



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

New owner, new players, new coach. How Canes plan to sell those changes to fans.

By Chip Alexander

The “Redvolution” is ending, its purpose served.

For the Carolina Hurricanes, make way for “Take Warning.” Expect to see it in promotions, time and again.

The Hurricanes have a new owner. They have a new head coach and assistant coaches. They will have a new look to their team roster when the 2018-19 season begins.

And a new marketing slogan.

“We knew we’d be pivoting away from ‘Redvolution’ toward the end of last season, when we knew we would not make the playoffs,” said Mike Forman, the Canes’ senior director of marketing and brand strategy. “It had a good run. To live three years as a marketing slogan, used by media, the players, by fans, we were really pleased with the campaign. But we thought it had run its course.”

“Take Warning” initially was to be used in introducing the Canes’ new alternate jersey on June 22, when the team hosted an NHL Draft night party at Raleigh Beer Garden. Forman said the team was going to market game nights in which the Canes wore the black alternate jerseys — including 11 Fridays this season — as “Take Warning” nights.

“We used it with the (jersey) teaser to gauge the fan feedback on it,” Forman said.

The feedback was strongly positive. As Forman put it, there is an “ominous” feel to it — the Canes also used “New Storm” on the jersey video tease.

The Canes had a new chief marketing slogan. “We think we found a winner,” Forman said.

Forman said it was a collaborative effort but credits Dan LaTorraca with “tossing out the idea.” LaTorraca is new, too, having been hired as the team’s director of digital marketing after working for the Carolina Panthers and Brooklyn Nets.

The Hurricanes had the No. 2 overall pick in the 2018 draft after being the biggest winner in the draft lottery, and while owner Tom Dundon and management were ecstatic, the same was true for the team’s marketing people.

Forman said Dundon and general manager Don Waddell quickly settled on Russian forward Andrei Svechnikov as the Canes’ first-round selection, giving the marketing staff a nice headstart for the draft in Dallas.

“We were able to build out video clips, had posters available, jerseys with nameplates,” Forman said. “We knew what number he’d have ahead of time (No. 37). Andrei was in town a few weeks early for a quick photo shoot, video shoot.

“It was great to get so much in advance. It’s awesome they’d be so open with us and trust us that we wouldn’t tell anybody what’s going on. We had it all ready to go.”

The team held its annual Summerfest Celebration the week after the draft, in conjunction with its prospect development camp. Posters featuring Svechnikov were scattered about PNC Arena — “This Seat Could be Yours!” — and the first 37 fans to buy full season tickets were promised a puck signed “by #37 himself.”

After missing the Stanley Cup playoffs for nine consecutive years, the longest playoff drought in the league, the Canes are marketing youth and hope. The team is banking that young established players such as forwards Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen, with prospects such as Svechnikov and 19-year-old center Martin Necas, give its fans optimism about the future.

“There are so many new components with the team now with the new owner and new players. It’s a new day,” said Scott Dupree, executive director of the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance. “It makes all the sense in the world for them to have a new marketing campaign.”

Jonathan Jensen, an assistant professor of sport administration at UNC, called it smart marketing.

“When you’ve gone nine straight years without making the playoffs, there’s not a lot to lean on,” said Jensen, a former sports marketing executive. “I’m sure they’ve done an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, and what can they leverage moving forward. Youth, hope and with the growth that’s going on in Wake County and in Raleigh ... it all makes a lot of sense.”

Jensen said there’s data that 50 new people are moving into Wake County each day, many perhaps lured by the high rankings the area has received for livability and business. For the Canes, that’s an influx of potential new customers and fans.

“Whatever perception people may have had about the Hurricanes — ‘Oh, they’re not winning, they’re not innovative’ — those things may not matter as much with so many people getting introduced to the brand for the first time,” Jensen said. “I think it’s an exciting time for the team. A million more people in Wake County in 10 years? The Hurricanes have that growth, so it’s a matter of introducing those newcomers to the area to the brand.”

And embracing an old franchise brand — the Hartford Whalers. The Canes still have plans to have a retro night at PNC Arena and wear the iconic Whalers jerseys if approved by the league. Under former majority owner Peter Karmanos, who moved the team from Hartford, Conn., in 1997, that would not have happened. Dundon wants it.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

"Sticking your head in the sand like an ostrich and saying, 'Oh, we once were the Hartford Whalers but we're going to forget that ever happened,' that's really not smart," Jensen said. "It makes no sense to throw away all that history."

