on Monday. "Those teams have always won. A great one-two punch. A good three and four. I don't think it's ever changed."

And truly, it wasn't until the Capitals had Evgeny Kuznetsov to go with Nicklas Backstrom down the middle that they were in that category. Now, they have their Cup.

That's the eternal ingredient that's usually needed in the NHL. But there were other parts of the Capitals' blueprint that made them special and worthy of a Stanley Cup contention. To get an idea how many teams around the league have a legitimate shot at winning a championship, looking at them through the lens of Washington's success is an interesting exercise. So what made the Capitals great? With MacLellan's help, we identified some characteristics.

1. Great centers with depth down the middle – The Capitals have that covered. Along with Backstrom and Kuznetsov, the Capitals got a strong playoff performance from Lars Eller, a key ingredient in the win.

2. A game breaker – Elite centers may be a must-have, but it's also nice to have a guy who can change the course of the game by himself. In Alex Ovechkin, the Capitals had exactly that. So did other recent Stanley Cup winners like Pittsburgh (Phil Kessel) and Chicago (Patrick Kane).

3. Offensive defensemen – Gone are the days where you'd pair one stay-at-home defenseman with one mobile defenseman and call it a day. The Capitals had a defensive corps that could score, skate and jump into play. One of the sneaky good moves of the regular season was the addition of Michal Kempny to go with the likes of John Carlson, Matt Niskanen and Dmitry Orlov. "His skating is so good," said MacLellan, who believes there's another level to be had for the 27-year-old defenseman.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – It's not quantifiable and it doesn't guarantee anything but playoff heartbreak was definitely a part of the Capitals' DNA. Many of the great teams have a postseason in the past they can point to and say that was part of the building process. MacLellan also said that some difficulties during the season leading into the playoffs can be a good thing, too. "Going through things during the year, helps make you a better team," he said. "It makes you hungrier. You peak at a different time."

5. Size – This attribute comes from MacLellan and the Capitals' size was an advantage he believes helped them go through some good, skilled opponents. And it runs a bit counter to a league that is getting faster and smaller. "We're

a big team and I think size matters in the playoffs," he said. "It came to the forefront in a couple series. During the year, you can get away without it a little more. In the playoffs, you need to be big. Or have enough size all over."

But it can't just be size for the sake of having size. It has to be big players who can contribute.

"They can all play, that's the key," MacLellan said of the Capitals bigger players. "Everybody emphasizes speed now. But having big guys who can skate and play — it's a big, big advantage."

Throughout the rest of the week, we'll break down how the rest of the league stacks up to the Capitals in these categories. But first, we'll start with the rest of Washington's division rivals – the Metropolitan Division.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

1. Great centers – Check. Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin are an all-time example of this. When the Penguins are at their best, they have a No. 3 center who makes matchups all but impossible, and Derick Brassard has that potential, although he's a candidate to play on the wing in camp.

2. A game breaker – Check. Kessel qualifies. Really, so do Crosby and Malkin.

3. Offensive defensemen – Yep. Guys like Kris Letang and Justin Schultz are skilled offensive players and even the oft-maligned signing of Jack Johnson brought in a defenseman who is just a few years removed from a 40-point season. The Penguins qualify here.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – This core has been through everything, including a long stretch where you wondered if Crosby was ever going to win another Stanley Cup. Check.

5. Size – The Penguins aren't as big as the Capitals and really are the team that started the league-wide trend towards playing with team speed as the main identity. It's worked out just fine for Pittsburgh but for the sake of this exercise, they don't qualify.

Total – Pittsburgh registers in four out of five categories. As long as Crosby and Malkin are two of the best players in hockey, this team is a Stanley Cup threat.

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

1. Great centers – Maybe we're fudging here a little bit, but the Flyers are going to get a check mark. Yes, Claude Giroux played on the wing last season, but he can slide into the middle when needed. Sean Couturier has emerged as one of the games best two-way centermen. Nolan Patrick made major progress as the season went on. In 40 games before the All-Star break, he had nine points. In the 33 after, he had 21. Now, imagine a full season with James van Riemsdyk on his wing.



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2. A game breaker – I mean, Giroux qualifies if we're not counting him in the above category. New addition van Riemsdyk had 36 goals last season and he did it playing less than 15 minutes per game. There isn't necessarily an Ovechkin in the bunch, but that's a high standard. We'll go half-credit.

3. Offensive defensemen – Shayne Gostisbehere certainly qualifies here and pairs quite nicely with Ivan Provorov. Travis Sanheim is still scratching the surface on what he can bring to the table offensively, but there's a lot to like about the young defensemen in Philadelphia. Check.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – This is the portion that comes next for this group. The young players have gotten a taste of the postseason, but this isn't a group that has necessarily gone through a few of the protracted long, playoff grinds that are often necessary for a championship, despite some of the veterans having that experience.

5. Size – Wayne Simmonds is a player who has that ideal mix of skill and size that pays off in the spring. Patrick and Couturier aren't exactly small down the middle. Van Riemsdyk is 6-foot-3. There's a nice blend of size and skill throughout this lineup. Check.

Total – 3.5 out of 5. This is a franchise that's ready to knock on the door in the Eastern Conference among Stanley Cup contenders. It's an exciting time to be a Flyers fan.

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

1. Great centers – The Blue Jackets have good centers. They have versatile centers. They have an emerging potential future star in Pierre-Luc Dubois. Alexander Wennberg can play on my team any day of the week. But they don't have any centers you'd call elite. Not at this point.

2. A game breaker – Artemi Panarin certainly fits this category. He's one of the few players in the league who can change the course of a game by himself. Ideally, you want your best forward at center, but in Panarin's case, it doesn't matter. He's so good. It's also possible he's not on the team at the start of training camp so there's that.

3. Offensive defenseman – Zach Werenski is Exhibit A in how you'd want your young, modern defenseman to play. He's almost like a rover. Seth Jones is a legitimate Norris candidate, in large part because of his skating and ability to transition the puck. They could probably use one more in Columbus, but these two are so good, they qualify.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – Columbus is getting there in this department. They don't have experience as a group beyond the first round, but losing to the Capitals last year in round one, when an overtime goal in Game 3 probably advances them, is some playoff heartbreak that they can draw on for experience. Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky now has an .891 save percentage in 24 playoff games. That should be enough hardship for a half a point here.

5. Size – This team isn't going to get pushed around. Josh Anderson is that big winger you like to have in the playoffs. Nick Foligno plays bigger than his six-foot frame. David Savard brings size and physicality to the defense. There's a good mix in Columbus to compliment the smaller players like Cam Atkinson and Panarin.

Total: 3.5 out of 5. The way the Panarin situation settles will go a long way in determining just how close this franchise is to real Stanley Cup legitimacy.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS

1. Great centers – Oh man, we're not going to do this to Islanders fans. Just know that in Mathew Barzal, the Islanders still have a great, young center in which to build around in the post-John Tavares era. That's a hard piece to get and they have it. If you can get over what might have been for the next eight years, it's a positive. But they need more than him to be a Cup contender.

2. A game breaker – Anders Lee has 74 goals in his past two seasons. He's not the prototypical game-breaker in the sense that he's going to take over a game and pull you out of your seat. He does most of his damage in close range where he's one of the best in the league in front of the net. He shot 19.2 percent last year, so expecting another 40-goal season might be a stretch, but we're giving him this category.

3. Offensive defensemen – Nick Leddy can skate like the wind and just put up a 42-point season. Both he and Ryan Pullock hit double-digits in goals, but it thins out a bit after that. The loss of Calvin de Haan is going to hurt the defense. The Islanders have good, young defensemen and hit in the draft with Noah Dobson and the intriguing Bode Wilde. There's enough here for half-credit with room to grow.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – The Islanders only got out of the first round once in the Tavares era. There isn't a ton of experience for the core here as a group.

5. Size – This group has some size, especially at forward with guys like Andrew Ladd, Brock Nelson and Lee. GM Lou Lamoriello brought in some edge in the form of Leo Komarov and Matt Martin. There is definitely enough size here to compete with the bigger teams.

Total – 2.5 out of 5. This offseason was one that could have taken the Islanders from good to great. Even though it didn't pan out, there's still a lot of potential here and enough pieces for Lamoriello to go big-game hunting for a player like Panarin if he is so motivated.

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1. Great centers – Carolina enters this season weaker down the middle than last year with the losses of Elias Lindholm and Derek Ryan. The wild card is prospect Martin Necas, a Czech center who has the potential to be a top-six forward sooner rather than later, but this is still a real area of need for the Hurricanes.

2. A game breaker – Sebastian Aho is getting there, following up a rookie season with a 29-goal performance last season. The expectation is that Andrei Svechnikov fills that role for the next decade in Raleigh. The No. 2 overall pick in the 2018 draft had 40 goals in 44 games last year for Barrie and enters this season on the short list of Calder favorites. Let's see it for a season first.

3. Offensive defensemen – GM Don Waddell added a 25-year-old defenseman who put up 17 goals last season in Dougie Hamilton. Jaccob Slavin is a 30-point defenseman



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and, if Justin Faulk is on the team this season, he's another double-digit goal-scorer. This is a potentially great defense.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – You've got to make the playoffs to have a core hardened by the playoffs.

5. Size – There's a good mix in Carolina. Teuvo Teravainen and Aho are the small, skilled guys. Jordan Staal has size down the middle, and among defensemen Hamilton, Brett Pesce, Jaccob Slavin and Haydn Fleury are all 6-foot-3 or bigger, although Hamilton has been criticized for not using his 6-foot-6 body to his advantage. We'll give Carolina credit here.

Total – 2 out of 5. There are nice pieces in Carolina, but this group is likely still years away from Cup-quality.

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

1. Great centers – Nico Hischier was an important building block to the rebuilding puzzle in New Jersey, but he's not quite at the elite center stage of his career yet. But he's a start. This year is a good barometer to see if Pavel Zacha can emerge as a legitimate second-line center. But the Devils still need work down the middle.

2. A game breaker – Check. Taylor Hall is a superstar and proved capable of carrying the team for stretches of time last season. We are watching peak Taylor Hall right now and the Devils will want to take advantage.

3. Offensive defensemen – Most of the defensemen in the Devils' top four have an offensive element to their game. What this defense lacks is the high-end offensive defenseman to bump everybody down into better matchups. Half a point here.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – The young core in New Jersey is just getting started.

5. Size – The Devils aren't a particularly big team. GM Ray Shero, as he should, has been focused on adding high-end skill, but it has come in the form of 5-foot-10 Sam Vatanen, 5-foot-10 Will Butcher, 6-foot-1 Hall, 5-foot-11 Kyle Palmieri, etc.

Total: 1.5 out of 5. There are good things happening with the Devils, but using the Capitals as a measuring stick, there's still work to be done.

