



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Gold: Waddell situation part of larger Canes story

By Adam Gold

This has been a strange off season for the Carolina Hurricanes. The two and a half months following the Canes incredible playoff run to the conference finals has been nothing short of tumultuous.

And, what's transpired raises real questions about how owner Tom Dundon will be able to mesh his highly successful business and entrepreneurial career with the sports world.

The latest pothole in the offseason road is the status of Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell, who earlier this week had an in-person interview for the G-M post with the Minnesota Wild. Now, keep in mind that Waddell was a finalist for the league's executive of the year award after a season in which Carolina traded their way to a revamped roster that helped put an end to a decade of post season futility.

It involved the trade that brought Dougie Hamilton, Michael Ferland and top defensive prospect Adam Fox to Carolina in exchange for Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin. And, while only the offensively-gifted Hamilton remains from that deal, Ferland was a highly productive player for the first half of his tenure with the Canes and Fox was sent along to the Rangers for what will most likely be a pair of second round draft picks. Then, there was the January heist of Nino Niederreiter for Victor Rask — from the Wild! — and a series of roster moves that all seemed to blend perfectly as the Hurricanes posted the second best record in the NHL from mid-January on.

Was this all the doing of Waddell? Was this head coach Rod Brind'Amour working his inspirational magic? Was it a collective effort from Dundon, Waddell's hockey operations team and Brind'Amour's coaching staff? Was it the planets aligning to create a mystical force that carried the team to all of that success?

Probably a little of everything, is the right answer. But, there's a far bigger picture here that we should understand.

Don Waddell's contract expired on June 30. And, while he expressed no concerns outwardly about his status, he was the only NHL general manager who's company key card did not include the safety net of a contract. Is this the future of the NHL for that position? Well, if so, it would take a change in the league charter which mandates that every team have a general manager under contract by September 1.

Currently, in the four major team sports in the United States, there is only one GM not under contract — other than Waddell, of course — and that's because Jerry Jones is also the owner of the Dallas Cowboys. Though, part of me would be interested in seeing Jerry hold out for a better deal with Jerry and see how that was covered by the football media.

The answer is that it probably isn't the coming wave in pro sports. Teams who have people in place who are good at their jobs want to maintain those people in those positions. Dundon can dress this up any way he wants but this is not about freedom for his president/GM. The contract protects both sides in this case. If Waddell gets an offer from another club, a contract doesn't prevent Dundon from letting Don do what's best for him.

We know for a fact that Dundon doesn't place the same value on the position of general manager as do the rest of the league. That's why Waddell became the general manager in the first place. Dundon spoke with several candidates last spring, including the now-out-of-work Paul Fenton — for whose job Waddell is now a finalist. The story last year was that the Hurricanes were offering a fraction of what league-wide GM's earned because Dundon's public stance was that we'd do this as a team, by committee.

So, with the draft approaching and still no one hired to replace the fired Ron Francis, Waddell just added the GM title to that of team President and the Hurricanes went about their business. That's a commonplace occurrence in the business world, no? Rather than hire a replacement, just have someone on staff add those duties to their list of responsibilities for little or no increase in compensation.

I'm sure we all know someone who's been in this position, maybe you have.

I don't know about you, but if I had an employee who soldiered on the way Don Waddell had, coming off a season like the Canes enjoyed, I'd want to keep him around a little longer. Even if it cost me a little more money on the front end, I'd at least want to extend him the courtesy of a contract for another year — at the absolute minimum. Remember, if Waddell leaves for St. Paul, Minnesota, the Canes theoretically have two openings to fill.

Now, back to the original point of this endeavor, the bigger picture. Waddell is just the latest of a rough spring/summer.

Goaltending coach Mike Bales left for the same job with the Buffalo Sabres — joining another former Hurricanes assistant, Steve Smith, who left a year ago. Remember last season how often Brind'Amour said that the decisions on their starting goalies was up to Bales? Whether true or not, that is definitely NOT the case any longer.

Mike Vellucci led the Charlotte Checkers to the Calder Cup title last year, the first time the Hurricanes' top minor league squad won the AHL championship. He was also one of the club's assistant general managers and an ace at developing players. He's now the head coach of the Penguins' AHL team. Another member of the team's staff who left for — at best — a lateral move.



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Brian Tatum, another former assistant GM, a triangle native who'd been with the organization in some capacity since arrival from Connecticut, left the team to join a local company outside of hockey.

John Forslund should have been an easy situation to tie up. The best (yes, I'm biased, but I'm not wrong) play-by-play voice in hockey today loves his adopted home, loves this franchise and would probably sign a lifetime contract if offered. But, somehow, this got to the final day of the league year before he — and partner Tripp Tracy — received a bare minimum, one-year extension.

Sebastian Aho, the team's dynamic, star center, was lowballed in contract discussions to the point where he was willing to risk leaving the Hurricanes when he signed an offer sheet with the Montreal Canadiens. Don't fool yourself into believing that Aho ONLY signed that to get the deal done with the Canes. There's a reason why no other restricted free agent signed an offer sheet, and it isn't because there's no interest in Mitch Marner or Brayden Point or Mikko Rantanen or Charlie McAvoy or Patrik Laine or....

Did the league's collective bargaining agreement (CBA) allow for the Canes to try and force a below-market deal on Aho — their best player? Yes. But, is that the best way to use the system? Just because you have Jaccob Slavin on a bargain contract doesn't mean every one of your players needs to get in line. Aho deserves to be paid what players of his ilk receive around the league. So, ask yourself what would be better for Carolina, Aho for eight years at \$9.5 million annually, or five years at \$8.45 and the baggage of a bitter contract negotiation in which they were told to accept the team's insulting (my opinion) contract for eight years or play on the one-year, \$1 million qualifying offer?

Sounds like it didn't really work out in the Canes' favor if you ask me.

And, why in the hell is Justin Williams still not under contract? We're five weeks from the opening of training camp and Carolina's captain still isn't signed? This should have been wrapped up weeks ago. All Williams did last year was post his most productive season in almost a decade. Along the way, he started the Storm Surge — which created a "Bunch of

Jerks" revenue stream — and helped change the culture of a club that badly needed an overhaul. Yes, he's going to be 38 on October 4. Yes, he's not the player he used to be when he posted 30-goal campaigns in his first tour of duty in Raleigh.

But, my gosh, this guy is the walking, living, breathing example of being a professional and is absolutely vital to the Hurricanes success. What is the hold up? This is a player — set aside everything else for a second — the Canes should be hotly pursuing. And, if you think it's because he still hasn't decided if he wants to come back for another year, well, I could be wrong, but I'd be shocked if he's not playing this year. I just hope it's in a Canes uniform.

Individually speaking, there are easy reasons for every situation ending up the way they did. National TV schedules and how the team dealt with Forslund's absence at times, Bales got a raise, Vellucci an opportunity to be a head coach should something happen with Penguins coach Mike Sullivan — yeah, about that. Sullivan got a multi-year extension in June.

Either way, when all lumped into one big pile, the bigger picture looks less rosy. It appears that the intersection of the business and professional sports worlds isn't quite as easily negotiated. Have you ever seen people at a traffic circle for the first time?

I've said this before, professional sports is a club. You can't ridicule people you have to deal with. You can't treat everyone like a line item. You can't operate like you do in the business world where there are no rules — or ethics — apart from the legal system.

The rest of the league is watching just as Andrei Svechnikov was paying attention as the non-negotiations with Aho were dragging along. Lose Waddell and the Hurricanes will find it hard to replace him. Lose Don and who knows who else follows him out the door. Waddell has 40 years of NHL relationships in his phone. He loves it here. He wants to continue what he's helped create. All he really needs is a reason to stay

Right now, all he's seeing are reasons to leave.



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Tweetmail No. 222: Out of Office

by Michael Smith

Hello and welcome to Tweetmail, a weekly feature on Hurricanes.com in which I take your Twitter questions about the Carolina Hurricanes or other assorted topics and answer them in mailbag form. At least, that's what usually happens.

I'm taking a slightly altered approach this week. I've been out of the office on vacation since the beginning of the month, and some things have happened since then.

So, let's discuss.

We've had something brewing for a while...

Now we want #Canes fans to put the finishing touches on it

This was fun, and I think y'all will enjoy the end result. More - including our brewery partner, the design of the cans and packaging, the type of beer and, of course, the name - will be revealed soon.

New handle. Same jerks.

If you didn't notice, we shuffled some letters around in our Twitter handle (and we're just @canes on Instagram now, too). Why? It may look insignificant, but there are good reasons behind it. At some point, I'm sure we've all tried to search "Canes" on Twitter and come up empty, since the "NHL" preceded that in our old handle. No more. This should make our account much easier to find.

This was just the beginning for @ASvechnikov_37

Truth.

"He's just a fantastic player who is good at everything. He makes his teammates better." @SebastianAho was ranked the 14th BEST center by the @NHLNetwork

NHL Network named Sebastian Aho the league's 14th best center. "He's just a fantastic player who is good at everything," Mike Johnson said.

Aho's surrounded by some pretty good company, too, sandwiched by Evgeni Malkin at 13 and Jack Eichel at 15. There's no reason to think Aho can't continue climbing the charts, either. The 22-year-old Finn has only improved in each of his first three seasons in the NHL, culminating with a team-leading 83-point campaign (30g, 53a) in 2018-19. A push toward 90 points and perhaps even the century mark isn't out of the question for 2019-20.

The #Canes have acquired Kyle Wood from the San Jose Sharks in exchange for Trevor Carrick

A move involving defenseman Trevor Carrick had been simmering for some time. After being selected by the Hurricanes in the fourth round of the 2012 NHL Draft, Carrick played in the organization for five seasons. In that time, he logged just four NHL games, while his time in Charlotte culminated with a Calder Cup championship just a few months ago. His season-ending tweet hinted at a new beginning, and I speculated about his future with the organization in last week's Tweetmail, as well.