"Particularly since (Dundon) doesn't come from hockey and doesn't come from professional sports, it seems like they've been a lot more innovative and lot more willing to take chances."

When the franchise first came to North Carolina the brand was a new one — the renamed Carolina Hurricanes. A strong dose of traditional advertising and marketing helped build the brand, in the area and in the state, but so did winning.

In the first 12 seasons the team was in Raleigh, after two seasons in Greensboro, the Canes won the 2006 Stanley Cup, played in two Stanley Cup finals (2002, 2006) and reached the Eastern Conference finals (2009) while hosting the 2011 NHL All-Star Game and 2004 NHL Draft. The exposure, for the team and the Triangle, was widespread.

"I think a lot of the brand has to do, going back a bit, on the crowds and the noise in the building and the tailgating and most importantly a Stanley Cup championship and two Stanley Cup finals appearances," Dupree said. "I think that's still at the core of the brand nationally. They did enough good things and great things from 1997 to 2009 to establish the brand of a vibrant, winning professional sports franchise in the South and in Raleigh in particular."

"I think that's still there but obviously not as strong as it was 10 years ago and they have work to do ... but the base and the foundation is still there. I think it's very realistic to get back to that level of national awareness and national brand recognition that they may have lost over the last nine or 10 years. Marketing is important but winning is more important."

When Waddell, the former president and GM of the Atlanta Thrashers, was brought in as team president in 2014, he said he was pleasantly surprised to find the Hurricanes brand to be strong. But a big part of his job is filling the seats at PNC Arena, and the Canes' inability to reach the playoffs has been a challenge.

"The brand was strong," Waddell said last week. "Every place I went, everybody knew about the Hurricanes but we

had lost connection with the community. But I think we've done a good job in reaching out to the community."

Waddell noted paid attendance increased \$3.5 million last season despite not making the playoffs.

One saving grace the past nine years: the rise of social media. The Canes use their social media platforms to directly connect with their fans. Their main Twitter account — @nhlcanes — has 355,000 followers and their Instagram account 186,000.

"With social, there is no salary floor, no salary ceiling," Forman said. "You can compete with anyone on social. If you engage with your fans it doesn't matter if it's the Hurricanes or Toronto Maple Leafs. You can build a phenomenal social brand, and that's what we're trying to do."

Looking to the 2018-19 season, Forman said the team may again offer a "Canes Pass," although no firm decision has been made. After Dundon became majority owner in January, the "Canes Pass" was introduced, allowing fans to pay \$97 to attend as many as nine home games in February. The team then extended the promotion into March and April.

Forman said 850 passes were sold in February and that several fans have become season-ticket holders.

The Canes will continue the College Colors Night, offering caps with the Canes logo and a college logo. The N.C. State and East Carolina promotions sold out last year and the Duke and UNC promotions were close to sellouts, Forman said, and the Hurricanes could add such schools as Appalachian State, UNC Charlotte and UNC Greensboro this season.

An early promotion will be Aug. 23, when the Hurricanes and Durham Bulls team up for Hockey Night at Durham Bulls Athletic Park. The Bulls will wear jerseys and caps patterned after the Canes jersey.

"The fact we've been able to build this brand and our (social media) follower base and the engagement we have, without a playoff appearance, gets all of us excited," Forman said. "If we can do that now, what's going to happen when we are in the playoffs? With so many eyes on us, I think we're going to have a lot of fun with it."

Hurricanes to be televised nationally once during 2018-19 season

By Brett Haensel

Of the 109 games NBC Sports plans to air nationally on either NBC or NBCSN, the Carolina Hurricanes will be featured just once.

Carolina's lone appearance on a national broadcast will come on March 26, when the Hurricanes will face the Washington Capitals on the road on NBCSN. Meanwhile, the defending Stanley Cup champion Capitals will be televised 18 times on an NBC Sports network throughout the season.

Last season, every Canes game was televised, with 81 out of the 82 contests appearing on either FOX Sports Carolinas or FOX Sports Southeast. Carolina also had just one game broadcast on NBCSN a year ago.