NEW YORK RANGERS

1. Great centers – Even when the Rangers were at their peak in recent years, this was always a bit of a disadvantage. They had good but not great centers. The hope has to be that this rebuild lands them one at some point.

2. A game breaker – Nope. Like the Islanders, this is another team that should be in full-on pursuit of Panarin.

3. Offensive defensemen – Kevin Shattenkirk qualifies. Brady Skjei has a great mix of size and skill. He's an important building block for this defense, but they still need a few more pieces on this front to get a check mark for Cup contention.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – The Rangers are slowly losing the players who accumulated the playoff experience together. Most of it is in Tampa. But as long as Henrik Lundqvist and his wealth of experience is around, you have to give them at least half credit here.

5. Size – There's size up front in the form of Kevin Hayes, Chris Kreider and Jimmy Vesey. Skjei and Marc Staal provide it on the back end. For what it's worth, there are players with a nice mix of size and skill on the Rangers roster.

Total – 1.5 out of 5. There's still a lot of work to be done on the Rangers' rebuild, one still in the early stages.

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The Athletic / What should be asked of USA Hockey's controversial hire John Vanbiesbrouck?

By Scott Burnside

The decision to elevate John Vanbiesbrouck to one of the most important jobs in USA Hockey — a job that makes him the face of the national hockey body for everything from grassroots initiatives to Olympic team construction — despite his history of using the N-word to describe one of his players immediately sparked questions about USA Hockey's construction and issues of race in the sport.



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Headlines rang out: "What was Team USA thinking in hiring Vanbiesbrouck? Or was it?"

But the most pressing and complex questions now are less about whether he should have been hired and more about whether he can make it work and how to do so without hiding from his past.

"The point is that that word hurts more than any other word and I'm very aware of it and so is everybody else," Vanbiesbrouck said during a conversation with The Athletic. "But I'm also a very inclusive person. That hasn't defined my life, that moment. As much as I don't like it and I'm sorry for it and I regret it, I can't change it anymore. I can't change the hurt. So you ask the question, what have you done? What have you done? I've done a lot of things. No. 1 is I had to repent of it and ask God for forgiveness because I live by faith and I violated my own principles. And I know that.

"The question is does that define my leadership skills? Does it define who I am as a person? That's what everybody seems to be weighing in on. They have a right to their own opinion. And I respect it."

In March 2003, Vanbiesbrouck was the coach and general manager of the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds. While in a billet family's home, angered over some players breaking curfew and apparently drinking beer, Vanbiesbrouck referred to his 19-year-old captain Trevor Daley with the racial slur in front of several of Daley's teammates.

Within days of the incident, Vanbiesbrouck stepped down from his position and agreed to give up his 25 percent ownership stake in the team. The team was fined \$50,000, the largest fine in the history of the OHL at the time.

Several times during our conversation Vanbiesbrouck noted the heavy price he paid because of the incident, but he has never contacted Daley in the 15 years since that night.

Over the years, Vanbiesbrouck was a broadcast analyst for NHL games in which Daley played, but Vanbiesbrouck said he didn't feel it was right to "intrude" in those circumstances.

There was a letter Vanbiesbrouck said he wrote to Daley and his mother, Trudy, but it appears it never reached its intended recipients.

"I don't know if it ever got delivered," Vanbiesbrouck said. "But I think it never did or else maybe we would have [had] a time to sit down and just rebuild the relationship. But that hasn't happened."

Why has Vanbiesbrouck made no attempts to reach out to Daley over the years — the NHL veteran is, after all, not particularly hard to find?

"But neither am I," Vanbiesbrouck replied. "I'm not that hard to find."

When suggested that most people would put the onus on Vanbiesbrouck to reach out to try to make amends with Daley, he agreed.

"I would love for that to happen. I'm here. And I wish he was here and sitting down with us right now," Vanbiesbrouck said.

"I know that, look it, I know I paid a high price. You know? Is that justice well served?" Vanbiesbrouck added. "And I respect the questions, that to sit down with him, and maybe the onus is more on me now because it's back in the public eye and people are wondering why? That's fair. But in today's day, I'm totally respectful of everybody. And totally inclusive of everybody. And that's important for this position that I'm in. And I'm very aware, OK? And I'd love for it to end. You know. And there needs to be an ending."

Whatever price was paid by Vanbiesbrouck, he stayed with the game and the game stayed with him, as he turned years of volunteering and leadership at various levels within USA Hockey into the role of assistant executive director hockey operations.

And given the layers of this story, the simplest question of the lot might be: Why Vanbiesbrouck for this job?

New USA Hockey executive director Pat Kelleher and USA Hockey seemingly view Vanbiesbrouck through one prism — the hockey prism.

In addition to his work with USA Hockey, Vanbiesbrouck played 882 NHL games, mostly with the Rangers and Panthers, won the Vezina Trophy and was a three-time All-Star.

But Vanbiesbrouck's past demands that different lenses be employed in assessing his qualifications for this job and judging him simply on his hockey resume was naïve at best and negligent at worst. This post and the importance of the work USA Hockey does to open the game up to as wide an audience as possible demanded greater care be taken. At the very least, a full investigation of how Vanbiesbrouck's past would impact his ability to do the job should have been conducted.

It didn't happen that way. In fact, it appears that in assessing that night in Sault Ste. Marie 15 years ago, Kelleher relied heavily on Vanbiesbrouck's interpretation of the event, and his expression of remorse and contrition, to resolve whatever concern the incident might have created.

"You know we talked to a lot of people about the position about John," Kelleher said during a long conversation he and Vanbiesbrouck had with The Athletic at the NHL draft in June. "I spoke primarily to John about the issue and all of that, so I had to get an understanding from him on his side of it or where it was. And again tried to get a lot of feedback from people on it and knew it would be a situation we would have to deal with and understand. A tough incident. John certainly has spoken about it and his regrets and remorse and all that. So we felt that was significant. And yeah, did know it would be something that would come up for sure."

Still, no one from USA Hockey has reached out to Daley to get his perspective. And as far as we can gather, USA Hockey didn't reach out to any members of the black hockey community to gather information on what this hiring might mean, either.

As one prominent member of the black hockey community told us, Kelleher forgave Vanbiesbrouck for what transpired with Daley. Kelleher, and by extension USA Hockey, forgave Vanbiesbrouck for uttering a word that shattered a young man and his family.

"He's done a lot of really good things," one top hockey executive with strong ties to USA Hockey said. "And when you're around him you can tell that hockey and American hockey and the hockey players matter to him."

The executive pointed to Vanbiesbrouck's work with USA Hockey's junior group as being especially forward-thinking.

But, the executive added, in the times he's heard Vanbiesbrouck address the Daley situation since being named to this post, he has been left cold by Vanbiesbrouck's explanation of how he's evolved, the lack of evidence that the moment changed him.

"I didn't hear any of that," he said.

Daley has not spoken publicly about the 2003 event in many years and even then he did so in the most circumspect of ways. Those who are close to the veteran NHL defenseman know that, while the incident is still a source of disappointment and pain, he is focused on moving on. It's why the two-time Stanley Cup champion didn't speak out when Vanbiesbrouck was appointed to his current post with USA Hockey.

So the question remains, what should USA Hockey, the NHL and the rest of the game's gatekeepers demand of Vanbiesbrouck given his new role?

Jay Coakley, professor emeritus from the sociology department at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs who has written on issues of race and sports for decades, said that public mistakes made by people like Vanbiesbrouck, mistakes that become part of the public discussion, require a public reckoning to help erase the stigma that those mistakes carry.



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"It's easy for whites to say this is in the past. It's not so easy for blacks to say this was in the past."

It's likewise easy for white people to take these incidents as distinct, separate incidents, "but that's not how African Americans see this," Coakley added. "They see this as part of a cultural phenomenon and a structural phenomenon."

Another prominent member of the black hockey community familiar with both Daley and Vanbiesbrouck believes strongly in second chances. But he also believes that earning those opportunities begins by making amends with Daley.

"I think he needs to address it first and foremost with Trevor," he said. "And then I think he needs to speak to it publicly from a standpoint of not scripted questions but questions that will allow people to understand how he feels, how he genuinely feels right now. I really believe it starts with him."

It appears the NHL believes that, too.

At USA Hockey's recent national congress, Kim Davis, who was hired by the NHL last November as the executive vice president, social impact, growth initiatives and legislative affairs, met with Vanbiesbrouck and Kelleher.

The NHL provides funding to national hockey bodies like USA Hockey and Hockey Canada every year to help fuel the growth of the game. Last year, the NHL gave \$8 million to USA Hockey and the two organizations have worked closely for years on a host of initiatives, including diversity programs aimed at opening up the game to communities that traditionally don't play the game.

We are told that one of the issues that came up in the conversation in Colorado Springs was the hiring of Vanbiesbrouck and the lack of contact between Vanbiesbrouck and Daley over the years.

A source familiar with the discussion told The Athletic that the league would like to see contact made to help bring some closure to the matter.

The NHL would not make Davis available to speak on the matter, saying the discussion with USA Hockey officials was a private matter.

Kelleher described the meeting with Davis as very positive.

"We had a great meeting with Kim," he said. "I think again we all try to work together to move forward in the things that we're doing, understanding that we rely on the NHL quite a bit. Had good conversation with them and I think again they're willing to help and help us continue to move forward, do the things that we can do and be successful all across the board. But also they're involved with us in things that we do specifically on diversity and inclusion."

As for resolving the fact Vanbiesbrouck has had no contact with Daley, Kelleher wouldn't say exactly what the league was looking for in that area, although he did acknowledge it was a topic of conversation.

"Yeah, I don't want to speak for the league but I think we had some good conversations regarding the whole situation. And where Kim and their group can be helpful," Kelleher said.

Both the NHL and USA Hockey have a big stake in how this plays out, according to Coakley.

For every shining moment — like Willie O'Ree's upcoming induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame — there is a moment like Devante Smith-Pelly of the Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals being taunted racially by fans in Chicago this past season. Or Givani Smith, a forward with the Kitchener Rangers, being subjected to racial slurs by fans this spring. The comments, some threatening, were so dire the team obtained a police escort to its hotel and to the rink in Sault Ste. Marie prior to a playoff game.

These incidents aren't Vanbiesbrouck's fault, but in his new role it certainly behooves him to be center stage when these kinds of incidents take place. Further, it would seem critical that, if Vanbiesbrouck is a

different man — a man who told us he's never used the N-word since the Daley incident — he makes sure he's visible in places like Washington, D.C., at Fort Dupont Ice Arena, home to a long-standing minority hockey program; or in Philadelphia where former Flyers owner Ed Snider started his youth hockey initiative in 2005 to help underserved youth; or in Harlem where the successful Hockey in Harlem program started in 1987, has helped kids who otherwise wouldn't get a chance to play hockey. Or maybe Vanbiesbrouck should go on the road with O'Ree, who now dedicates his life to spreading the message that this can be anyone's game, regardless of what they look like or where they come from. Since 1996, O'Ree has worked with the NHL's diversity program, one started with the help of longtime USA Hockey executive Lou Vairo.