Ultimately, the 25-year-old blueliner was in search of a fresh start with a new organization, and in return, the Hurricanes acquired defenseman Kyle Wood.

Wood is a big boy - he's officially listed at 6-foot-7 and 235 pounds - who can move the puck. The 23-year-old D-man totaled 29 assists (matching a career high) and 35 points (second among team defensemen) in the 2018-19 season with the San Jose Barracuda.

Anton Forsberg awarded one-year contract in arbitration

Goaltender Anton Forsberg was one of the Hurricanes' last remaining restricted free agents yet to ink a new contract. He had been issued his qualifying offer from Chicago prior to the late-June trade that brought him and defenseman Gustav Forsling to North Carolina, and Forsberg elected to settle in arbitration. On Tuesday, the independent third party awarded Forsberg with a one-year contract worth \$775,000.

Forsberg joins a crowded group in the blue paint that is led by Petr Mrazek. James Reimer, Alex Nedeljkovic and Forsberg all figure to contend for the back-up role in training camp. Depth is key at any position, especially in goal, where the Canes utilized four netminders in the 2018-19 season.

Forward Saku Maenalanen and defenseman Roland McKeown are now the Canes' only remaining restricted free agents, and I'd expect both to re-sign with the team in the coming days or weeks.

And then there's unrestricted free agent Justin Williams, who is expected to make a decision on his immediate future in the immediate future.

Is it October yet?

Join me next week for a return to our usual question-and-answer format!

If you have a question you'd like answered or you particularly enjoyed this twist on the usual Tweetmail, you can find me on Twitter at @MSmithCanes, or you can drop me an email.



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Canes, Flyers Will Face Off on NBCSN in March

Local FOX TV schedule coming later this summer

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes garnered national attention as one of the league's top teams in the second half of the 2018-19 season and their subsequent run to the Eastern Conference Final.

Lots of eyeballs, both locally and on a national scale, tracked the Hurricanes down the stretch of the season and into the playoffs. The team's lone national broadcast of the season - a late March divisional tilt in Washington - delivered a 1.4 local rating, the highest-rated regular-season Canes games in the Raleigh market in more than 10 years. A month later, Game 1 of the second round posted a 4.4 local rating, the highest-rated Second Round game on record in the Raleigh market. Nationally, Game 1 delivered a 0.79 overnight rating, up 22 percent against a comparable game from the year prior.

Despite this strong television showing, the Hurricanes will still have just one nationally televised game in the upcoming 2019-20 regular season.

The Canes will appear on NBCSN when they face off with the Flyers in Philadelphia on Thursday, March 5 at 7 p.m. The Metropolitan Division match-up is the season's fourth and final meeting between the two teams.

The upside of this: There will be plenty of John Forslund, Tripp Tracy and Mike Maniscalco in your lives. The Canes' 81 remaining games will be televised by FOX Sports, a majority of which will be carried by FOX Sports Carolinas, with sister network FOX Sports Southeast picking up the balance. A full breakdown of the local television schedule will be released later this summer.

The Hurricanes open the 2019-20 regular season on Thursday, Oct. 3 by hosting the Montreal Canadiens. Be sure to sync the schedule to your personal digital calendar, and if you want a printout for your office cubicle or refrigerator, we've got you covered.



Waddell 'not going anywhere' as Hurricanes general manager, owner says

Dundon expects him to stay despite lack of contract, interview with Wild

by Tom Gulitti

Don Waddell doesn't have a contract with the Carolina Hurricanes, but owner Tom Dundon said he believes the general manager will remain in that role.

"Yeah, I expect Don to be the GM of the team for a while," Dundon said Wednesday.

Waddell's contract with the Hurricanes expired June 30. Dundon said Waddell, who recently interviewed to be GM of the Minnesota Wild, has continued to work for Carolina under the terms of his expired contract. Dundon said he hopes their business relationship will continue that way.

"To me, he's employed by the Carolina Hurricanes," Dundon said. "He's employed and he's not going anywhere as far as I'm concerned. So the whole contract thing, I don't understand it. ... I have found this weird since I got into the hockey business that the business people all have contracts. I never had contracts with the people that worked for me. It was just, 'If you do a good job (and) I like you, you'll work here, and I'll treat you fair.'"

Dundon, the chairman and managing partner of Dundon Capital Partners, a Dallas-based private investment firm, became majority owner of the Hurricanes on Jan. 11, 2018. At the time, Waddell was their president; he replaced Ron Francis as GM on March 7, 2018.

Carolina qualified for the Stanley Cup Playoffs last season for the first time since 2009 and reached the Eastern Conference Final before losing to the Boston Bruins. Although Waddell doesn't have a contract, he has overseen the Hurricanes' offseason business seemingly without any issues.

But the Wild's interest in Waddell, a finalist for the NHL General Manager of the Year Award last season, was understandable after they fired Paul Fenton on July 30. Dundon told Waddell he should listen to what Minnesota had to say.

"Tom's told me I have a job for life, but he's also encouraged me to explore other opportunities to see what the market will pay," Waddell told The News & Observer on Tuesday. "We started something here, I love it here, but when the job opened up and Tom said you should explore it, that's what I'm doing."

Dundon said he wouldn't have stood in Waddell's way even if he had a contract.

"I'm happy with him and I think he's happy here, but if there's other opportunities in the world, it's fair for him to understand them," Dundon said. "I've never subscribed to theory that people shouldn't be able to know what their choices are. So that was it. It's not like I was trying to push him out or anything."

Dundon acknowledged Waddell talking about a job with another team with the start of training camp about five weeks



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away isn't ideal, but he doesn't think it will impact the Hurricanes or his relationship with Waddell.

"I think he and I are good," Dundon said. "I think he knows what our situation is, and he probably doesn't know as much about that situation (with Minnesota). So this is probably not as big a story to me as it is to everybody else."

Waddell working for the Hurricanes without a contract is unusual, but he said he wasn't worried about it at the 2019 NHL Awards Media Day in Las Vegas on June 18.

"It's not an issue," Waddell told NHL.com. "The owner and I have met. We have a good relationship. He asked me to stay on as the GM next year, so when you get my age (61 on Aug. 19) you don't worry so much about those things, the logistic part. It will all get taken care of at the end of the day."

Dundon said Waddell has job security with the Hurricanes with or without a contract.

"I've told Don I'm not going to walk in and fire Don Waddell, so he doesn't need a contract," Dundon said. "If he wants one, he can have one if he asks for one. But we're trying to avoid having a bunch of contracts, so if he has a big contract it's kind of hard for us to run the team and run the business. ... Don and I get along great, everybody is happy. So if he were to leave, that would most likely be over money."

"And I'm comfortable that I'm willing to pay a fair amount of money, but there's always somebody that will pay more, not just in hockey but in every business."



Preparing for Life After Justin Williams...Just In Case

We still don't know if the Hurricanes captain will return for another season. If he decides to hang up his skates, how could will the leadership vacuum that results affect the team?

By Zeke Lukow

Justin Williams is coming off of his best season since 2011-2012 with 23 goals and 53 points and played back-to-back 82-game seasons since his last stint with the Carolina Hurricanes, in the Stanley Cup winning season and the subsequent one. The 37 year old, a veteran of 20 NHL seasons, poured everything he had into last season, and won't come back unless he can give everything he has again. Now he has a difficult decision to make on whether to come back for another season as the Hurricanes captain. It's August 7, we're a month away from training camp, and we're still waiting for a decision.

While GM Don Waddell has been planning as if Williams is not coming back by bolstering the roster with more top-six forwards, the loss of the captain would still leave a large hole where it counts most: leadership. That said, even if he does re-sign for next season, it simply kicks this problem down the road a season, so it's an impending hole regardless of the signing that the Canes need to look at sooner rather than later.

If any team knows how important leadership is, it's the Carolina Hurricanes. Since the departure of former captain Eric Staal, the Canes struggled to find their way and rise to the occasion in big moments. This largely kept them around .500 and just outside of the playoff bubble.

During that same time period, head coach Bill Peters also experimented by making the two most tenured players on the team, Justin Faulk and Jordan Staal, co-captains — which did not go well, to say the least. The split of duties was awkward as it was based on home and away games, so the voice in the room changed on a regular basis.

Both co-captains, and especially Faulk, were seemingly paralyzed by splitting the duties and not having full authority

to command the locker room. After Williams was named captain last offseason, both players admitted they felt relieved to no longer have the title of co-captain and admitted that the situation was awkward.

A year belatedly, Williams ascended to the captaincy and was able to take control of the team. It also helped that he was a former teammate with head coach Rod Brind'Amour for three seasons. They were constantly on the same page, with Brind'Amour even admitting that he sometimes didn't have to do too much coaching because Williams would say things on the ice before he could.

Williams bridged the gap between the locker room and the coach's office. He could deliver the message to his colleagues rather than having a coach come in and be the bad guy. As a result, there was total buy-in into a new system, something that the team hadn't seen with previous coaches. The success was immediate.

Throughout the Canes' previous ten seasons when they faced a do or die game, they often failed to rise to the occasion. With Williams leading the locker room, the Canes overcame that hurdle for the first time since the 2008-2009 season, both throughout the season and in the first round when they won multiple win-or-go-home games, including a double overtime Game 7 to advance to the second round. (On a goal, naturally, that Williams set up.)

So, in a world where Williams calls time on his career, where does this team go? Thankfully most of the young core now has playoff experience and knows what it takes to go deep in the playoffs, something the team lacked throughout the lineup before last season. But who is ready to step up — and is a single post-season experience enough to lead a team?

I think if there is one thing that the organization has learned from the past is that they must name a captain. They cannot go another year with only alternates or a weird multi captain system, but who can they look to?



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Jordan Staal

Staal is an obvious candidate since he is the longest tenured Hurricanes player and the most senior vet on the team. He is one of the only players on the team to have won a Stanley Cup, albeit a long time ago. Staal has given everything to the team, never giving up when they were in the middle of the Great Drought. He is also signed through the 2024-2025 season, so he is here to stay for years to come.