The rest of the Hurricanes' 2018-19 television schedule has yet to be released.

The 109 games NBC Sports is set to broadcast are its most since acquiring NHL rights before the 2005-06 season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018



Hamilton Named One of NHL's Top Defensemen

NHL Network ranks Hamilton 18th on top 20 list

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes have one of the National Hockey League's best defensive corps, a group that now includes one of the league's top 20 defensemen, according to NHL Network.

Dougie Hamilton ranks 18th on NHL Network's list of Top 20 NHL Defensemen Right Now, as revealed in a Sunday night television special.

The Canes acquired Hamilton from the Calgary Flames in a five-player, draft-day trade, a move that brought an offensive force to the team's blue line. Hamilton, 25, ranked tied for first among NHL defensemen with 17 goals in the 2017-18 season. Selected ninth overall by the Boston Bruins in the 2011 NHL Entry Draft, Hamilton has tallied double-digit goals and at least 42 points in four consecutive seasons. The Toronto native has totaled 220 points (64g, 156a) in 423 games over six seasons with Boston and Calgary.

The right-shooting Hamilton now figures to be an integral part of the Hurricanes' top four on defense, whether he skates alongside Jacob Slavin or Calvin de Haan, and he'll likely be a mainstay on the team's power play.

"I think they're a team on the rise," Hamilton said of the Canes, shortly after learning of the trade on June 23. "I'm excited to be a part of a young group ... and help Carolina become a playoff team. It's going to be fun. I'm looking forward to it."

No other members of the Canes' defense cracked the NHL Network's top 20 nor their short list of defensemen "on the bubble," though you certainly could make a strong case for any number of them, including Slavin, who received a fifth place Norris Trophy vote in 2017-18.

After naming the league's top 20 centers the week prior, NHL Network will continue their weekly countdowns leading up to the start of the 2018-19 season with their lists of the top 20 wings, top 20 goalies and top 50 players. [Click here for more.](#)



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Canes Revisionist History: John Forslund to NBC?

John Forslund has been a stalwart in the Hurricanes booth since day one in North Carolina. What if he left or were to leave?

By Jake Crouse

John Forslund is a Carolina Hurricanes institution, serving as television play-by-play announcer for the team since its move to Raleigh and years before, too, with the Hartford Whalers. But what if his tenure had been cut short by a full-time gig at NBC along the way, or could be so sometime in the next few years with a national job opening upon the retirement of Doc Emrick?

It's hard to imagine Forslund forgoing an extension with the Canes during any point of his career thus far, assuming contract negotiations went fairly and smoothly. Forslund was with the franchise when it moved to North Carolina and said he took pride in the fact that he was a part of the growth of a "burgeoning team."

But what if he hadn't moved? What if he was concerned with staying near a national market, and opted to stay within reach of NBC execs (or those of ESPN, who held the national NHL contract at the time) or, potentially, join the ship after departing his Hartford gig?

It's hard to backtrack and try to pick out specific replacements for Forslund at the time, but there are a few that would be interesting thought scenarios.

For example, what if J.P. Dellacamera showed up free along the way? I know, I know -- why would we ever entertain the idea of a Thrasher-affiliated broadcaster? But at the time Forslund got his start with the Hurricanes, he hadn't begun with the Thrashers. His tenure was from 2003 to 2008.

But listening to Dellacamera's calls, I couldn't help but notice a severe drop in energy level during the big moments of a game. Maybe it's partly due to his voice carrying less heft, but his goal calls — more so in hockey than in soccer, the sport he calls the most — lack energy, and he doesn't seem to care much at all about calling the opponent's goal.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

Another fun one to consider is the man who hopped around a bit over his 2,000+ games called: Jeff Rimer. Now the play-by-play man for the Columbus Blue Jackets, he also spent time with the Washington Capitals and Florida Panthers, including calling games for both teams in the same season.

Rimer definitely packs a punch for goals and clutch saves and has a pretty agreeable tone of voice, but there's just something with his long "S" sounds that I can't seem to get over.