"In this case, USA Hockey must decide what is right for them," Coakley said.

"Do they want to recruit black kids into hockey and support black players? African American players, would-be players and their parents, and black spectators are sensitive to such issues," Coakley wrote to The Athletic. "Unless they feel that the issue has been resolved to the point that they can move beyond it, it may influence their perception of USA Hockey and hockey in general. White people may say, let's forgive and forget, but they have not had to cope with centuries of accumulated racism and the everyday indignities that African Americans still experience."

There is so much to like about what USA Hockey has done in recent years.

Last season saw a record number of players under the USA Hockey umbrella (562,145) and a record number of players eight years of age and under. It marked the third straight year for record totals for that age group — a sign that grassroots programs were successful in drawing players to the game.

In the past five years, youth participation is up nine percent and the number of girls registered rose 23 percent.

The game also continues to grow dramatically in non-traditional markets like California, Arizona, North Carolina and Tennessee with participation rising anywhere from two-fold to four-fold since the early 1990s. And during the past five years, USA Hockey's southeastern district saw participation grow 18 percent, making it one of the fastest growing regions in the United States.

As for the NHL, it has put support behind initiatives like You Can Play and its own diversity program. A year ago, the NHL, along with other hockey bodies like the NHL Players' Association and USA Hockey, unveiled a declaration of principles that purports to define a shared vision of how to make the experience of hockey the best it can be for players and their families.

A longtime friend of Daley who also grew up in USA Hockey and has strong ties to the organization admitted he found the topic complicated but, at the end of the day, believes strongly that people can change and that good can come from bad.

"Oftentimes people that make mistakes like that can come and become some of the biggest advocates for doing the right things after learning from it and dealing with their own mistakes and, if that's the case (with Vanbiesbrouck), perfect," he said.

Big picture, this longtime NHLer added, it's important to understand the often critical impact that USA Hockey and its people, from coaches to managers to senior executives, have on young people and their lives.

"It's critical that we look with a hard eye at what we're doing and the messages we're sending," he said.

For his part, Vanbiesbrouck said he relishes the notion that he is seen as one of those people who can turn something horrible into something positive.

"I do and I would love to advocate for that conversation to help in any way, shape or form; that a bad situation can turn into a better



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conversation and growth," Vanbiesbrouck said. "I don't know how that will roll out, but I would. Your question to me is would I like to play a role in that? I would say, yes.

"It's interesting how hockey is built on this, overcoming bad situations and making a good situation come out of it. ... Those failures have a way to grow into better situations and to have real conversations about real issues that are presented to us today, and I would hope that I would be included and be asked to be involved in those discussions knowing that, yeah, I made a mistake and this is how it affected my life, and if I can help one person in the process and that leads to two, I'd like to be part of that."

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The Athletic / Stanley Cup blueprint: How the Metropolitan teams stack up to Capitals' best assets

Craig Custance

Aug 7, 2018

There are a lot of ways to win hockey games. There are also a lot of ways to build a team that can contend for a Stanley Cup. But when chatting about the blueprint that tends to work the best, Capitals GM Brian MacLellan said there's usually one common thread.

"You're always, forever going to want depth down the middle. You want to be as strong as you can," MacLellan told The Athletic on Monday. "Those teams have always won. A great one-two punch. A good three and four. I don't think it's ever changed."

And truly, it wasn't until the Capitals had Evgeny Kuznetsov to go with Nicklas Backstrom down the middle that they were in that category. Now, they have their Cup.

That's the eternal ingredient that's usually needed in the NHL. But there were other parts of the Capitals' blueprint that made them special and worthy of a Stanley Cup contention. To get an idea how many teams around the league have a legitimate shot at winning a championship, looking at them through the lens of Washington's success is an interesting exercise. So what made the Capitals great? With MacLellan's help, we identified some characteristics.

1. Great centers with depth down the middle – The Capitals have that covered. Along with Backstrom and Kuznetsov, the Capitals got a strong playoff performance from Lars Eller, a key ingredient in the win.
2. A game breaker – Elite centers may be a must-have, but it's also nice to have a guy who can change the course of the game by himself. In Alex Ovechkin, the Capitals had exactly that. So did other recent Stanley Cup winners like Pittsburgh (Phil Kessel) and Chicago (Patrick Kane).
3. Offensive defensemen – Gone are the days where you'd pair one stay-at-home defenseman with one mobile defenseman and call it a day. The Capitals had a defensive corps that could score, skate and jump into play. One of the sneaky good moves of the regular season was the addition of Michal Kempny to go with the likes of John Carlson, Matt Niskanen and Dmitry Orlov. "His skating is so good," said MacLellan, who believes there's another level to be had for the 27-year-old defenseman.
4. A core hardened by the playoffs – It's not quantifiable and it doesn't guarantee anything but playoff heartbreak was definitely a part of the Capitals' DNA. Many of the great teams have a postseason in the past

they can point to and say that was part of the building process.

MacLellan also said that some difficulties during the season leading into the playoffs can be a good thing, too. "Going through things during the year, helps make you a better team," he said. "It makes you hungrier. You peak at a different time."

5. Size – This attribute comes from MacLellan and the Capitals' size was an advantage he believes helped them go through some good, skilled opponents. And it runs a bit counter to a league that is getting faster and smaller. "We're a big team and I think size matters in the playoffs," he said. "It came to the forefront in a couple series. During the year, you can get away without it a little more. In the playoffs, you need to be big. Or have enough size all over."

But it can't just be size for the sake of having size. It has to be big players who can contribute.

"They can all play, that's the key," MacLellan said of the Capitals bigger players. "Everybody emphasizes speed now. But having big guys who can skate and play — it's a big, big advantage."

Throughout the rest of the week, we'll break down how the rest of the league stacks up to the Capitals in these categories. But first, we'll start with the rest of Washington's division rivals – the Metropolitan Division.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

1. Great centers – Check. Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin are an all-time example of this. When the Penguins are at their best, they have a No. 3 center who makes matchups all but impossible, and Derick Brassard has that potential, although he's a candidate to play on the wing in camp.
 2. A game breaker – Check. Kessel qualifies. Really, so do Crosby and Malkin.
 3. Offensive defensemen – Yep. Guys like Kris Letang and Justin Schultz are skilled offensive players and even the oft-maligned signing of Jack Johnson brought in a defenseman who is just a few years removed from a 40-point season. The Penguins qualify here.
 4. A core hardened by the playoffs – This core has been through everything, including a long stretch where you wondered if Crosby was ever going to win another Stanley Cup. Check.
 5. Size – The Penguins aren't as big as the Capitals and really are the team that started the league-wide trend towards playing with team speed as the main identity. It's worked out just fine for Pittsburgh but for the sake of this exercise, they don't qualify.
- Total – Pittsburgh registers in four out of five categories. As long as Crosby and Malkin are two of the best players in hockey, this team is a Stanley Cup threat.

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

1. Great centers – Maybe we're fudging here a little bit, but the Flyers are going to get a check mark. Yes, Claude Giroux played on the wing last season, but he can slide into the middle when needed. Sean Couturier has emerged as one of the games best two-way centermen. Nolan Patrick made major progress as the season went on. In 40 games before the All-Star break, he had nine points. In the 33 after, he had 21. Now, imagine a full season with James van Riemsdyk on his wing.
2. A game breaker – I mean, Giroux qualifies if we're not counting him in the above category. New addition van Riemsdyk had 36 goals last season and he did it playing less than 15 minutes per game. There isn't necessarily an Ovechkin in the bunch, but that's a high standard. We'll go half-credit.
3. Offensive defensemen – Shayne Gostisbehere certainly qualifies here and pairs quite nicely with Ivan Provorov. Travis Sanheim is still scratching the surface on what he can bring to the table offensively, but there's a lot to like about the young defensemen in Philadelphia. Check.



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4. A core hardened by the playoffs – This is the portion that comes next for this group. The young players have gotten a taste of the postseason, but this isn't a group that has necessarily gone through a few of the protracted long, playoff grinds that are often necessary for a championship, despite some of the veterans having that experience.

5. Size – Wayne Simmonds is a player who has that ideal mix of skill and size that pays off in the spring. Patrick and Couturier aren't exactly small down the middle. Van Riemsdyk is 6-foot-3. There's a nice blend of size and skill throughout this lineup. Check.

Total – 3.5 out of 5. This is a franchise that's ready to knock on the door in the Eastern Conference among Stanley Cup contenders. It's an exciting time to be a Flyers fan.

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

1. Great centers – The Blue Jackets have good centers. They have versatile centers. They have an emerging potential future star in Pierre-Luc Dubois. Alexander Wennberg can play on my team any day of the week. But they don't have any centers you'd call elite. Not at this point.

2. A game breaker – Artemi Panarin certainly fits this category. He's one of the few players in the league who can change the course of a game by himself. Ideally, you want your best forward at center, but in Panarin's case, it doesn't matter. He's so good. It's also possible he's not on the team at the start of training camp so there's that.

3. Offensive defenseman – Zach Werenski is Exhibit A in how you'd want your young, modern defenseman to play. He's almost like a rover. Seth Jones is a legitimate Norris candidate, in large part because of his skating and ability to transition the puck. They could probably use one more in Columbus, but these two are so good, they qualify.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – Columbus is getting there in this department. They don't have experience as a group beyond the first round, but losing to the Capitals last year in round one, when an overtime goal in Game 3 probably advances them, is some playoff heartbreak that they can draw on for experience. Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky now has an .891 save percentage in 24 playoff games. That should be enough hardship for a half a point here.

5. Size – This team isn't going to get pushed around. Josh Anderson is that big winger you like to have in the playoffs. Nick Foligno plays bigger than his six-foot frame. David Savard brings size and physicality to the defense. There's a good mix in Columbus to compliment the smaller players like Cam Atkinson and Panarin.

Total: 3.5 out of 5. The way the Panarin situation settles will go a long way in determining just how close this franchise is to real Stanley Cup legitimacy.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS

1. Great centers – Oh man, we're not going to do this to Islanders fans. Just know that in Mathew Barzal, the Islanders still have a great, young center in which to build around in the post-John Tavares era. That's a hard piece to get and they have it. If you can get over what might have been for the next eight years, it's a positive. But they need more than him to be a Cup contender.