The issue with Staal is that in the role of co-captain he really struggled. He didn't take charge of the locker room and make the push to be the voice. He was also one of the many co-alternate captains that were non-factors after his brother left. So if he wasn't able to establish himself in all those other circumstances, it's fair to wonder if he can step up now.

Justin Faulk

He served as a co-alternate and a co-captain for years and, perhaps most importantly, is the brand ambassador for Moe's (fan leadership!). However, he has never really developed into a leader in the Williams mold. Some players are most comfortable in a situation where they are not looked upon as The Guy, and based on what Faulk said last year about his year as a co-captain, that could certainly be true for him.

Faulk is only signed through the upcoming season and has been the subject of constant trade rumors. If he does not seem to be open to negotiations early in the season, the Canes could easily ship him out for other players at the deadline even if they are in contention. They have defensive depth that makes other teams drool and if there is one thing that Tom Dundon has shown, he does not overvalue assets.

Sebastian Aho

Aho emerged as the Hurricanes' next superstar and is almost guaranteed to be a future captain for the Canes, but is he ready now? He has just three seasons of NHL experience and just one postseason under his belt. He has shown that he thrives in a larger role; no one expected his transition from the

wing to center to go this well, and for him to improve in every facet of the game.

The question is can he also do this in a role off the ice. He has been a fairly quiet guy in interview and around the media, although he's continually becoming more open and less guarded. Will he be ready to face criticism and answer all the questions night in and night out on top of leading the room? The good news is he is someone who takes in everything and learns from every experience that he can.

He will be a great captain in the future, but the concern is whether or not he can handle it now in a transitional year for the Canes who are looking to string together success for the first time since moving to Raleigh. Ideally, he would have another season of experience as the number two behind Williams, but that might not be able to happen and he may be thrust into the captain role before he is fully ready and comfortable with it.

Looking Ahead

The other players signed for more than three years are Teuvo Teravainen, Jaccob Slavin, and Brett Pesce, but none of them have consistently worn a letter. It is hard to think they could go from no role directly to captain.

Playoff experience is a premium for captains, and without many playoff savvy vets the Canes don't have many foolproof options. Without Williams, the Canes may be forced to name a new captain earlier than they would like. However, you sometimes don't know the full capability of a person until they are thrown into sink or swim situation.

Without confident leadership the Canes are at risk of taking a step back next season. Regardless of this, the core that has been assembled along with the natural leadership of Rod Brind'Amour ensures this team will be fun to watch for seasons to come. Let's hope that Williams signs on for one more season to help with the mentoring of the next generation of the Carolina Hurricanes.



Checkers sign Cedric Lacroix to AHL deal

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers today signed forward Cedric Lacroix to a two-way, AHL contract.

The 24-year-old completed his first pro season a year ago, leading the ECHL's Wheeling Nailers in goals (22), ranking fourth on the team in points (42) and ranking sixth in the

league with 215 penalty minutes. The undrafted Lacroix also appeared in one AHL contest for the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins and lit the lamp twice in his debut.

A Quebec native, Lacroix spent four years at the University of Maine where he accumulated 40 points (21g, 19a) and 155 penalty minutes in 145 games.



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<http://gocheckers.com/articles/transactions/checkers-sign-cedric-lacroix-to-ahl-deal>

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All eyes on how GM Ron Francis will 'build out' the analytics department of Seattle's NHL team

Aug. 7, 2019 at 6:00 am Updated Aug. 7, 2019 at 8:15 am

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

It's been four years since nanotechnology expert Eric Tulsky quit his day job developing electric vehicle batteries in California and moved his family to North Carolina to launch an entirely different career.

Then-Carolina Hurricanes general manager Ron Francis, now with Seattle's NHL franchise, had employed Tulsky part-time for a season as a long-distance hockey analytics consultant but wanted to make him a full-time data analyst heading up a department devoted to statistics-crunching. For Tulsky, who'd grown up a Flyers fan in Philadelphia before launching the Outnumbered hockey analytics website, it was a risky move into a field the NHL had only started embracing.

"We anguished about it for a bit because it's not an easy thing to leave a career and a bunch of training you've put into it," said Tulsky, 44, who holds a Bachelor of Arts in chemistry and physics from Harvard and a doctorate in chemistry from UC-Berkeley. "But it seemed like a good opportunity, so we moved out there. And that was four years ago."

Tulsky was since promoted last year to Hurricanes vice president of hockey management strategy, owed largely to current Seattle GM Francis having taken his work seriously right away. Where some teams have been accused of marginalizing analytics personnel, Tulsky insists: "From the day I started, they brought me in because they wanted to hear what I had to say."

All eyes are now on Francis and what he'll do analytics-wise with a Seattle franchise launching in October 2021.

NHL Seattle CEO Tod Leiweke said the day Francis was named GM that work with analytics was a major reason, calling him "a visionary who understood that there's new competitive advantages coming by way of analytics and technology and we wanted somebody — especially in Seattle — who had that skill set."

The team already had analytics specialist Alexandra Mandrycky as a director of hockey administration, but Francis has said he'll work with her "as we build that department out." That could take much of the next year, but will involve adding staffers.

In Carolina, where Francis had fewer financial resources than is expected here, the Hurricanes' analytics staff was initially limited to Tulsky.

It wasn't until just before his final 2017-18 season as Hurricanes GM that Francis approved adding Toronto native Kevin Kan — who'd also run a hockey analytics website — as a data engineer. Those working with the Hurricanes say Tulsky and Kan became regulars at meetings with scouts and coaches.

"They didn't come in trying to tell everybody how to do their jobs," one source said. "But as time went on, you could tell they were being listened to because a lot of their ideas were what we ended up doing."

Under new Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, Kan was promoted this summer to a hockey operations developer role, and Matt Walter was hired as data engineer. A new data scientist position has also been filled by a soon-to-be-announced hiring.

The bolstered staff of four leaves the Hurricanes among the bigger analytics crews in the league — though it's difficult to determine exactly how many analytics staffers teams employ as they sometimes incorporate them within separate departments.

But Seattle's team will need at least two such staffers and likely more as the NHL this coming season provides teams with reams of additional game data courtesy of player- and puck-tracking technology.

Mandrycky came to Seattle from the Minnesota Wild, where she'd been a data analyst since 2016 working with lead hockey researcher



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Andrew Thomas — her former colleague at the War on Ice hockey website.

She was known as a strong programmer who designed systems that made it easier for Wild officials to digest numbers thrown their way, while Thomas was seen as having strengths on the analysis and strategy side. But Minnesota opted not to retain Thomas this past spring and unsuccessfully tried to keep Mandrycky, who joined NHL Seattle just ahead of Wild GM Paul Fenton being fired last week after only one season.

It remains to be seen whether Mandrycky assumes the lead data analysis role here.

Not surprisingly, there's been speculation Francis will hire Tulsy away from the Hurricanes. That would place Tulsy in the senior role here — he's one of only two NHL team vice presidents in an analytics position, along with recently hired Tyler Dellow of the New Jersey Devils — though the combo of his and Mandrycky's skills would leave Seattle superbly stocked.

Tulsy declined to discuss subjects unrelated to his current and past work for the Hurricanes.

There's also been talk, predating Francis' arrival, of NHL Seattle CEO Tod Leiweke luring longtime Tampa Bay Lightning director of hockey analytics Michael Peterson with a VP promotion. It was under Leiweke, CEO of the Lightning from 2010 to 2015, that Peterson became one of the game's most respected specialists in his field.

Just ahead of Leiweke's final season with the Lightning in 2014-15, the team signed a deal with TIBCO Software Inc. — a leading data and analytics discovery platform — to better analyze the copious statistical information they were collecting. And that type of analysis will now be critical with the league's new tracking data becoming available.

The need to quickly incorporate that new data within its expansion draft planning means NHL Seattle could make any senior analytics hires — especially any above Mandrycky — from within the league's existing talent pool rather than importing outsiders unfamiliar with inner workings of teams. Unlike four or five years ago, when Mandrycky, Thomas, Tulsy and others were hired from online blogs, the league today is well-stocked with analytical minds.

That doesn't mean bloggers aren't still being hired. The Devils just picked up Matt Cane from Hockey Graphs to serve as their analytics director under VP Dellow, while longtime Hockey Prospectus author Rob Vollman last year became a senior analyst with the Los Angeles Kings.

A potential future NHL recruit is Dominik Zrim, 39, Montreal-based co-founder of the CapFriendly.com website devoted to salary cap issues. Zrim watched three years ago as the Vegas Golden Knights hired Tom Poraszka, founder of a competitor cap-related site, as their hockey operations analyst and said blogger poaching typically comes in spurts.

"There was a huge thing in spring 2014 where clubs were just scoping out guys and their websites and bringing them onboard," Zrim said. "And then, it slowed down a bit where you might have one or two guys a year. But in the last six months, there's been a spike."

Zrim said one NHL assistant GM told him to expect "an arms race" for analytics staffers ahead of next season's flood of new stats.

"I think teams are gearing up for this next evolution in hockey analytics and they don't want to be left behind the eight-ball."

Among bloggers not already with teams, Seattle fans might keep an eye on twins Luke and Josh Younggren from Evolving Wild in Minnesota. Mandrycky had an up-close view of their work while with the Wild.

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Zrim agreed the Younggren twins have as good a grasp on analytics as any bloggers. He also listed Micah Blake McCurdy of the Nova Scotia-based HockeyViz site, Manny Perry of Corsica Hockey in Montreal and Brad Timmins from Natural Stat Trick in Ottawa as potential recruits.

One thing's certain: Mandrycky should soon have more departmental co-workers than Tulsy did under Francis early on.

The Hurricanes offered Tulsy his initial part-time role not long after being one of only a handful of teams that paid to attend a seminar he hosted on the state of NHL analytics in a Philadelphia hotel conference room during the 2014 NHL draft. Tulsy said it still took a while to gain the trust of Francis and others.