2. A game breaker – Anders Lee has 74 goals in his past two seasons. He's not the prototypical game-breaker in the sense that he's going to take over a game and pull you out of your seat. He does most of his damage in close range where he's one of the best in the league in front of the net. He shot 19.2 percent last year, so expecting another 40-goal season might be a stretch, but we're giving him this category.

3. Offensive defensemen – Nick Leddy can skate like the wind and just put up a 42-point season. Both he and Ryan Pullock hit double-digits in goals, but it thins out a bit after that. The loss of Calvin de Haan is going to hurt the defense. The Islanders have good, young defensemen and hit in the draft with Noah Dobson and the intriguing Bode Wilde. There's enough here for half-credit with room to grow.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – The Islanders only got out of the first round once in the Tavares era. There isn't a ton of experience for the core here as a group.

5. Size – This group has some size, especially at forward with guys like Andrew Ladd, Brock Nelson and Lee. GM Lou Lamoriello brought in some edge in the form of Leo Komarov and Matt Martin. There is definitely enough size here to compete with the bigger teams.

Total – 2.5 out of 5. This offseason was one that could have taken the Islanders from good to great. Even though it didn't pan out, there's still a lot of potential here and enough pieces for Lamoriello to go big-game hunting for a player like Panarin if he is so motivated.

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1. Great centers – Carolina enters this season weaker down the middle than last year with the losses of Elias Lindholm and Derek Ryan. The wild card is prospect Martin Necas, a Czech center who has the potential to be a top-six forward sooner rather than later, but this is still a real area of need for the Hurricanes.

2. A game breaker – Sebastian Aho is getting there, following up a rookie season with a 29-goal performance last season. The expectation is that Andrei Svechnikov fills that role for the next decade in Raleigh. The No. 2 overall pick in the 2018 draft had 40 goals in 44 games last year for Barrie and enters this season on the short list of Calder favorites. Let's see it for a season first.

3. Offensive defensemen – GM Don Waddell added a 25-year-old defenseman who put up 17 goals last season in Dougie Hamilton. Jacob Slavin is a 30-point defenseman and, if Justin Faulk is on the team this season, he's another double-digit goal-scorer. This is a potentially great defense.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – You've got to make the playoffs to have a core hardened by the playoffs.

5. Size – There's a good mix in Carolina. Teuvo Teravainen and Aho are the small, skilled guys. Jordan Staal has size down the middle, and among defensemen Hamilton, Brett Pesce, Jacob Slavin and Haydn Fleury are all 6-foot-3 or bigger, although Hamilton has been criticized for not using his 6-foot-6 body to his advantage. We'll give Carolina credit here.

Total – 2 out of 5. There are nice pieces in Carolina, but this group is likely still years away from Cup-quality.

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

1. Great centers – Nico Hischier was an important building block to the rebuilding puzzle in New Jersey, but he's not quite at the elite center stage of his career yet. But he's a start. This year is a good barometer to see if Pavel Zacha can emerge as a legitimate second-line center. But the Devils still need work down the middle.

2. A game breaker – Check. Taylor Hall is a superstar and proved capable of carrying the team for stretches of time last season. We are watching peak Taylor Hall right now and the Devils will want to take advantage.

3. Offensive defensemen – Most of the defensemen in the Devils' top four have an offensive element to their game. What this defense lacks is the high-end offensive defenseman to bump everybody down into better matchups. Half a point here.

4. A core hardened by the playoffs – The young core in New Jersey is just getting started.

5. Size – The Devils aren't a particularly big team. GM Ray Shero, as he should, has been focused on adding high-end skill, but it has come in the form of 5-foot-10 Sam Vatanen, 5-foot-10 Will Butcher, 6-foot-1 Hall, 5-foot-11 Kyle Palmieri, etc.

Total: 1.5 out of 5. There are good things happening with the Devils, but using the Capitals as a measuring stick, there's still work to be done.



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NEW YORK RANGERS

1. Great centers – Even when the Rangers were at their peak in recent years, this was always a bit of a disadvantage. They had good but not great centers. The hope has to be that this rebuild lands them one at some point.
2. A game breaker – Nope. Like the Islanders, this is another team that should be in full-on pursuit of Panarin.
3. Offensive defensemen – Kevin Shattenkirk qualifies. Brady Skjei has a great mix of size and skill. He's an important building block for this defense, but they still need a few more pieces on this front to get a check mark for Cup contention.
4. A core hardened by the playoffs – The Rangers are slowly losing the players who accumulated the playoff experience together. Most of it is in Tampa. But as long as Henrik Lundqvist and his wealth of experience is around, you have to give them at least half credit here.
5. Size – There's size up front in the form of Kevin Hayes, Chris Kreider and Jimmy Vesey. Skjei and Marc Staal provide it on the back end. For what it's worth, there are players with a nice mix of size and skill on the Rangers roster.

Total – 1.5 out of 5. There's still a lot of work to be done on the Rangers' rebuild, one still in the early stages.

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Sportsnet.ca / Connor McDavid talks Jack Hughes, Oilers moves, linemate search

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

August 7, 2018, 9:02 PM

TORONTO – Connor McDavid uses the word funny, but he's not laughing.

He's the captain of the Edmonton Oilers, who finished 18 points out of a playoff berth in 2017-18, a year in which some critics leapt from pegging that team as Stanley Cup favourites to writing them off before all the Halloween candy had been gobbled up.

He's the captain of the most recent edition of Team Canada, the one that floundered in the medal round and finished fourth at the world championship in May, the first national squad in four years to not leave with something shiny around their necks.

Individually, only a fool would blame McDavid — the most outstanding hockey player on the planet two years running, as voted by his peers — for these failures, even partially.

He won his second consecutive NHL scoring race in 2018, with a personal best 41 goals and 108 points. He piled up 17 points in 10 games for his homeland at the worlds. Earlier this week, the NHL Network anointed him the best centre in the game (again). A defiant "Crosby's better!" debate never arrived.

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.

He's the best right now. Present tense.

And yet, hockey is the ultimate team sport. One man cannot LeBron his way through June — even if that man is faster, smoother, more talented and more determined than anyone he shares a sheet with. McDavid didn't win the league MVP only because his supporting cast, taken as a whole, was lousy. He needs help, and judging by the Oilers limited off-season movement, it must arise from within.

So when McDavid, a month away from his fourth NHL training camp, muses about his potential wingers — Ty Rattie? Kailer Yamamoto? Bueller? — he says funny, but not in an LOL way.

"It's funny that we talk about it, and it's been three years now," McDavid said Tuesday after an intense, 90-minute skills workout at Toronto's Pro Edge Power camp. "I was able to find a little chemistry with Nuge [centre-turned right winger Ryan Nugent-Hopkins] and Ty Rattie at the end of the year, so you hope to come into that. Or maybe someone new. You hope to come into training camp and stay with someone and try to build your game with someone."

A self-described homebody, McDavid has been skating regularly for weeks now. He feels refreshed and looks driven after bouncing around Europe (Paris, London, Amsterdam) with girlfriend Lauren Kyle and friends for a while. "Which was awesome — to get away from everyone and everything. Spend some time with friends," he says.

Weaving through the increasingly popular skill-handling obstacles at PEP, which force players to up their hand speed and sharpen their edge work, McDavid starts off every drill, and none of the pros who follow — Connor Brown, Dylan Larkin, Boone Jenner, Alex DeBrincat among them — are as swift or nimble. McDavid's reaction time is so mesmerizing up close, Larkin, the last NHLer to hold the crown of Faster Skater pre-McDavid, doesn't dare suggest he could take him.

"Connor, for sure," Larkin concedes. "He's fast. Quick hands. The way he skates, you can tell he's been doing this training for a while now, and it clearly pays off for him."

McDavid, as ever, is trying to improve every aspect of his game. Despite his year-over-year goal total jumping from 30 to 41, his reputation is that of passer and playmaker first, so he's again pouring summer hours into his shot.

"It's hard to work on the other things," he admits. "You can talk about how you want to work on your defence, but how are you going to do that in the summer unless you're scrimmaging?"

So he continues to zip and spin through pylons and expert players like they are the same.

At one point, Jack Hughes — the 17-year-old projected to go No. 1 overall in the 2019 draft — accepts a perfect lead pass from McDavid's tape and you wonder if the two have a relationship.

"We're friendly with each other, I guess. He's been really nice to me. I'm not expecting to be friends with him or anything. As long as he's nice to me, that's all I'm asking for," Hughes explains. No phenom-to-phenom draft-year secrets have been revealed.

"It's kinda just been him chirping me about going to the OHL," says Hughes, who will return to the U.S. National Team Development Program. "He's a nice guy."

McDavid has trained with Hughes a couple times last summer and this one. Any advice McDavid passes to Jack, he reasons, wouldn't matter.

"You look at all the kids who have come in and done their thing — there's so many different examples he can relate to — it's not going to be an issue. He's so good that he's probably just waiting to get to the draft," says McDavid.

He launches into a scouting report that could fit either of them: "Such a good skater. He's very agile. He just looks smooth with the puck. He's obviously going to be a very good player."



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Quinn Hughes, Jack's older brother and the shiniest addition to the Canucks' prospect pool, believes not only is McDavid hands-down the best at running the drills, he sets a tone.

"Especially Jack watches him and sees how good he is and takes things from what he sees out here and tries to apply it. Seeing all these pros, being around these guys is really good for the both of us," Quinn explains.

"Nowadays, guys are so serious and skilled about it. No one can really take breaks. I mean, you watch the best player in the world and he's out here too, so ..."

So ... how 'bout them Oilers?

Purse-strung on July 1 by the giant contracts given to McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and critical lightning rod Milan Lucic in recent summers, McDavid says the consistent message from GM Peter Chiarelli to players and fans was that a big move would only be made if it presented itself.

"But nothing too promising came up. That's good. You want to keep the group together. We were a good team two years ago," says McDavid of the group that elevated all expectations when they drew within one win of the conference final. "The team we were last year wasn't up to our standards, and it's important we get back to our level."

It's suggested that the Oilers showed pride by finishing 2017-18 stronger than they started.

"There's just got to be a point in time where you get sick of losing, and you just don't anymore. Guys came together. Guys were sick of how the year was going and came back to playing hockey the way it should be, the way you need to," McDavid says.

"It's a good learning experience, but one you never want to go through again. We talked about it so much now that it doesn't really need to be talked about again."

Chiarelli did make two smart, low-risk free-agency bets on depth forwards Tobias Rieder and Kyle Brodziak, to whom McDavid has fired off a few text messages.

"Very excited to bring both those guys on. Reider with his speed and offensive flair, he's going to get chances in our lineup. He's a guy that can complement the number of centremen that we have," the captain says.

"Then you look at a guy like Brodziak, who's been in the league so long, who does everything right. I've heard he's an excellent guy in the room, and that's definitely something we could use."