"Anybody new, whether in analytics or a scout, needs to prove themselves a little bit," Tulsy said.

Another reason Francis and company likely want their department fully operational well ahead of serious player decisions.

Seattle Times LOADED: 08.08.2019

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The Athletic / The Gifted: How Stars prospect Jason Robertson plays smaller than he looks

By Scott Wheeler Aug 7, 2019

In hockey, as in life, there are archetypes built on hyperbole and buzzwords that are designed to fit every player into a pre-defined box. Scouts and evaluators often fall prey to lazily characterizing young prospects in this way: the power forward, the two-way centre, the speedy winger, the one-dimensional scorer, the stay-at-home defenceman. But sometimes, just sometimes, there's a player who is so different from everyone else in approach or in ability that he is able to distinguish himself through his uniqueness. These players have turned one skill into the body of their game, and they illustrate the varied ways hockey can be played at the highest levels. "The Gifted" is a 10-part series that examines, through video, the NHL's most fascinating prospects and the unique skill sets that define them. By popular demand, "The Gifted" is back for a third year at The Athletic. It runs every Wednesday from July 24 to Sept. 25.

The Gifted (2017 series): Part 1: Carl Grundstrom | Part 2: Jordan Kyrou | Part 3: Vitaly Abramov | Part 4: Juuso Valimaki | Part 5: Vili Saarijarvi | Part 6: Filip Chlapik | Part 7: Travis Sanheim | Part 8: Timo Meier | Part 9: Kirill Kaprizov | Part 10: Elias Pettersson

The Gifted (2018 series): Part 1: Miro Heiskanen | Part 2: Casey Mittelstadt | Part 3: Dylan Strome | Part 4: Oliver Wahlstrom | Part 5:



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Gabe Vilardi | Part 6: Adam Boqvist | Part 7: Evan Bouchard | Part 8: Kristian Vesalainen | Part 9: Jonathan Dahlen | Part 10: Morgan Frost

The Gifted (2019 series): Part 1: Cale Makar | Part 2: Nick Robertson | Part 3: Jason Robertson | Part 4: Aleks Heponiemi | Part 5: Adam Fox | Part 6: Dante Fabbro | Part 7: Emil Bemstrom | Part 8: Cody Glass | Part 9: Martin Necas | Part 10: Bode Wilde

Last week, when I wrote about Nick Robertson in Part 2 of this year's series, I detailed the game of a 5-foot-9, 160-pound forward who plays loud and forceful.

This week, as I write about Jason Robertson in Part 3, I'll be detailing a 6-foot-2, 200-plus-pound forward who is ... nothing like that.

And that, in essence, is what "The Gifted" is all about.

Looking at their numbers and measurements, you'd probably assume Jason, the elder brother, who has scored 153 goals in his last three seasons (or a 53-goal 82-game pace across 235 games), is the power forward in the family.

But looks can be deceiving and there's more to Robertson, who ranked 37th in my top 50 drafted prospects ranking, than meets the eye.

The numbers are eye-popping.

Last season, Robertson led the OHL in points (117), points per game (1.89) and power-play assists (36). In the last decade, just six other under-20 players have posted more than 117 points in a season. Each of them did it with another player on their line who's also on the list: Connor McDavid and Connor Brown; Dylan Strome and Alex DeBrincat; Mitch Marner and Christian Dvorak. Robertson is the only one to do it alone, having begun the season with the lowly Frontenacs before finishing it on the IceDogs, where he scored at a rate of 2.08 points per game.

The style of play is less eye-popping. That doesn't make it any less effective, though.

(As part of this analysis, I watched back the last three games of Robertson's 2018-19 regular season. In them, all victories, Robertson contributed on 11 of the IceDogs' 19 goals with five goals, six assists and 15 shots on goal. He is wearing No. 19 in all clips.)

Unlike his little brother, Robertson doesn't force his will on a game. Instead, he plays smaller than he is.

Robertson often finds pockets of space on the perimeter in situations where a player of his size and strength would go to the slot or the net-front. Watch how he lurks on the below goal, intentionally swinging behind the North Bay defenders to the back post:

He also has excellent stickhandling skills for a player his size and handles the puck in tight effectively. That often allows him to finish with a flair of talent and a quick dash rather than leveraging his heavy frame to simply attempt to pound pucks past goalies.

That was true above. And it's true below when, after trailing the play into the zone rather than crashing the crease, Robertson fakes the shot before curling the puck past the diving defender and lightly lifting (rather than shooting) the puck over the goalie:

That attitude is true throughout Robertson's game. In some ways, he's almost the anti-power forward. Here, again, after being the first player to the offensive zone blueline, he elects to be the trailer into the zone anyway — and scores:

None of this is to say Robertson is soft on the puck, or unwilling to use his size. He finishes the above play with a stick around his waist.

His power was on display in this burst of speed out wide for a partial break and a quality scoring chance, too:

Robertson does operate with finesse more than power, though. In the process, he routinely demonstrates how hockey can be played in a variety of ways.

Watch here, after bumping his man and using the physical advantage in his own zone, the way Robertson feigns to the middle off the rush before pulling up (rather than driving), resulting in a secondary assist off his entry:

And watch the attention he draws from two defenders when he feigns toward the slot on the power play ahead of this secondary assist:

While most teams use 6-foot-2 wingers who can really turn and shoot in the slot on the power play, Robertson played the point (a role normally reserved for smaller forwards) on Niagara's power play due to his outsized creativity and patience.

That's because he's among the better passers in the league (hence the league-leading PPA numbers) and he sees the ice extremely well for the cross-seam plays:

As the year progressed, teams began to try to take that play away from him and he adjusted. Watch, here, the way Colts forward Jason Wilms (No. 19 in white) turns his back to the play to track Akil Thomas (No. 44 in black), anticipating a play that Robertson never makes:

Instead, Robertson had the presence of mind to send the puck low for a tic-tac goal that resulted in the slot option being left available because too much attention was placed on Thomas.

Again and again, Robertson makes plays that you wouldn't expect out of a winger with his characteristics.

That's led by his patience. Wherever his brother would think "I have to power my way to the net," Robertson often thinks "I can delay here."

Look for that patience in action on this goal:

And on this one:

He also has much better puck skills than many players his size. Watch not for the way he goes to the net to finish the play but for the little bit of finesse required to handle the puck out of the air and begin the give-and-go with the little flip pass off his backhand here:

Or the way he again knocks the puck out of mid-air, this time for a shot (after lurking off his defender's back yet again), below:

And while Robertson is capable of driving the net, he's comfortable playing on the perimeter (a word that has always carried a negative connotation in hockey when it doesn't always have to).

In this sequence, Robertson gets the puck in the middle of the neutral zone. Rather than try to force a middle-lane entry, he takes it wide, stops up, finds the trailer cross-ice and then gets into that familiar space near the back post to receive the puck back as part of a give-and-go:

Look for the way he weaves through traffic (again like a much smaller player) with control below, before intentionally taking the puck from the middle of the ice to the flank and below the goal line for a cheeky attempt off the back of the goalie:



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Watch here, the way he uses his length and puck skill to stickhandle through two defenders for a scoring chance while actually trying to avoid — rather than initiate — contact:

In isolation, Robertson has a lot of individual skills.

His curl-and-drag release is tough for goaltenders to handle:

He's got straightaway speed and the skill necessary to take pucks off the boards and make plays:

When the option to carry off the boards isn't there he has the defensive stickwork needed to be disruptive and gain possession, as well as the offensive playmaking ability to get the puck to a more dangerous area as a passer:

But it's his approach that makes him unique. It's the willingness to use his size — and the complement of those skills — to play a finesse game instead of a power one.

Robertson has learned to play a game that contrasts his brother. He has learned to disengage instead of engage. He has learned to steal pucks instead of hit for them. He has learned that sometimes skating around someone serves the same purpose as skating through them:

He has learned that patience, timing and the ability to lurk in space can be just as effective as impatience and power. He's the big kid who plays small.

That talent, as much as anything else he possesses, is what made him the CHL's top scorer. Before long, that talent will make him an excellent playmaking NHL winger.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.08.2019

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The Athletic / The untold stories of Sidney Crosby, behind the scenes, as he turns 32

By Josh Yohe Aug 7, 2019

It's probably time to consider retiring the "Sid the Kid" nickname as Sidney Crosby turns 32 today.

One of the great things about Crosby, though, is that he handled himself as an adult from the time he arrived in Pittsburgh as an 18-year-old.

I've covered him for a decade, which has given me a different perspective of Crosby from behind the scenes, when the cameras are off. The polished, thoughtful gentleman that you see on camera isn't phony. Crosby really is a champion in the game of life as well as in hockey.

If you've read my mailbags and Q&As over the years, perhaps you've already come across some of these tales. Nonetheless, they're worth telling or, in some cases, re-telling. In an era where athletes often make headlines for truly horrendous reasons, Crosby has always conducted himself as a role model.

The most frequently asked question I receive is inevitably, "What's Sid really like?" Hopefully this will help answer that question. Here's a look at 10 Crosby moments I've witnessed over the years, some of them larger than life, and some of them simply serving as subtle

reminders that the Penguins' captain is has never been changed by that nine-figure bank account.

March 22, 2010 — The Penguins had just lost to the Red Wings, 3-1, at Joe Louis Arena. It had a big-game feel because those two teams had met in the Stanley Cup final the previous two seasons, and there was a sense they could meet again, which, of course, never happened. One month earlier, for historical perspective, Crosby had won the Olympic gold medal game in overtime.

A group of reporters stood outside of the visitor's locker room that night in Detroit. Standing beside us was none other than Gordie Howe, who had a picture in his hand. The picture, it turns out, was from the Olympics, one that showcased Crosby celebrating his game-winning goal against the United States. Howe walked directly to Crosby. They shook hands, and then Howe said, "I need your autograph on this." Crosby looked uncomfortable and said, "You're Gordie Howe. You don't want my autograph."

Howe responded, "I sure as hell do." Crosby doesn't look overwhelmed very often, but he almost did at that moment. He was very much in awe of Howe and has a healthy respect for the all-time greats. After signing the picture, Crosby shook Howe's hand again.

Crosby then looked at the group of people watching.

"When he shakes your hand, it feels like your hand is going to break," Crosby said. "God, he's still strong."

Jan. 11, 2012 — I've told this one before, but it's a good one. Crosby was out with a concussion and, well, long story short, I ended up writing an article about him the day before that wasn't my best. Long story. The article suggested that Crosby needed to let Ray Shero know what was going on with his health so that he could make a big move before the trade deadline if Crosby wasn't going to play again that season.

Crosby didn't like the article in the least, and I don't blame him. I was told by a team official that Sid wanted to talk in between periods in the press box in Washington, where the Penguins were in the process of losing their sixth straight game, this one a 1-0 setback to the Capitals.

Crosby and I chatted for most of the second period. He wasn't happy but it's hard for him to get angry. It feels forced because he's so friendly by nature. But I could tell he was upset. He then said something to me that I'll never forget: "I don't know how I'm going to feel from one day to the next."

What became most clear during this chat, other than the fact that he was dealing with a medical ailment that is frighteningly unpredictable, was his devotion to Penguins fans.

"I don't ever want them to think I don't care about winning and that I don't want to be out there," he said.

March 2, 2012 — The Penguins had just practiced in Denver and would play there the following day. Crosby had returned from a concussion, but made it through only eight games before enduring more symptoms.

He was skating with the team again by this time and was planning on returning to the lineup in a couple of weeks. It was pretty clear he was dealing with all sorts of emotions during the concussion. He had been scared he would never play again, concerned that his life could be permanently impacted, bored, frustrated and everything else imaginable.

By early March, he was symptom free. And he was getting a little angry. In Denver at altitude, Crosby decided to test himself. He was, by anyone's estimation, the best player on the ice during practice



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that day. And it was a long, fairly grueling practice. But his work was just beginning.

While his teammates left the ice, conducted interviews, showered and walked back to the team hotel, Crosby was still on the ice, giving himself the ultimate, high altitude test. It almost looked like he was punishing himself. A few people were in the building watching, and they were starting to look uncomfortable just from watching the workout he put himself through.

When it was finally, thankfully over, Crosby stayed on one knee for extended period of time, lost in his thoughts and nothing else. I believe that was the moment when he knew the hurdle had finally been cleared.

April 22, 2012 — The Penguins had just been dismissed, with conviction, by the Flyers in the first round of the playoffs. Entering the postseason as the Stanley Cup favorite, the Penguins were embarrassed by their biggest rival.

Crosby hardly played poorly in that series, having just returned from his health issues to record eight points in six games. But had been outplayed by Claude Giroux and the Penguins had lost their minds, and the series, in one of the low moments in franchise history.

The locker room following Game 6 was a particularly somber one, as you might imagine. Crosby and Jordan Staal were the final players to leave the room. Staal knew he would be traded that summer, that his time with the Penguins had come to an end. He sat beside Crosby, the two of them barely able to speak.

In the distance, Crosby could hear the Flyers celebrating. The look on his face told quite a story. He's never made it a secret that he doesn't care for the Flyers. Losing to them had a big impact, and the look on his face indicated that he never again intended on losing a playoff series against them. He could have left the room but instead just sat there, taking in the noises and the celebrations. You could see it fueling him. So far, he's met them once and recorded 13 points in a six-game series victory in 2018.

Nov. 20, 2012 — The true essence of Crosby was on display during the lockout. He was 25, right in the heart of his prime, and was finally feeling healthy after missing 101 games — not including a playoff series — during the previous two seasons. All he wanted to do was play. And he couldn't.

During this time, Crosby and about 10 of his Pittsburgh-based teammates practiced daily at Southpointe. On this particular day, when his teammates were done for the day, Crosby stayed on the ice for an additional half hour. There were hundreds of pucks on the ice, two nets and the greatest hockey player in the world. He stayed on the ice for 30 minutes after they were gone. When practice was over, the methodically skated the two nets off the ice and into a storage room. He then corralled the pucks into the center of the ice, sat on the frozen surface and placed each puck into a bag. This became his routine on a daily basis. There was something sad about watching Crosby carry nets off of the ice each day. There was also something impressive about it. He's no diva. It became his custom, day after day, to stay on the ice for longer than anyone else, and to save the maintenance staff in the building the extra work of putting everything back where it belonged.

Dec, 10, 2012 — Team officials weren't allowed to be at Southpointe during the lockout. Those workouts were for players only. No media relations officials allowed. So Crosby decided to serve as his own media relations person. Really.

I got a phone call from Crosby on the night of Dec. 10. It was a Monday.

"Hey Josh, I know I told the media we were going to practice at Southpointe tomorrow. But something came up so we're not going to be able to now. I'm really sorry about it. I would feel awful if anyone drove to practice, and expected us to be there. So if you could please let everyone know that we won't be there tomorrow, I'd really appreciate it."

March 25, 2013 — The Penguins were thinking about making a trade deadline splash: Jarome Iginla. Following practice, some of the team brass wanted to have a meeting and wanted Crosby to be involved. I don't know what the meeting pertained to, but I'll guess Iginla was one of the topics involved.

Ray Shero was hovering around the locker room after practice. Some coaches were around. Dan Bylsma was looking for his captain and finally said, "Does anyone know where Sid is?"

No one knew, in fact. Crosby almost always talks with reporters following practices but wasn't around the locker room that day. Nothing to be concerned about. Maybe it was an equipment issue. Maybe he didn't feel well. Maybe he was busy. These things happen.

A quick walk around the corner adjacent to the locker room told the story. Crosby was on his hands and knees, skates still on, having a conversation with a boy in a wheelchair that probably spanned 30 minutes. This is a common sight. Crosby always goes out of his way to not only greet people who deal with health struggles, but to actually listen to them and spend time with them. I see it all the time, but you never stop appreciating it. It's not for show. It's totally genuine, Jarome Iginla meetings be damned.

Jan. 11, 2014 — The Penguins had just won in Calgary. And it was cold. Really cold. And windy. Alberta winters aren't usually pleasant, after all.

In Calgary, the team bus sits on the arena floor level, and there is a steep hill beside it. On top of the hill, some young Flames fans wanted to get a glimpse of Crosby and had composed a sign that was wishing him luck in the upcoming 2014 Olympics.

One by one, the Penguins filed onto their team bus. Upon seeing the sign, Crosby did a U-turn from the bus and raced up the hill to sign autographs for his young fans. I wish I'd have had the good sense to take a picture of the scene, because the respective looks on their faces was priceless. I've seen Crosby sign autographs for literally thousands of people, but that one always sticks out. Most people who encounter Crosby will only meet him once in their lives. He knows that. He's too humble to ever talk about such things, but he knows it means a lot to people, and I've always sensed that he wants that one meeting to be a good one, every time.

March 6, 2014 — The Penguins had just acquired Lee Stempniak and Marcel Goc at the NHL trade deadline the following day. They had a morning skate in San Jose the next day. Like all players, Crosby is a creature of habit and always leaves the skate at the same time, maintaining the routine.

The Penguins took the ice at 11:30, were in their locker room at noon, and were gone for the team hotel by 12:30. But not Crosby. As the clock went from noon to 1, he just quietly stood outside of the Penguins' locker room. I finally had to ask why.

"I think it's important to make the new guys feel welcome," he explained.

Finally, a little after 1 p.m., while the rest of the Penguins were enjoying a nap, Crosby was there to shake the hands of his two new teammates.



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It's funny. Crosby played perhaps the worst game of his life that evening, finishing as a minus-5 in a 5-3 loss. Maybe there is something to be said for maintaining a routine. But there's something to be said for being a good captain, too. It was highlighted that day.

July 15, 2016 — The Stanley Cup was in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia, for Crosby's hometown parade following the Penguins' 2016 triumph. Crosby rode in the back of a truck, proudly showcasing the Cup. He gave a speech in front of thousands of people. It was a lovely afternoon, the perfect day for such an occasion.

When the speech was over, Crosby met with a few reporters for interviews and said hello to a few people in the area. He was then supposed to jump back in the truck and head back to his parents' house to spend a day celebrating with family. After an hour, everyone was starting to wonder where Crosby was. Troy and Trina weren't sure.

A look around the corner provided the answer. Crosby had met two members of the Canadian military and was deeply engrossed in his conversation about their travels, which seemed far more interesting and poignant to him than speaking about hockey.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.08.2019

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The Athletic / Projecting the 2019-20 NHL standings: How does each roster projection stack up?

By Alison Lukan Aug 7, 2019

As free agency activity wore down, each of our beat writers took a look at what they expect next year's lineup to look like for their respective team. Offseason projections are stuff of what-if's and possibilities, but they might also be one of the times we look at a team individually without a lot of context from the league as a whole.

So the question came to mind — how would each of these rosters stack up against one another?

To answer this question, Shayna Goldman and I ran each writer's expected lineup through Sean Tierney's lineup tool to evaluate each roster against the same set of measures and calculations.

You can read more on how the lineup tool works here, but basically it evaluates a lineup in terms of combinations and the anticipated ice time based on role. Then, using wins above replacement (WAR) data from Evolving-Hockey, each team's anticipated standings points is calculated.

There are some important limitations to know going into this analysis:

We restricted our lineup evaluation to 12 forwards, six defensemen and two goaltenders

For rookies and prospects outside the NHL, Tierney used Emmanuel Perry's prospect data for his projections and, given how these players can be evaluated, their WAR values should be taken with a grain of salt

If a rookie or prospect outside the NHL wasn't included in our WAR data set, we used the value of a replacement level player — so there's obviously room for improvement there

In terms of TOI distribution across lines, pairs and goaltenders, we used the ones Tierney suggests. The only exception is when a writer specifically noted exceptions for goaltenders.