One more thing the Oilers could use before McDavid flies from Toronto to Edmonton in about a month's time is a new contract for Darnell Nurse. The unsigned RFA led all Oilers defencemen in scoring last season and should take another step in his progression.

"He's definitely a guy that's a key piece to our puzzle," McDavid says. "He's going to need to be there. I'm not sure the extent of what they're talking about, but he definitely needs to be there."

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1102759 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / From bad boy to Lady Byng: Stan Mikita changed himself and the game

Ryan Dixon | @dixononsports

August 7, 2018, 4:46 PM

Pat Stapleton first played against Stan Mikita when they were both 14-year-old bantams. A couple years later, they were junior-hockey teammates in St. Catharines and the pair spent seven seasons together on fantastically talented Chicago Black Hawks teams. All that exposure led Stapleton to one conclusion when recalling what Chicago's all-time leader in games played and points was capable of on the ice.

"Stan was an artist," Stapleton said. "He had instincts and anticipation second to none."

Mikita, thought to be suffering from Lewy body dementia since 2015, passed away Tuesday at the age of 78.

Disease can be merciless and indiscriminate, but Mikita's affliction had a lot to conquer. His hand-eye coordination dazzled whether he was holding a baseball bat, golf club or pool cue.

"Whatever you wanted to play," said Stapleton. "I would say he was as good an athlete as I ever played with or against."

Mikita could impress with most any piece of sports equipment, but his livelihood and legend were made by his skills with a hockey stick. Of course, his reputation was also enhanced by what he did to a hockey stick: If he wasn't the actual inventor of the curved blade, he was certainly instrumental in popularizing it.

Standing five-foot-nine and weighing about 160 pounds, Mikita more than compensated for any size disadvantage with an I'll-show-you spirit. Though not the strongest skater, he was often the person orchestrating the action, seeing the angles and making the plays, all the while spending his energy efficiently.

"He never confused activity with results," says Stapleton. "Stan always had the puck. He was tremendous with the puck."

"He had I.Q. for the game. For that game and a lot of games."

Intelligence, though, often bowed to emotion during the first chapter of Mikita's career, when he made frequent trips to the penalty box. In 1966, his daughter, Meg, pointed this out in what became a crystalizing moment for the young father.

"She said, 'Daddy, when that guy in the stripes blew the whistle, why did Uncle Bobby [Hull] go sit with his friends and you went all the way across the ice and sat by yourself?' Mikita told Sportsnet's Dave Zarum in 2012. "And I almost cried, because as a six-year-old, she knew better than I did."

The numbers would tell you Mikita completely altered his approach after that conversation. He went from posting 146 PIM in 1963-64 and 154 in 1964-65 to 12 in 1966-67 and 14 the year after. The 26 minutes combined he compiled during those latter two campaigns represented a lower total than he posted in all but one of his other 19 seasons.

The statistics are stark, but according to Stapleton, there was no appreciable change in style. Mikita — who probably veered into rat territory early on in his career — may have found a way to eliminate his yapping and general knuckleheaded behaviour, but it did not come at the expense of intensity. In fact, the springs of both 1967 and '68 concluded with Mikita claiming the league scoring title, MVP honours and the Lady Byng Trophy for his sportsmanlike play. He's the only player in NHL history with a 100-plus PIM season on his resumé and a Byng on his shelf.

"I never thought Stan ever changed that much," Stapleton said. "He was always a competitive guy, he was always the lead dog."

He also cared about helping others be their best. The late Keith Magnuson was fond of telling a story about getting a call from Mikita in the summer of 1970 to meet for lunch. Magnuson had just completed his rookie season with the Hawks, so getting an invite to socialize from Mikita was a big deal. When Magnuson and fellow youngster Cliff Koroll connected with Mikita that day, it wasn't for a bite and a sudsy sip as they



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expected, but rather to help out at Soldier Field with the Special Olympics. Mikita, who also helped establish a hockey school for the hearing impaired, told Magnuson and Koroll that helping out was simply part of the job when you're a Black Hawk.

"That's what he did," said Bob Verdi, the author who worked with Mikita on the 2011 book *Forever a Blackhawk*. "He was a giver."

If Mikita had an affinity for the underdog, it's likely because of the hurdles he was required to clear as a boy making a trans-Atlantic move. Born Stanislav Gvoth on May 20, 1940, in what is now Slovakia, Mikita emigrated to St. Catharines when he was eight years old to live with Anna and Joe Mikita, his aunt and uncle. He spoke no English and, at least initially, received some rough treatment from fellow kids who saw him as an outsider. The shoulder chip Mikita carried to the NHL was surely gouged, at least in part, by that difficult entry to a new life.

Almost 25 years after coming to Canada, the 1972 Summit Series took Mikita back behind the iron curtain. At 32 years old, Mikita was buried on the depth chart at centre and didn't make an appearance in the eight-game set after the third contest in Winnipeg. While the enduring memory for all involved remains Paul Henderson's series-winning goal, Mikita was in the middle of a moment that reinforced what opposite worlds the two squads came from.

After the eighth game versus the Soviets, the Canadians were slated to play an exhibition match in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Mikita — who had left Moscow early to spend some extra time with his mother, Emilia, sister, Viera, and brother, George — was re-inserted into the lineup and named Canada's captain. When the national hero was introduced prior to puck drop, the arena exploded.

"It was an outstanding applause for a guy who, probably a lot of them, never saw play," Stapleton said. "The reception that man got from the [Czech and Slovak] people; our guys still talk about it."

They may also recall a more sombre scene when, following the game, Mikita had to once again say goodbye to his family, who were still stuck under Soviet rule.

"It wasn't a happy moment for anybody," Stapleton said.

Maybe not. But knowing what Mikita made of himself after that first trying departure surely soothed the pain for everyone.

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1102760 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Five ways Ottawa Senators' season could play out

Sean McIndoe | @DownGoesBrown

August 7, 2018, 10:56 AM

So things aren't going great for the Ottawa Senators these days.

Last week, they re-signed one of their best players, getting Mark Stone under contract prior to arbitration. That might seem like good news, but the deal was only for one year, meaning Stone will be an unrestricted free agent next summer. If he doesn't agree to a long-term extension by then, he could walk away for nothing. So could Matt Duchene, another pending UFA with a recent history of bailing on struggling teams; if there's been any progress on an extension for him, it's been kept quiet.

And then there's the ongoing Erik Karlsson saga, which these days has no end in sight. Maybe that's a good thing — until he's traded, there's

always a chance he could stay. But that still seems unlikely, and given the poor reviews from the Mike Hoffman deal and the general lack of confidence in the Senators' front office, you could forgive their fans for expecting the worst.

They might get it. But they might not, because predicting anything in today's NHL is tricky business. So today, let's look at five ways the Senators' season could play out. We'll rank them from best to worst, although as you'll see that doesn't necessarily mean that more wins are better.

Let's start with the best possible outcome: The one where we're all worrying over nothing, because the Senators are actually good.

Scenario #1: The feel-good story

What happens: We won't get crazy and predict a scenario where the Senators roll over the league and win the Stanley Cup. Even as a best case, that seems far-fetched. So instead, let's imagine a 2018–19 season that looks a lot like 2016–17 did. In other words, the Senators play well enough to make the playoffs with room to spare, and once they get there they're good enough to at least have a puncher's chance against any team they run up against.

If you strip away all the off-ice drama, this kind of season doesn't seem impossible. If they make it to opening night with Karlsson still on the team, the roster would at least bear a passing resemblance to the 2017 squad that came within one goal of the Final. Stone and Duchene will both have plenty to play for in contract years, so if the goaltending turns around, Bobby Ryan rediscovers his game and a few of the key youngsters make big leaps, well, who knows, right?

What doesn't happen: Like any team, the Sens won't go anywhere without decent goaltending, which means a big rebound year from Craig Anderson or Mike Condon or maybe someone else — remember, Anderson also reportedly wants out. If they get a full season of sub-.900 goaltending like they did last year, nothing any of the other players do is going to matter.

But beyond that, it feels like any kind of success on the ice would be tied to a lack of drama off of it. That includes any kind of panic moves around Karlsson, Stone or Duchene. It also probably means that Eugene Melnyk is locked in a storage closet somewhere deep in the bowels of the arena and isn't allowed to talk to the media or anyone else.

Our first sign it might be happening: The schedule-maker didn't do the Senators any favours, with a tough October that features seven playoff teams, plus teams like Chicago and Dallas that should be better. But if the Senators can come out of the month with something like a 6-3-2 record, November opens with a home-and-home against the Sabres. Win those, and the "Hey, this team might be better than we thought" vibe will flicker to life.

The odds that it happens: 10%. Is this too high? It's probably too high. By this point, even the most diehard Sens fans seem to have accepted that the coming season will be a disaster, and are just waiting to find out how bad the damage gets. The idea that the year might actually turn out to be a success seems hopelessly optimistic.

But this is the NHL. If an expansion team can shock the world, and another team can go from dead last to the playoffs, and yet another team can go from last in its conference back to the playoffs all in the same year... well, like we said, who knows? We're living in the NHL's age of hyper-parity, and anyone who tries to tell you that anything is a sure thing hasn't been paying attention.

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Scenario #2: The true rebuild



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 8, 2018

What happens: The team struggles, trades a bunch of star players, and finishes last or somewhere close to it. And that's all OK, because the 2018–19 season ends up marking the start of a true rebuild that sets the franchise back on the road to contending for a championship.

Consider it a controlled demolition, one where the team accepts some short-term pain in return for building a foundation for long-term success. We've seen that sort of approach build champions in places like Chicago and Pittsburgh, and more recently the Maple Leafs have made at least the early stages look easy. Of course, teams like the Oilers, Sabres and Coyotes remind us that just losing a bunch of games doesn't guarantee anything. But in today's NHL, it usually helps.

All that said, any kind of traditional rebuild in Ottawa would come with a catch: They don't own their own first-round pick next year, after sending it to Colorado in last season's Duchene trade. That derails the usual "bottom out and draft a franchise player" strategy. But on the other hand, they've got three big stars who are all in the last year of their deal and should fetch plenty on the trade market, and their lack of long-term commitments to just about anyone gives them a much cleaner cap situation than most rebuilding teams.

So imagine this: By the time the trade deadline passes, Karlsson is gone, and one or both of Stone and Duchene are, too, but the organization has reaped a windfall of picks and prospects along the way. The team is bad, but guys like Thomas Chabot and Colin White are playing big minutes and looking like future stars. They have plenty of cap space, some of which they use to add even more futures in exchange for taking on bad short-term deals. Pierre Dorion has a plan, the fans are buying in, and suddenly the future seems bright.