If teams tied in standings points, we used total team WAR as a tie-breaker

There are definitely some weird results and outliers, and we've noted why for each, but overall this was a fun look at how things might just stack up come next season.

Here's how the final standings, as well as what the first round of the playoffs would look like (click any image to enlarge).

It's no real surprise that last year's President's Trophy winners' 2019-20 lineup projects strongly for next season. In our WAR categories, Tampa currently ranks first in both forwards and defense, and fifth in goaltending. Further, the recent addition of Kevin Shattenkirk brings even more versatility to the defense regardless of where he slots into the lineup. Competition on the blue line will look to be steep with Jan Rutta earning playoff time last season and the acquisition of Luke Schenn this offseason.

Boston is a team that didn't have much overhaul to do on its roster and, accordingly, it's projected roster looks to remain quite robust for the coming season, particularly when its forward group ranks third in total WAR.

The defending Stanley Cup champions are definitely a story of the sum being greater than the total of its parts. Their forwards and goaltending units each project to be within the top third of the league in terms of total WAR, but they are bolstered by the third-overall defense. And, as we saw, these puzzle pieces fit together perfectly down the stretch for St. Louis last year. Of those projected to be in the starting lineup, only Ivan Barbashev remains unsigned.

A revamped fourth line and tweaked defensive corps add to an established core in Washington that will look to once again win the Metropolitan Division. It's interesting that goaltending projects to be the weakest part of this specific team in terms of WAR, ranking 15th overall.

As James Mirtle said in his lineup projection, the 2019-20 Leafs are "going to be different." New faces will be on both sides of the ice due to acquisition and opportunity — for example, Mirtle expects Nick Shore to slot in as Zach Hyman recovers from a torn ACL; and the acquisition of Jordan Schmalz through a trade with St. Louis might add a name to the list of players vying for the third pair. Toronto remains the second-best offensive group but its defense sits in 19th place in terms of total WAR. Goaltending ranks 13th.

Columbus ranking so high may be the biggest outlier in our model and shows us some of the big red flags to watch for — for better or worse — in this exercise. First, the impact of first-year players where the degree of difficulty estimating actual performance skyrockets. Alexandre Texier significantly elevates the value of the third line here, but the player, while promising, has just five NHL games to his name. Even the substitution of much-anticipated Emil Bemstrom halves the expected WAR for that trio and drops the team by six standings points. Second, this model is descriptive, not predictive, so overall, this forward group will have a lot to live up to in the post-Artemi Panarin world, and the big question mark lies in goaltending. The unproven tandem of Joonas Korpisalo and Elvis Merzlikins ranked last in our WAR projections.

*The value of a replacement-level goaltender was used for Elvis Merzlikins.

There hasn't been a lot of change for Montreal as far as the players in the mix, it's the mix itself that remains in question, and that



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variability obviously impacts how Montreal might perform. As Arpon Basu summarized, "in terms of who's on the roster, (this lineup) should be pretty close. The one thing set in stone is the first forward line. Some of the line combinations may be different; and Ben Chiarot might play with Jeff Petry. Brett Kulak would therefore be on the third pair."

But even with all this jumbling, Montreal currently ranks in our top 10 in forward, defense and overall WAR.

Congratulations to the Stars who come in first overall in goaltending WAR for next season and without a lot of drama. As Sean Shapiro noted, "Ben Bishop is the starter and Anton Khudobin is the reliable 1A. It would be wise if the duo had a similar split in games to last season, albeit by design instead of injuries to Bishop forcing their hand."

Otherwise the team as projected will have some work to do forward-wise (ranked 21st) but the play in net should be strong enough to keep them in eighth overall in WAR and firmly in a playoff spot for the second straight season.

*The value of a replacement-level defenseman was used for Stephen Johns.

Using this model, the Flames project to win the Pacific with the only weakness being goaltending (24th), but a lot of variables remain for Calgary. For further explanation, we turned the floor over to Kent Wilson.

"Brad Treliving still has a lot of work to do to get under the cap, which will have implications on the depth chart. (This lineup) assumes Michael Frolik is traded as a cap dump. If (TJ) Brodie is traded instead of (or in addition to) Frolik, Rasmus Andersson moves up to the top pairing with (Mark) Giordano and Brandon Davidson plays on the third pairing with (Juuso) Valimaki.

"Andrew Mangiapane may start life out on the fourth line, but I think he's a good bet to be elevated to the top-six on the second line. If it's not him, then it will be Sam Bennett, with Mangiapane sliding up and taking Bennett's place instead. Milan Lucic probably starts life out on the third line, but I wouldn't be surprised to see him on line 4 by midseason."

Josh Yohe wrote earlier this summer about the projected lineup for next season and it's not expected to change much more. The Penguins' forward group still projects to be one of the top 10 in the league, according to WAR (Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin will do that), but a weaker third pairing has the defense ranked 15th overall and goaltending is also middle of the pack at 14th.

Even with Ian Cole out of the lineup until December (hip surgery), a strong Avalanche team got stronger this offseason. Interestingly, according to our model, the most significant position is goaltending, where Phillipp Grubauer and Pavel Francouz are currently the third-best pairing in terms of any tandem's WAR, but again, this is where fewer appearances for the starter and rookie variability for the backup can inflate such projections. Over the past three seasons, Grubauer only appeared in 96 games; while his numbers were stellar and there's reason to be optimistic, a lot can change in a netminder's first full season as a starter. There is also a very good chance the skaters in front of the net exceed these projections; and even if they do not, this is still a playoff team.

Murat Ates said Winnipeg is likely to be a cap team this coming season, but they should also be guaranteed a playoff spot for their trouble. The roster as constructed looks to fall right in the middle in terms of forward WAR (15th) and defensive WAR (16th), and is bolstered by the seventh-best goaltending.

Nashville was involved in one of the most high-profile roster changes this summer as they moved P.K. Subban to make room for top-six center Matt Duchene. The projected Predators roster remains strong enough to earn postseason play and will continue to ride the strength of play in net – Nashville's goaltending had the fourth-best WAR of any team.

Vegas had to do quite a bit of shuffling to remain cap compliant this offseason, but the dust has settled and it locked in a roster that should still make the postseason as constructed. The loss of Nikita Gusev cost Vegas two standings points in our model, but it still has the fifth-best forward corps in the NHL that's built around long-term deals for key players such as Mark Stone and William Karlsson.

This roster presumes that both Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau are on the Sharks roster come opening night. But even with them, while San Jose's forward group has lost some punch, its defensive corps currently stands as second-best in the league in our WAR standings. And while this isn't exactly breaking news, a boost in goaltending could add a much needed increase in overall performance.

We mentioned Columbus earlier as over-estimated in this exercise, and its former goaltender, Sergei Bobrovsky, is now with perhaps one of the most underestimated. Why? After a solid offseason, the Panthers' forwards and defensemen showed well in our WAR rankings, but goaltending lagged – primarily due to the unpredictability of rookie Sam Montembeault. Couple that with a weaker than usual season for Bobrovsky last year and even a slight over-performance by this tandem could propel the Panthers much higher in the standings.

The Hurricanes are a group that likes to surprise people one way or another, and they will have to do it again this season if this exercise holds true. The team surely got stronger this offseason (we're assuming Justin Williams returns), but their forward corps ranked 22nd in our WAR exercise. But who is to say this team doesn't again surge and remain in the playoff conversation.

Also on the netminding horizon, there are many players in the mix: Petr Mrazek, James Reimer, Alex Nedeljkovic and Anton Forsberg. We went with Mrazek-Reimer because, even though Carolina's goaltending situation isn't sorted completely and it's fair to expect Nedeljkovic to see some NHL action, his WAR impact was equal to Reimer's.

Chicago's is a roster where change has become a constant and Scott Powers did an outstanding job trying to project what the lineup looks like for the near future. One big key for this team in our exercise? The addition of Robin Lehner. He joins the Blackhawks off an exceptional season on the Island and brings a higher full season WAR value that is almost two wins higher than the incumbent Corey Crawford. This tandem currently ranks sixth overall in goaltending WAR. As Powers noted, coach Jeremy Colliton acknowledge a greater share of time going to his "backup" netminder, so we gave Crawford just a 60-40 edge in terms of overall playing time.

*The value of a replacement-level forward was used for Dominik Kubalik.

Count New Jersey as another team anticipating a more even split in net, so we've given Cory Schneider and Mackenzie Blackwood equal time in our exercise. As far as skaters go, many a positional battle is expected in training camp, and if Subban stays healthy and becomes a defensive force, while Nikita Gusev and/or Jack Hughes show to be as promised, the Devils are another contender for over-performing the projections from this exercise.



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The Islanders came up as a player in a lot of free agency talk, but when all was said and done, there hasn't been a lot of upheaval. Anders Lee remains an Islander and, after an upstart season last year that was driven by goaltending, this team will look to surprise once again. The good news on the Island is that, even with the departure of Lehner and arrival of Varlamov, the Islanders' tandem still ranks ninth in the league in WAR, while the defense sits in 12th place.

It will be an interesting season for the Wild who will be playing under a new general manager likely looking to quickly reverse the fortune of a team that hasn't reached expectations of late. Changes may be coming as the season rolls on, but for now, the projected roster sits outside of a playoff spot.

The Canucks were active this summer and show some progress in their lineup effectiveness, at least in terms of this exercise. Their defense ranks 17th overall and goaltending sits in a stout 11th place. However, outside of that dangerous top line, the forward group will still struggle offensively.

Philadelphia is another team with some moving parts in its lineup and it may be hard to squeeze impactful value out of the bottom six forwards and defensive group. At least the goaltending situation seems to be settled after the position was a turnstile last year. And, with general manager Chuck Fletcher saying, "he envisions (Carter) Hart and (Brian) Elliott sharing duties in 2019-20, with both netminders receiving somewhere between 30 and 50 games ... (with) the organization is hoping that Hart ends up closer to the 50-start mark," we've modified the time on ice percentages to 60-40.

*The value of a replacement-level forward was used for German Rubtsov.