What doesn't happen: The key here is that the front office has to be ready and willing to go this route. Publicly, they haven't indicated that that's the case. That's fine, because it's not the sort of thing teams tend to want to advertise. But there's long been a concern about just how much Ottawa would support a lousy team, and whether the franchise can afford to find out.

For a true rebuild to work, everyone from ownership on down has to be on board. If attendance is down in November and Melnyk starts pushing for short-term moves, we can probably just skip ahead to Scenario #5.

Our first sign it might be happening: We could get it well before camp even opens, depending on how the Karlsson situation plays out. If the team makes a deal that's heavy on future assets, that's a good sign. If they can't find fair value, or it feels like they're more interested in padding out the roster with more Mikkel Bodker-type guys, look out.

The odds that it happens: 25%. This all relies on Melnyk being patient and level-headed, and history shows that's not always a good bet. But depending on how the season kicks off, he may not have much choice.

Scenario #3: Stuck in the middle

What happens: The Senators aren't good. But they're also not all that bad. They're just kind of... there. Not quite good enough to be worth getting excited about, but not bad enough to justify blowing the whole thing up and starting over.

In the salary-cap era, this is just about the worst spot a team can find itself in, since it typically means that you miss the playoffs but also can't land an elite player at the top of the draft. The Senators don't have to worry about their lottery odds this year thanks to the Avs owning their pick, but a middling season would complicate their decisions around Karlsson, Stone, Duchene and others.

In the worst-case version of this scenario, this sort of season can result in a Buridan's Donkey type of situation where a team can't figure out whether they should be buying or selling, so they just stay the course and do nothing, riding out a forgettable season and ending up without much of anything to show for it. Needless to say, staying the course doesn't really feel like a great option in Ottawa these days.

What doesn't happen: On paper, the Senators would need a lot of things to go right just to get to this level. If the team starts slowly and pulls the trigger on a big-name trade or two, the race to the bottom is probably on and we can forget about even hanging around the fringes of the race.

Our first sign it might be happening: To some extent, we can look at last year's Islanders for some lessons here. They weren't very good, but they weren't awful, and were lurking around the playoff bubble up to the deadline. As a result, they froze on the John Tavares question. We all know how that worked out.

From the Senators' perspective, watch for the dreaded "star player who doesn't want to negotiate once the season starts" storyline. And if the team is eight points out of a wild-card spot in December but still talking about how they think they're a playoff team, it will be time to worry.

The odds that it happens: 20%. Again, maybe this seems high if you're already convinced that the Senators will inevitably be a train wreck. But remember, it doesn't take much for even a bad team to look mildly competitive in today's NHL. A solid six-week stretch from a hot goaltender could be all it takes.

Once that happens, it all really comes down to just how optimistic the organization wants to be — or pretend to be. Which leads us nicely into our next section...

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.

Scenario #4: Fool's gold

What happens: The Senators are good again... kind of. The standings say they are, and maybe they even make the playoffs. But all other signs point to those results being a fluke, and the team not being anywhere near as good as their record indicates.

This sort of scenario has played out for plenty of teams in recent years, including the 2012–13 Maple Leafs, the 2014–15 Flames and Canucks, and (maybe most memorably) the 2013–14 Avalanche. To a lesser extent, you could also include the 2014–15 Senators, who weren't very good until career minor-leaguer Andrew Hammond went on the hot streak to end all hot streaks down the stretch.

These sorts of seasons often do more harm than good to a team's long-term hopes. On the one hand, wins are wins, the score is the only stat that matters, and all that extra playoff revenue sure looks nice on the bottom line. But these are the sort of seasons that convince teams they're on the right track and everyone involved is doing a great job. Those in charge tend to double down on what's clearly working, and lots of chest-puffing, back-patting and big-money extensions tend to follow. (Remember Dave Nonis getting five years from MLSE for "fixing" the Maple Leafs?)

Then the numbers even out, reality hits hard, and the team realizes it was all a mirage. By then, it's usually too late, and the hole is even deeper than it was before.

What doesn't happen: These sorts of scenarios can always be stopped in their tracks by a smart GM who has the confidence to read the situation correctly and not overcommit to something that isn't there. Is Dorion that sort of GM? Maybe, but most of his NHL counterparts haven't been.

Our first sign it might be happening: Most fans know the stats to watch for by now — unsustainably high shooting percentages, hot goaltending, a disproportionate number of points coming from overtime and shootouts. Put it this way: If you hear a lot of people mumbling about PDO, that's bad. Also bad: If grizzled Avalanche fans keeps cackling evilly while shouting "You'll see!"

The odds that it happens: 15%. The hockey gods like to pull this trick on at least one team every few years. Considering all the fun they've been having with the Senators lately, it would seem fitting.

Scenario #5: Total disaster



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 8, 2018

What happens: The team is terrible on the ice, and a punchline off of it. They make bad trades on Karlsson and others, they plummet down the standings, and the team's few remaining stars make it clear they want out. By the end of it, Sens fans just want it all to end.

In other words, this scenario looks an awful lot like 2017–18.

But as much as Senators fan won't want to hear it, the 2018–19 season could be shaping up to be even worse. Last season's disaster could at least hold out the promise of a high draft pick to dull some of the pain. If the Sens are bringing up the rear this year, Ottawa fans will be having visceral reactions to hearing the name Jack Hughes by mid-season.

And remember, the Karlsson situation could still end badly. Some Sens fans might prefer to see a trade happen now, if only to tear the band-aid off and get it over with. But with the market looking lukewarm at best, there's at least a chance that 2018–19 starts off with the best player in franchise history being dealt for a handful of loose change. And then Stone and Duchene could be next. Or worse, maybe somebody gets hurt and the team can't move them at all, only to see them bolt for the door when free agency arrives.

Mix in a Guy Boucher firing, a half-empty arena, a Melnyk meltdown or two, and every other fan base pointing and laughing all along the way, and by the end of the season you could see Sens fans reminiscing for the good old days of 2017–18.

What doesn't happen: Anything good.

Our first sign it might be happening: Between the lack of a Karlsson bidding war, Anderson's trade request, the Hoffman debacle and Stone's one-year deal, you could make a good case that we've already seen it. If the season starts out with a losing streak, attendance flatlines and Dorion starts morphing into Ken Doral, we'll know where we're probably headed.

The odds that it happens: 30%. The pessimist will point out that we're ranking this as the most likely scenario. And that's true — there are days where the Senators just feel like a team that's headed towards disaster right now.

The optimist will note that on balance, we still think this outcome is relatively unlikely, and that the season will turn out better than the worst-case. That's not exactly a vote of confidence, but my read on the situation is that fans around the league have been too quick to conclude that the Senators are headed for disaster. They could be, absolutely. But in today's NHL, there are no sure things, and every season serves up a few surprises that nobody saw coming.

Maybe this year's surprise team is the Senators. Or maybe not, and we should all get our popcorn ready for the debacle that's about to unfold. At the very least, let's remember that there are still a few different ways this could all play out.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 08.08.2018

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Sportsnet.ca / First glance at future Canadian stars brings intrigue, but few fans

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

August 8, 2018, 1:18 AM

EDMONTON — This is where we see them first. Where kids like Kirby Dach skate by and you watch the way he holds his stick, the way he passes the puck. You think "Ryan Getzlaf."

The place where you keep checking your program to see that Canada No. 10 is Jamieson Rees, a small, every-day package that just continues to make you say, "Nice play" or, "Good hustle."

This is an early stage in Hockey Canada's Program of Excellence, where you can get to know a kid who might just be around for the world juniors in a year or two. And after that, who knows?

"Without working hard, you don't have a chance at this," Rees, a Hamilton native said after he'd perfectly set up teammate Josh Williams for the final goal in a 4-2 Canada win over Slovakia. Rees is that kid who you might not have come to the rink to see, but you leave talking about.

Rees made Team Canada at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, folks close to the team say, because he showed the Canadian coaches exactly what we saw at Rogers Place on Tuesday night.

"Going to that U18 camp, everyone had a chance of making the team. It just came down to work ethic. Who wanted it more," he said. "To lead into the next level (the world juniors), it's exciting. But you're nowhere near it yet. Still a lot of work to go."

"Everybody out here has around the same skill level," he reasons. "If you don't compete, then you're going to be the same as everybody else. If you compete, you can separate yourself from everybody else."

We're testing Canadians' desire for summer hockey this month in Western Canada, first with the World Junior Showcase in Kamloops last week, and now the arrival of the freshly minted Hlinka Gretzky Cup here in Edmonton.

You might think it's a no-brainer: Canadians and top-level hockey. A puck and the red Maple Leaf. It shouldn't matter what time of year they play the games, right?

Well, the attendance in Kamloops last week was below what was expected. On a beautiful August week in British Columbia fewer people opted for a shivery hockey rink than organizers had hoped, despite the fact our country is absolutely crazy about the world junior championship each Christmas.

In Edmonton, where the Hlinka Gretzky Cup will play every second year through 2022, they are making baby steps. On a lovely 29 C holiday Monday, they pushed 7,000 through the turnstiles at Rogers Place versus Switzerland, but on Tuesday they needed only half the lower bowl to house a spotty crowd of just over 3,000, we'd estimate.

Summers are short, hockey rinks are cold and, unlike the under-20 age group, none of these kids have been drafted. As such, the players in Alberta this week are not affiliated with anyone's favourite NHL team just yet, the way the Vancouver-Victoria world junior tournament this Christmas will sell some tickets on the back of United States defenceman Quinn Hughes — the Canucks first-rounder this past June.

This U18 Team Canada is built around the next young star out of Rimouski, Alexis Lafreniere, who scored his first of the tournament on Tuesday. It was one of 58 shots Canada peppered at little Slovakian goalie David Borak, who was the difference between 4-2 and 10-2, stopping four breakaways in the first period alone.

"Their goalie was pretty hot," said Lafreniere, billed as the consensus No. 1 for the 2020 NHL Draft. "You just try to keep shooting. Our mentality is to bring a lot of pucks to the net. He was hot, but ..."

If you keep shooting, something has to go in eventually? "We think so," he said, chuckling.

This is where we get our first look at the Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., native Dach, a six-three-and-a-half, pass-first centreman who brings to mind a young Ryan Getzlaf.

"That's one of the guys I compare myself to. The other is Mark Scheifele of the Winnipeg Jets," Dach said. "I really like to model my game after those two guys."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 8, 2018

Dach got hooked on the Team Canada experience as a kid. Now, he's living the dream.

"It's my third time representing Canada, and every time it's a huge honour." Dach said. "I think it all started when I was little, watching Jordan Eberle score that goal against Russia (in 2009). That's when I first fell in love with being part of Team Canada. Ever since then I've wanted to wear that name across my chest."

We are a long ways away from any of these kids becoming household names, but in today's hockey landscape the path to that place winds through the Gretzky Hlinka Cup.

Canada plays Sweden on Wednesday night. Someone will be a hero.

There's always a hero.

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Sportsnet.ca / From bad boy to Lady Byng: Stan Mikita changed himself and the game

Ryan Dixon | @dixononsports

August 7, 2018, 4:46 PM

Pat Stapleton first played against Stan Mikita when they were both 14-year-old bantams. A couple years later, they were junior-hockey teammates in St. Catharines and the pair spent seven seasons together on fantastically talented Chicago Black Hawks teams. All that exposure led Stapleton to one conclusion when recalling what Chicago's all-time leader in games played and points was capable of on the ice.

"Stan was an artist," Stapleton said. "He had instincts and anticipation second to none."

Mikita, thought to be suffering from Lewy body dementia since 2015, passed away Tuesday at the age of 78.

Disease can be merciless and indiscriminate, but Mikita's affliction had a lot to conquer. His hand-eye coordination dazzled whether he was holding a baseball bat, golf club or pool cue.

"Whatever you wanted to play," said Stapleton. "I would say he was as good an athlete as I ever played with or against."

Mikita could impress with most any piece of sports equipment, but his livelihood and legend were made by his skills with a hockey stick. Of course, his reputation was also enhanced by what he did to a hockey stick: If he wasn't the actual inventor of the curved blade, he was certainly instrumental in popularizing it.

Standing five-foot-nine and weighing about 160 pounds, Mikita more than compensated for any size disadvantage with an I'll-show-you spirit. Though not the strongest skater, he was often the person orchestrating the action, seeing the angles and making the plays, all the while spending his energy efficiently.

"He never confused activity with results," says Stapleton. "Stan always had the puck. He was tremendous with the puck."

"He had I.Q. for the game. For that game and a lot of games."

Intelligence, though, often bowed to emotion during the first chapter of Mikita's career, when he made frequent trips to the penalty box. In 1966,

his daughter, Meg, pointed this out in what became a crystalizing moment for the young father.

"She said, 'Daddy, when that guy in the stripes blew the whistle, why did Uncle Bobby [Hull] go sit with his friends and you went all the way across the ice and sat by yourself?' Mikita told Sportsnet's Dave Zarum in 2012. "And I almost cried, because as a six-year-old, she knew better than I did."

The numbers would tell you Mikita completely altered his approach after that conversation. He went from posting 146 PIM in 1963–64 and 154 in 1964–65 to 12 in 1966–67 and 14 the year after. The 26 minutes combined he compiled during those latter two campaigns represented a lower total than he posted in all but one of his other 19 seasons.

The statistics are stark, but according to Stapleton, there was no appreciable change in style. Mikita — who probably veered into rat territory early on in his career — may have found a way to eliminate his yapping and general knuckleheaded behaviour, but it did not come at the expense of intensity. In fact, the springs of both 1967 and '68 concluded with Mikita claiming the league scoring title, MVP honours and the Lady Byng Trophy for his sportsmanlike play. He's the only player in NHL history with a 100-plus PIM season on his resumé and a Byng on his shelf.

"I never thought Stan ever changed that much," Stapleton said. "He was always a competitive guy, he was always the lead dog."

He also cared about helping others be their best. The late Keith Magnuson was fond of telling a story about getting a call from Mikita in the summer of 1970 to meet for lunch. Magnuson had just completed his rookie season with the Hawks, so getting an invite to socialize from Mikita was a big deal. When Magnuson and fellow youngster Cliff Koroll connected with Mikita that day, it wasn't for a bite and a sudsy sip as they expected, but rather to help out at Soldier Field with the Special Olympics. Mikita, who also helped establish a hockey school for the hearing impaired, told Magnuson and Koroll that helping out was simply part of the job when you're a Black Hawk.

"That's what he did," said Bob Verdi, the author who worked with Mikita on the 2011 book *Forever a Blackhawk*. "He was a giver."

If Mikita had an affinity for the underdog, it's likely because of the hurdles he was required to clear as a boy making a trans-Atlantic move. Born Stanislav Gvoth on May 20, 1940, in what is now Slovakia, Mikita emigrated to St. Catharines when he was eight years old to live with Anna and Joe Mikita, his aunt and uncle. He spoke no English and, at least initially, received some rough treatment from fellow kids who saw him as an outsider. The shoulder chip Mikita carried to the NHL was surely gouged, at least in part, by that difficult entry to a new life.

Almost 25 years after coming to Canada, the 1972 Summit Series took Mikita back behind the iron curtain. At 32 years old, Mikita was buried on the depth chart at centre and didn't make an appearance in the eight-game set after the third contest in Winnipeg. While the enduring memory for all involved remains Paul Henderson's series-winning goal, Mikita was in the middle of a moment that reinforced what opposite worlds the two squads came from.

After the eighth game versus the Soviets, the Canadians were slated to play an exhibition match in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Mikita — who had left Moscow early to spend some extra time with his mother, Emilia, sister, Viera, and brother, George — was re-inserted into the lineup and named Canada's captain. When the national hero was introduced prior to puck drop, the arena exploded.

"It was an outstanding applause for a guy who, probably a lot of them, never saw play," Stapleton said. "The reception that man got from the [Czech and Slovak] people; our guys still talk about it."

They may also recall a more sombre scene when, following the game, Mikita had to once again say goodbye to his family, who were still stuck under Soviet rule.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 8, 2018

"It wasn't a happy moment for anybody," Stapleton said.

Maybe not. But knowing what Mikita made of himself after that first trying departure surely soothed the pain for everyone.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 08.08.2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Five ways Ottawa Senators' season could play out

Sean McIndoe | @DownGoesBrown

August 7, 2018, 10:56 AM

So things aren't going great for the Ottawa Senators these days.

Last week, they re-signed one of their best players, getting Mark Stone under contract prior to arbitration. That might seem like good news, but the deal was only for one year, meaning Stone will be an unrestricted free agent next summer. If he doesn't agree to a long-term extension by then, he could walk away for nothing. So could Matt Duchene, another pending UFA with a recent history of bailing on struggling teams; if there's been any progress on an extension for him, it's been kept quiet.

And then there's the ongoing Erik Karlsson saga, which these days has no end in sight. Maybe that's a good thing — until he's traded, there's always a chance he could stay. But that still seems unlikely, and given the poor reviews from the Mike Hoffman deal and the general lack of confidence in the Senators' front office, you could forgive their fans for expecting the worst.

They might get it. But they might not, because predicting anything in today's NHL is tricky business. So today, let's look at five ways the Senators' season could play out. We'll rank them from best to worst, although as you'll see that doesn't necessarily mean that more wins are better.

Let's start with the best possible outcome: The one where we're all worrying over nothing, because the Senators are actually good.

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What happens: We won't get crazy and predict a scenario where the Senators roll over the league and win the Stanley Cup. Even as a best case, that seems far-fetched. So instead, let's imagine a 2018–19 season that looks a lot like 2016–17 did. In other words, the Senators play well enough to make the playoffs with room to spare, and once they get there they're good enough to at least have a puncher's chance against any team they run up against.

If you strip away all the off-ice drama, this kind of season doesn't seem impossible. If they make it to opening night with Karlsson still on the team, the roster would at least bear a passing resemblance to the 2017 squad that came within one goal of the Final. Stone and Duchene will both have plenty to play for in contract years, so if the goaltending turns around, Bobby Ryan rediscovers his game and a few of the key youngsters make big leaps, well, who knows, right?

What doesn't happen: Like any team, the Sens won't go anywhere without decent goaltending, which means a big rebound year from Craig Anderson or Mike Condon or maybe someone else — remember, Anderson also reportedly wants out. If they get a full season of sub-.900 goaltending like they did last year, nothing any of the other players do is going to matter.

But beyond that, it feels like any kind of success on the ice would be tied to a lack of drama off of it. That includes any kind of panic moves around Karlsson, Stone or Duchene. It also probably means that Eugene Melnyk is locked in a storage closet somewhere deep in the bowels of the arena and isn't allowed to talk to the media or anyone else.

Our first sign it might be happening: The schedule-maker didn't do the Senators any favours, with a tough October that features seven playoff teams, plus teams like Chicago and Dallas that should be better. But if the Senators can come out of the month with something like a 6-3-2 record, November opens with a home-and-home against the Sabres. Win those, and the "Hey, this team might be better than we thought" vibe will flicker to life.

The odds that it happens: 10%. Is this too high? It's probably too high. By this point, even the most diehard Sens fans seem to have accepted that the coming season will be a disaster, and are just waiting to find out how bad the damage gets. The idea that the year might actually turn out to be a success seems hopelessly optimistic.

But this is the NHL. If an expansion team can shock the world, and another team can go from dead last to the playoffs, and yet another team can go from last in its conference back to the playoffs all in the same year... well, like we said, who knows? We're living in the NHL's age of hyper-parity, and anyone who tries to tell you that anything is a sure thing hasn't been paying attention.

"Who knows?" isn't exactly an optimistic slogan heading into a season, but these days Ottawa will probably take it.

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What happens: The team struggles, trades a bunch of star players, and finishes last or somewhere close to it. And that's all OK, because the 2018–19 season ends up marking the start of a true rebuild that sets the franchise back on the road to contending for a championship.

Consider it a controlled demolition, one where the team accepts some short-term pain in return for building a foundation for long-term success. We've seen that sort of approach build champions in places like Chicago and Pittsburgh, and more recently the Maple Leafs have made at least the early stages look easy. Of course, teams like the Oilers, Sabres and Coyotes remind us that just losing a bunch of games doesn't guarantee anything. But in today's NHL, it usually helps.

All that said, any kind of traditional rebuild in Ottawa would come with a catch: They don't own their own first-round pick next year, after sending it to Colorado in last season's Duchene trade. That derails the usual "bottom out and draft a franchise player" strategy. But on the other hand, they've got three big stars who are all in the last year of their deal and should fetch plenty on the trade market, and their lack of long-term commitments to just about anyone gives them a much cleaner cap situation than most rebuilding teams.

So imagine this: By the time the trade deadline passes, Karlsson is gone, and one or both of Stone and Duchene are, too, but the organization has reaped a windfall of picks and prospects along the way. The team is bad, but guys like Thomas Chabot and Colin White are playing big minutes and looking like future stars. They have plenty of cap space, some of which they use to add even more futures in exchange for taking on bad short-term deals. Pierre Dorion has a plan, the fans are buying in, and suddenly the future seems bright.

What doesn't happen: The key here is that the front office has to be ready and willing to go this route. Publicly, they haven't indicated that that's the case. That's fine, because it's not the sort of thing teams tend to want to advertise. But there's long been a concern about just how much Ottawa would support a lousy team, and whether the franchise can afford to find out.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 8, 2018

For a true rebuild to work, everyone from ownership on down has to be on board. If attendance is down in November and Melnyk starts pushing for short-term moves, we can probably just skip ahead to Scenario #5.