Even the addition of Phil Kessel isn't enough to push this forward group into the top half of the league, but coach Rick Tocchet acknowledged a lot can change before opening night. There will be plenty to explore in the Coyotes' lineup and one of the most interesting parts of the roster may be the goaltending. Catherine Silverman explored the netminding pipeline and, with her analysis, we've split playing time 50-50 between Antti Raanta and Darcy Kuemper. Right now the 6.44 WAR those two generate ranks ninth.

This is one of the rankings that likely comes with a grain of salt as the Rangers are likely another victim of young talent impacting WAR valuation – after all this is a team that added Artemi Panarin this summer. Outlining some of the key decisions in the lineup we used from this exercise, Rick Carpinello and Goldman chose to keep Chris Kreider on the second line (barring any trade) and put Ryan Strome in over Vladislav Namestnikov. If Kreider is traded, our writers project Buchnevich and Kravtsov on line two, Brendan Lemieux-Lias Andersson-Strome as line three, Cristoval Nieves over Greg McKegg on line four and a shift lower in the standings.

Buffalo entered the offseason with a lot of question marks, and with the dust settling, Joe Yerdon offered what he sees as the opening night lineup (acknowledging the initial absence of Lawrence Pilut (shoulder) and Zach Bogosian (hip)). Ultimately, the Sabres are stuck in a bit of a balancing act with all the veteran players who still have a hold on spots while young talent pushes for spots, and there are just so many defenders competing for ice time.

Anaheim is undergoing a "roster transformation" as Eric Stephens described in his look at the lineup for the coming season, but for now, in Anaheim, the storyline is: John Gibson, we're sorry.

*The value of a replacement-level defenseman was used for Jani Hakanpaa.

Detroit is another team that is working on finding the right spots for the young talent that is NHL-ready. Again, that injects a measure of questioning because it's hard to fully evaluate players in this exercise before they have a lot of NHL experience.

Even when you're a team that has Connor McDavid, this exercise doesn't look as favorably on a roster that will see an injection of change coming from a lot of prospect-based talent and with so much unknown. The highest ranking segment of the Oilers roster was in net with a Mikko Koskinen—Mike Smith tandem falling 23rd in WAR.

*The value of a replacement-level player was used for Gaeten Haas and for Matt Benning.

It's hard to be optimistic about Ottawa's lineup right now. While its defense came in 13th, the forward group ranked last and only two teams' goaltending was worse than the Senators'.

*The value of a replacement-level forward was used for Jonathan Davidsson.

Another flag we noted in this exercise is the impact of being descriptive of what has happened, and last year's performance surely impacts this Kings prediction. Each of Los Angeles' units – forwards, defense and goaltending – ranked in the bottom five of our WAR standings. The Kings' are evolving their roster, but their promising young talent doesn't look to be quite ready and this coming season may be a slow bit of improvement on last year.

Postseason Picture

While the resulting values in this exercise may not be fully true to expected outcomes, they do at least give us a look at how each team's projected lineup measures against one another using the same scale.

Here's how each team ranked in total WAR with representative segments for forwards, defense and goaltending.

If these relative measures to one another stay true, here's how the final conference standings would shake out (an asterisk designates playoff teams):

And here's a mock up of the first round of the playoff picture come April.

Conclusion

As noted, this exercise wasn't about offering up concrete final standings for the 2019-20 season, it was about measuring each of our projections against the same ruler. There are plenty of variables not just in the lineups, but also in how the lineup calculator attributes value to players that can – and will – affect how reality compares to our results.

But for now, it was fun to take a gander at how each team expects to stack up against the other teams in the league, and who knows which lineups will end up over or under-performing expectations?

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators' Dorion talks team's payroll, off-season moves and 2019-20 optimism

Wayne Scanlan August 7, 2019, 2:12 PM



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This has been another interesting summer for the Ottawa Senators, a team that finished dead last in the NHL in 2018-19 and fired head coach Guy Boucher before it was over. Despite their finish, Ottawa only drafted 19th overall in Round 1 because it surrendered its own pick to secure forward Brady Tkachuk in the 2018 draft.

In a one-on-one interview, general manager Pierre Dorion discussed with Sportsnet's Wayne Scanlan his off-season moves, his notoriously low roster payroll and why he is so bullish on the upcoming season with new coach D.J. Smith behind the bench.

Sportsnet: Pierre, how would you characterize this off-season as far as the Ottawa Senators are concerned?

Pierre Dorion: It's been a very productive off-season. I think we've made a lot of changes. Right from the end of the year until now, the first and biggest thing was the hiring of (head coach) D.J. Smith. We hired someone we feel is going to grow with these players. And someone who's going to set the culture where we need it to be for us to have a lot of success going forward.

I think the other thing we've done, while we've created opportunity for young players, at the same time we've brought in veterans, guys we feel are going to help these young players grow and develop. And we made some trades that will help us short term but also in the long term — the trade we made with Toronto in getting Nikita Zaitsev and Connor Brown (for Cody Ceci and Ben Harpur), as well as the trade for Artem Anisimov, who we feel will play really well in our system.

SN: Is your work nearly done for the summer?

Dorion: Honestly, I don't think your work is ever done as a GM. We don't expect to be too busy right now. The Anisimov trade (for Zack Smith) came pretty quickly, in the second week of July we really started getting into the details of it. And just a week ago or so the Ryan Callahan trade (for Mike Condon). We're about a month away from rookie camp. I think it starts Sept. 6. So, we're looking forward to it, but our work is never done.

SN: What is the latest on the Colin White contract discussions?

Dorion: Respectfully, I don't think we want to get into details about our negotiations for the simple reason that for us, it makes it harder negotiating through the public. But we want to tell our fans we know the importance of keeping our young core here for the long term. And we know that includes (Thomas) Chabot, White, (Brady) Tkachuk.

SN: Is there a chance Chabot could also get done this summer or fall, despite the fact he doesn't become an RFA until next summer?

Dorion: I'm pretty much going to give you the same answer, but we've had discussions.

Ottawa Senators defenceman Thomas Chabot. (Paul Sancya/AP/CP)

SN: A lot of fans feel the organization isn't constructing a true rebuild until some of these young players sign long-term deals? Would you concur?

Dorion: Our fans are really important to us. We all want the same things. We all want our young players to be here on long-term deals. We want them developing and growing together. Winning together. But the most important thing for us this year is making sure our young players do grow, and are surrounded by good veterans. And whether they're here in the NHL, or the American League, they're always progressing. That's the most important thing we're trying to

do here ... so when they get to the NHL, they're ready to contribute and help us win.

SN: As a competitive hockey guy, how much does it pain you to have an actual payroll in the neighbourhood of \$47.5 million (plus three LTIR players, including Callahan), when you have to compete against payrolls as high as \$80 million-plus?

Dorion: First and foremost, the most important thing to us is the Ottawa Senators and making sure our team continues to improve and get better. I think you'd agree with me, spending to the cap right now would do us no good. We have the cap flexibility to sign this core group of young players going forward and that's what we have to focus our attention on.

SN: How soon can that happen? Owner Eugene Melnyk has mentioned 2021 as the start of Ottawa's higher spending and what he termed a run of "unparalleled success."

Dorion: Eugene has put it on me to determine when the time will be to spend to the cap. He has been extremely supportive. The one thing with the plan that we have, we can't rush it, we can't take shortcuts, as tempting as they may be. We talk regularly, and when it comes time, we will pay our younger players.

SN: What excites you the most about the upcoming season?

Dorion: That's probably the most fun question to answer in all this. First and foremost, D. J. Smith, he's got an infectious personality. He's going to make these players play hard, he's going to make them accountable. I talked to him this morning for about 45 minutes, and I don't think I've been more pumped about doing what I have to do today. He just brings a joy to the game of hockey with his personality.

The other thing that excites us is the turnover on our roster. Not just the young players but the veterans. It's a significant difference, and we're trying to do this the proper way, adding quality, character core guys. Their mentorship can be valuable for our team success moving forward.

New Ottawa Senators head coach D.J. Smith. (Sean Kilpatrick/CP)

SN: How big a difference can Smith and his staff make in the team's overall play?

Dorion: I think it's going to be a massive difference. D.J. and his staff are going to bring — they're not going to be radical changes but they're going to be changes, where our players play for one another and we've got a team that's going to play with a lot of energy.

I don't think it's going to be measured all the time with wins and losses. But what we want to see from a management side, and what I think our fans want to see, is significant progression and we feel that's going to happen this year.

SN: Smith has been talking about improving the way Ottawa players "track the puck" (citing the Boston Bruins as an example). Is that something that registers with you?

Dorion: Yes, it definitely registers with us. I think you're going to see a big difference with our back-checking, in our tracking. How we play in our own end, with our centremen almost being like a third defenceman down low. Our scoring chances, I think, are going to come from different areas than they have in the past. But when you track the puck, and get on the opposition quicker before they get in the zone, or when they're entering the zone, I think it's going to really show to our fans that we are committed to a winning type of hockey and better defensive hockey. And we need to do that. When you give up the most goals against (302) last year, and we were pretty



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high up there the previous year (291), we have to really bear down on play without the puck.

SN: What are your expectations for this group this season?

Dorion: For us — our management group and me as GM — this is probably the most excited I've been. I just feel with the turnover we've had, the veterans we've brought in, combined with the young players, the new coaching staff, the chance for our young players to grow, whether here or in Belleville — personally I don't think I've been more excited about a season. This is one summer I feel is dragging on. I almost wish it was Sept. 6 today so we could start with rookie camp and get on with training camp and exhibition games and play our first game against Toronto on Oct. 2.

I know good things are ahead. And we feel really positive about this group of players.

SN: This isn't on the hockey side, but the departure of Aimee Deziel as chief marketing officer is the latest in a long line of club executives who have come and gone. Do you expect her to be replaced?

Dorion: That's not my place to answer, the only thing I know from being in the office this summer is that our business side is really working hard to get ready for this season and I think we're going to have a lot of new and exciting things.