Our first sign it might be happening: We could get it well before camp even opens, depending on how the Karlsson situation plays out. If the team makes a deal that's heavy on future assets, that's a good sign. If they can't find fair value, or it feels like they're more interested in padding out the roster with more Mikkel Bodker-type guys, look out.

The odds that it happens: 25%. This all relies on Melnyk being patient and level-headed, and history shows that's not always a good bet. But depending on how the season kicks off, he may not have much choice.

Scenario #3: Stuck in the middle

What happens: The Senators aren't good. But they're also not all that bad. They're just kind of... there. Not quite good enough to be worth getting excited about, but not bad enough to justify blowing the whole thing up and starting over.

In the salary-cap era, this is just about the worst spot a team can find itself in, since it typically means that you miss the playoffs but also can't land an elite player at the top of the draft. The Senators don't have to worry about their lottery odds this year thanks to the Avs owning their pick, but a middling season would complicate their decisions around Karlsson, Stone, Duchene and others.

In the worst-case version of this scenario, this sort of season can result in a Buridan's Donkey type of situation where a team can't figure out whether they should be buying or selling, so they just stay the course and do nothing, riding out a forgettable season and ending up without much of anything to show for it. Needless to say, staying the course doesn't really feel like a great option in Ottawa these days.

What doesn't happen: On paper, the Senators would need a lot of things to go right just to get to this level. If the team starts slowly and pulls the trigger on a big-name trade or two, the race to the bottom is probably on and we can forget about even hanging around the fringes of the race.

Our first sign it might be happening: To some extent, we can look at last year's Islanders for some lessons here. They weren't very good, but they weren't awful, and were lurking around the playoff bubble up to the deadline. As a result, they froze on the John Tavares question. We all know how that worked out.

From the Senators' perspective, watch for the dreaded "star player who doesn't want to negotiate once the season starts" storyline. And if the team is eight points out of a wild-card spot in December but still talking about how they think they're a playoff team, it will be time to worry.

The odds that it happens: 20%. Again, maybe this seems high if you're already convinced that the Senators will inevitably be a train wreck. But remember, it doesn't take much for even a bad team to look mildly competitive in today's NHL. A solid six-week stretch from a hot goaltender could be all it takes.

Once that happens, it all really comes down to just how optimistic the organization wants to be — or pretend to be. Which leads us nicely into our next section...

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.

Scenario #4: Fool's gold

What happens: The Senators are good again... kind of. The standings say they are, and maybe they even make the playoffs. But all other signs point to those results being a fluke, and the team not being anywhere near as good as their record indicates.

This sort of scenario has played out for plenty of teams in recent years, including the 2012–13 Maple Leafs, the 2014–15 Flames and Canucks, and (maybe most memorably) the 2013–14 Avalanche. To a lesser

extent, you could also include the 2014–15 Senators, who weren't very good until career minor-leaguer Andrew Hammond went on the hot streak to end all hot streaks down the stretch.

These sorts of seasons often do more harm than good to a team's long-term hopes. On the one hand, wins are wins, the score is the only stat that matters, and all that extra playoff revenue sure looks nice on the bottom line. But these are the sort of seasons that convince teams they're on the right track and everyone involved is doing a great job. Those in charge tend to double down on what's clearly working, and lots of chest-puffing, back-patting and big-money extensions tend to follow. (Remember Dave Nonis getting five years from MLSE for "fixing" the Maple Leafs?)

Then the numbers even out, reality hits hard, and the team realizes it was all a mirage. By then, it's usually too late, and the hole is even deeper than it was before.

What doesn't happen: These sorts of scenarios can always be stopped in their tracks by a smart GM who has the confidence to read the situation correctly and not overcommit to something that isn't there. Is Dorion that sort of GM? Maybe, but most of his NHL counterparts haven't been.

Our first sign it might be happening: Most fans know the stats to watch for by now — unsustainably high shooting percentages, hot goaltending, a disproportionate number of points coming from overtime and shootouts. Put it this way: If you hear a lot of people mumbling about PDO, that's bad. Also bad: If grizzled Avalanche fans keeps cackling evilly while shouting "You'll see!"

The odds that it happens: 15%. The hockey gods like to pull this trick on at least one team every few years. Considering all the fun they've been having with the Senators lately, it would seem fitting.

What happens: The team is terrible on the ice, and a punchline off of it. They make bad trades on Karlsson and others, they plummet down the standings, and the team's few remaining stars make it clear they want out. By the end of it, Sens fans just want it all to end.

In other words, this scenario looks an awful lot like 2017–18.

But as much as Senators fan won't want to hear it, the 2018–19 season could be shaping up to be even worse. Last season's disaster could at least hold out the promise of a high draft pick to dull some of the pain. If the Sens are bringing up the rear this year, Ottawa fans will be having visceral reactions to hearing the name Jack Hughes by mid-season.

And remember, the Karlsson situation could still end badly. Some Sens fans might prefer to see a trade happen now, if only to tear the band-aid off and get it over with. But with the market looking lukewarm at best, there's at least a chance that 2018–19 starts off with the best player in franchise history being dealt for a handful of loose change. And then Stone and Duchene could be next. Or worse, maybe somebody gets hurt and the team can't move them at all, only to see them bolt for the door when free agency arrives.

Mix in a Guy Boucher firing, a half-empty arena, a Melnyk meltdown or two, and every other fan base pointing and laughing all along the way, and by the end of the season you could see Sens fans reminiscing for the good old days of 2017–18.

What doesn't happen: Anything good.

Our first sign it might be happening: Between the lack of a Karlsson bidding war, Anderson's trade request, the Hoffman debacle and Stone's one-year deal, you could make a good case that we've already seen it. If the season starts out with a losing streak, attendance flatlines and Dorion starts morphing into Ken Doral, we'll know where we're probably headed.

The odds that it happens: 30%. The pessimist will point out that we're ranking this as the most likely scenario. And that's true — there are days where the Senators just feel like a team that's headed towards disaster right now.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The optimist will note that on balance, we still think this outcome is relatively unlikely, and that the season will turn out better than the worst-case. That's not exactly a vote of confidence, but my read on the situation is that fans around the league have been too quick to conclude that the Senators are headed for disaster. They could be, absolutely. But in today's NHL, there are no sure things, and every season serves up a few surprises that nobody saw coming.

Maybe this year's surprise team is the Senators. Or maybe not, and we should all get our popcorn ready for the debacle that's about to unfold. At the very least, let's remember that there are still a few different ways this could all play out.

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TSN.CA / Signing bonus issue lingers over next NHL labour deal

Travis Yost

To land superstar centre John Tavares, the Toronto Maple Leafs exercised their financial might and structured a contract most teams around the league couldn't possibly fathom.

On the surface, Tavares' contract isn't that exotic. A seven-year, \$77 million contract for one of the league's preeminent scorers was expected. In fact, TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger reported that Tavares "left millions on the table" by signing with Toronto.

There are probably a multitude of reasons Tavares chose the Maple Leafs, but one item on that list is the actual structuring of his contract. Tavares' contract is laced with signing bonus money, which has become a very popular stipulation for players under the latest collective bargaining agreement.

Almost \$71 million – or 92 per cent of Tavares' contract – will come by way of signing bonus, which offers myriad benefits to the player. Chiefly: he will pay at a substantially lower tax rate and his contract effectively becomes buyout proof. Under the current CBA, buyouts are calculated by taking two-thirds of remaining salaries, exclusive of signing bonuses, then spread over twice the remaining contract length. Thus, signing bonuses effectively take buyouts off the table, since the teams don't enjoy any real cap relief. It all but guarantees a player will be paid for what his contract was actually signed for and not a stipulated lesser amount. They've also become fabled lockout protection. Signing bonuses, unlike straight salary, must be paid if the league decides to shut its doors.

The structure of Tavares' deal may be on the extreme side, but he's certainly not the only player to earn a lot of his pay by way of signing bonuses. Oilers superstar Connor McDavid will earn \$86 million of his next contract in a similar manner. Lightning centre Steven Stamkos was the predecessor of that deal, having \$60 million in signing bonus money embedded in his contract. Before Stamkos we saw Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews ink contracts with \$44 million a piece in signing bonus money. Point being: If you're a star in this league, you are generally getting sizable cheques sent your way on July 1.

As a brief aside, the NHL isn't far away from another "lockout watch" – owners can officially opt out of the current CBA on Sept. 1, 2019. There have been myriad complaints about the structuring of escrow, among others. I believe signing bonuses are a major issue, and reports indicate that the league has either informally or formally pled with teams to stop handing them out.

Still, the power teams don't seem to be listening. It's hard to blame them, since procuring and preserving talent in any major sports league is a challenge in and of itself. But it has created an interesting "have" versus "have not" dichotomy – one that still highlights spending disparities in a league that prides itself in a hard cap structure and intensive revenue sharing program.

The league has been increasingly aware and vocal about the signing bonus issue over the last couple of seasons. Look at the spread of team payouts by way of signing bonuses over just the last two seasons, and note how little it's changed even when compared to prior periods:

Signing bonus money works against the hard cap the same way an ordinary contract does, but I don't think the league envisioned two things here. One, signing bonuses have put substantially more leverage in the hands of the players, which the league is never going to be particularly happy with. Two, it's created a massive delta between revenue sharing and non-revenue-sharing teams.

Think about it from this perspective: The average team from 2015-17 spent about \$8.4 million against the salary cap by way of signing bonuses. That grew to \$13.8 million (or, a growth of 63 per cent) in 2017-19. And because that's grown, so too has the standard deviation between the samples – about 37 per cent over the same period.

This is how you end up in situations where the Maple Leafs can spend \$42 million in signing bonus money from 2017-19 while their provincial rival, the Ottawa Senators, spend \$4 million. You can also point to the Washington Capitals and their \$39 million in signing bonuses versus division rivals Carolina and Columbus, who have spent about \$500,000 each.

Now, some of this is a matter of circumstance. Teams that are contenders are going to be more willing to get aggressive with signing bonuses. Teams with no obvious plan to reach the postseason are always going to be more conservative, dumping contracts and generally keeping salaries low. So there will always be a natural split in payouts, whether we are talking signing bonuses or team salary in general.

But Carolina, Columbus, and Ottawa – just to name a few teams here – have been contenders in past years and had rosters equipped for the postseason. And yet, they have historically spent very little by way of signing bonus money. If the players truly value it as part of their contracts, it can put some of the small-market teams (who may be cash strapped to begin with) in a bit of a bind.

It's an interesting issue to keep an eye on as the NHL and NHLPA gear up for the next round of CBA negotiations.

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