SN: How would you market this 2019-20 team? Give us your best pitch.

Dorion: The first thing is, our fans can grow with us, can see the growth of our players. I think there is going to be as much accountability as I've seen in the past five-to-10 years. I think we are going to see a totally different team as far as work ethic, systems. The biggest thing is a different mindset. We have a lot of faith in this coach and I think we are really going to see these players progress.

SN: With the veterans added, including Ron Hainsey and Tyler Ennis as free agents, there may be less room for some of your young talent to make this roster, but fair to say it's not the worst thing to have them develop in AHL Belleville a while longer?

Dorion: Exactly. Let's say Player X, whomever that may be, one of our best prospects, doesn't make the team out of camp and is in Belleville til Christmas time. He's getting valuable experience. His mistakes won't be shown on Sportsnet every night and he's getting that experience in the minors so when he comes up here he's ready to contribute and help us have success. If you put them in the NHL too early, they lose their confidence and you set them back. It varies from prospect to prospect.

The importance of the veterans is twofold — they mentor the younger players and they ensure we don't have too many young players at the NHL level. If we had 20 players under 25 we'd finish in last place and then you create a losing culture. We have to be careful to balance a winning culture with developing them properly, progression, all these things. We've planned for this.

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Sportsnet.ca / Former Canadiens defenceman Andrei Markov eyeing NHL return

Mike Johnston August 7, 2019, 3:28 PM

Andrei Markov has spent the past two seasons in the KHL, but the veteran defenceman is reportedly eyeing a return to the NHL for the 2019-20 campaign.

If it were up to Markov, his North American comeback would be with the only NHL club he suited up for during his 16-season NHL career — the Montreal Canadiens.

"I know I'm 40, but it doesn't feel like I'm 40," Markov told Stu Cowen of the Montreal Gazette. "I worked hard over the summer and I've done some stuff I never did before. I put in lots of work this summer and I'm looking forward ... we'll see what's going to happen."

Markov signed a two-year deal with Ak Bars Kazan as a free agent following the 2016-17 NHL campaign, after he and the Canadiens couldn't come to an agreement on a new contract. Markov sought a multi-year offer then, something the Canadiens reportedly weren't willing to make.

The Russian didn't want to explore other NHL options two years ago, but he did leave the door open for an eventual return.

"I will never forget my time here," Markov said at the time. "I didn't see myself with any other NHL team. I didn't see myself wearing another jersey."

Markov was also just 10 games away from earning his silver stick when he decided to sign overseas. If he joins an NHL team this year and makes double-digit appearances, he'll become the eighth Russian in NHL history to reach the 1,000-game milestone.

"It's important ... but most important probably is to try to play one more year in the NHL, to prove that I can still play in that level," Markov told Cowen.

Unlike the case in 2017, it doesn't appear to be a Canadiens-or-bust situation for Markov.

"You never know," Markov added. "Right now, I'm going to say 'why not?' For example, if the Canadiens don't want me anymore and any other team gives me an offer or gives me an opportunity to play, I'll probably take that."

Markov was selected by the Canadiens in the sixth round (162nd overall) of the 1998 NHL Draft and accumulated 572 points in his 990 games. He ranks sixth all-time in games played in a Canadiens uniform behind Claude Provost (1,005), Jean Beliveau (1,125), Bob Gainey (1,160), Larry Robinson (1,202) and Henri Richard (1,258) and is among the franchise's all-time leading scorers from the back end.

Markov told Cowen he misses "everything" about Montreal.

"When you step on the ice you feel the fans, they're so passionate and they support each game and you feel like the crowd's got your back behind you," he said. "That feeling is kind of like something special, you know."

The Canadiens currently have approximately \$4 million in salary cap space and the blue line has a dearth of talent compared to other Atlantic Division teams.

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Sportsnet.ca / Crosby on the Subban incident, Golden Goal, Johnson's baseball brawl

Sportsnet Staff | August 7, 2019, 3:08 PM

Make no mistake, Sidney Crosby's got stories.

Though the longtime face of the NHL has always seemed most unfettered when that face is hidden away behind a CCM helmet and visor, the Cole Harbour king's 14-year career has seen no shortage of marquee moments — Stanley Cup runs, Olympic golds, and a fair few run-ins along the way.

Joining former teammates Ryan Whitney and Paul Bissonnette on a new episode of the Spittin' Chiclets podcast, released Wednesday on No. 87's 32nd birthday, Crosby shared some of his best stories from his decade-and-a-half in the game.

A few noteworthy tidbits:

1. Yes, Sid was irked by P.K. Subban's mouthwash trolling

Back in 2017, Crosby and Subban were locked in a Stanley Cup Final showdown between the Penguins and Subban's then-club, the Nashville Predators. The stars' rivalry was famously taken from the ice to the locker room midway through the series when Subban dropped this to reporters after a game (a Preds win) in which he and the Penguins captain had exchanged some words:

"Usually when guys chirp after a game or during the game it's usually about your game or something personal, but [Crosby] went on to tell me that my breath smelled bad, and I don't know why, because I used Listerine before the game. So I thought my breath smelled great. I mean, at the end of the day we're just going to take the win and move on."

Soon after, Subban arrived at the arena on gameday hauling a bag of Listerine for all to see. Much was made of whether the off-ice tomfoolery helped spur Crosby and the Penguins on to their eventual series win.

The Penguins captain shared his side:

"Yeah, I was a little irritated by it," Crosby said of Subban's antics. "I mean, I think you could tell at the time when I was doing the interviews. It was just like the last thing I wanted to be talking about. But I mean, maybe that was part of it."

"They had just tied it 2-2 — we had won the first two and that was in Nashville. He had said something to Guentz (Jake Guentzel) leaving the ice, and I just went to kind of get in the middle and try to break them up. He kind of kept saying stuff, and him and I went at it. Nothing was said even remotely close to that, but then to read that after, it was like, 'Oh okay, I'm going to have to answer [questions] about this.' It was more that. And then on top of that, he ended up taking Listerine, carrying a bottle of Listerine into the game or something. What are you going to do."

"He still jokes about it — we were at the awards and he was still joking around about it. I mean, it is what it is. ... That's just mind games, it's nothing. Me and him had some good run-ins throughout the whole series, I was playing a lot against him. I don't have anything against him for that. I just was kind of annoyed that I had to answer about it."

Crosby posted three points in the Penguins' subsequent Game 5 win, before they claimed the series — and the Cup — in Game 6.

2. Penguins teammate Jack Johnson made Sid's final baseball game a wild one

Prior to their reunion in Pittsburgh, Crosby and defender Jack Johnson played alongside each other during their dominant 2002-03 season for Shattuck-Saint Mary's — Crosby had 162 points in 57 games that year, Johnson had 42 points in 48 games.

But their wildest moment together apparently came on the diamond, not on the ice, when Johnson started a mid-game brawl while the two were playing for Shattuck's baseball team:

"That was crazy. That's the last baseball game I ever played in," Crosby said. "So, I was pitching and the other team was kind of chirping. That happened every game though, it was just fun, guys are going back and forth. [Johnson] gets up to bat, he starts saying stuff to their pitcher but the pitcher starts brushing him off. He kind of moves in a little closer, like kind of showing him, 'Hey I don't care if you're brushing me off, I'm going to get tighter to the plate.' So I'm on deck and I'm thinking, 'This is not going to be good.' You can tell, like, he's going to charge the mound at any point."

"Sure enough, brushes another one back, he goes out there, he just starts beating the crap out of the pitcher. Like, within two punches that guy's down. First baseman comes over, that guy's down. Second baseman throws his glove at him. So he's standing on the mound, two guys are down — I remember I ran, like hockey mentality, grabbed the catcher because I'm thinking he might blindside him. I'm like, 'What just happened.'"

"The athletic director came up to us after and said, 'You guys are going to have to sit out the rest of the season.'"

Canada's Sidney Crosby celebrates his game-winning goal during overtime period men's ice hockey gold medal final at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. (Paul Chiasson/CP)

3. A drill from his younger days helped Sid score Canada's Golden Goal

Though he's amassed his fair share of NHL accomplishments, there are many for whom his finest moment came without a Penguins jersey in sight. Crosby's gold medal-winning tally against Team USA at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver remains one of the Nova Scotia native's most iconic memories.

Crosby reflected on the moments leading up to the golden goal:

"I remember the feeling I had when [Team USA's Zach] Parise scored, that's what I remember the most. I was sick to my stomach," he said. "I was like, 'You've got to be kidding me.' This is, what was it a minute or under a minute he scored? And I remember, like 'Oh my God.' ... And then we only had 30 seconds, so we come in the room still kind of like lingering. I remember Scott Niedermayer was so cool and calm. I don't remember exactly what we said, but I mean, he was convinced we were going to win, judging by the way he was talking. I just remember, 'Wow, this guy's been through everything. We're going to get this done.' He had that quiet confidence."

He also recalled how a drill from his younger days helped clinch the game for the red and white:

"It's cool because I used to do this drill growing up, I remember, probably like 12-, 13-, 14-years-old. It was 10 pucks and you just shoot 10 into the net — the pucks were scattered all over the offensive zone, so you didn't necessarily know where the net is sometimes. You're just trying to get 10 pucks in as best time as you



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can, so you've got to score 10 goals on an empty net. It's pretty hard because, once you get tired, you're skating out to the blue line, turning, you're firing, you miss, puck goes in the corner, you gotta go chase it down, it's just annoying. It's kind of like a bag skate at the end.

"But anyways, that drill used to get those bad angles all the time, and you don't really look at the net a lot, you just kind of let it go. And it was just one of those things where that puck just kind of popped out and for whatever reason, I shot it. But it wasn't a great angle — for whatever reason, I shot it, but most times you'd take that to the net, and I think that's what Miller probably thought, I was going to take that to the net.

"Nine times out of 10 I probably don't shoot that right away. It was just weird the way it worked out."

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