But it's hard to entertain the idea of Forslund leaving before now. I mean, come on -- even though he's increasingly worked with NBC for playoff broadcasts, he saves, "Hey, hey, whaddya say?" for the local broadcasts of a team that hasn't seen the playoffs in nine seasons. That's relationship goals.

He's also just a gem to listen to. How Forslund manages to scream without any sign of cracking his voice or overpowering the audio system capabilities is beyond me.

After the Hurricanes were unable to come to terms with Chuck Kaiton this offseason, serious questions emerged about what may happen to Forslund, given the reliance of NBC on him as a play-by-play announcer. Would he join the national market — one he was concerned with reaching in his early days — or try to work out something in Raleigh?

Thankfully, he's around for another two years at least, but the most likely candidate for his position had he left this

summer is a little clearer than it would have been years ago: Jason Shaya.

Shaya has been the voice of the Charlotte Checkers since 2007 and has learned the team from the ground-up through the process. He's markedly improved in his on-camera appearances since he started doing field reports on home game days years ago.

Shaya made his NHL broadcast debut in last season's 8-1 loss to Toronto (boy, talk about being thrown into the fire), and reaction trended pretty favorable. Plus, that voice!

Twitter Ads info and privacy

But it would also be interesting to hear from Dallas Stars broadcaster Daryl Reaugh, too. Reaugh got his start in NHL broadcasting with the Whalers alongside Forslund (I even found the Courant article that mentions that hiring (bottom of story)).

But Reaugh is now the color analyst for the Stars and served as a long-term fill-in play-by-play man after the untimely death of Dave Strader, and it's hard to imagine he'd jump ship so soon, especially given those unfortunate circumstances.

Still, it's fun to entertain the idea of a guy who drops Tupac song lyrics into broadcasts taking over the Canes booth.

For now, though, let's appreciate the guy we've got. He's a national talent whose stuck it out with us all these years, and he's as loyal as he is entertaining.

The Hockey News

Five young players facing what could be make-or-break seasons

By: Jared Clinton

Last season, it was first-overall pick Nail Yakupov who saw himself given one more chance to get his career on track. This time, these five young players could be facing career-defining campaigns.

It was safe to call the Colorado Avalanche's signing of Nail Yakupov to a one-year, \$875,000 last summer a calculated risk.

On one hand, the 2012 first-overall pick hadn't lived up to the considerable hype and expectations surrounding him, failing to ever reach the same heights as he did during his 17-goal, 31-point rookie campaign with the Edmonton Oilers during the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season. On the other, Yakupov still had many of the tools that could have made him a late-bloomer. He was gifted with and worked to establish speed and a mind for the offensive game, but his defensive game was a liability. The hope was more structure could turn him into an effective, every-game player in Colorado.

The early returns on Yakupov were great for the Avalanche, too. While he wasn't necessarily white hot, his seven-goal, 10-point output through the first two months of the season came with promise he could be a half-point per game player

in Colorado and one with definite 20-goal upside. As the season wore on, however, Yakupov's production slipped, his appearances became more infrequent, his minutes fewer and he ended the season as a healthy scratch in nine consecutive contests, including all six first-round playoff outings.

Thus, when news came earlier this off-season that Yakupov had departed the NHL for life in the KHL with SKA St. Petersburg, it was no surprise. After all, the 24-year-old had been given repeated opportunities to sink or swim, and in what will likely be the last NHL campaign of his career, he hadn't done enough offensively to warrant a continued presence in the lineup, nor had he improved enough without the puck to become a reliable hand.

Yakupov wasn't the only player who stared down a make-or-break season and ended up on the wrong side of the ledger, though. Former first rounders Jacob Josefson (20th overall in 2011) and Beau Bennett (20th overall in 2010), as well as once-promising second-rounders Shane Prince (61st overall in 2011) and Ville Pokka (34th overall in 2012) saw their North American stays come to a close as they inked deals overseas.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

So, which players could find themselves in a similar position this coming season? Here are six players whose NHL futures could be at stake during the 2018-19 campaign:

ZEMGUS GIRGENSONS, BUFFALO SABRES

The only thing that would have kept Girgensons off of a similar list last season was the fact that he had signed a two-year, \$3.2-million pact in mid-August. That guaranteed the winger at least two attempts at rediscovering the form that saw him pot 15 goals and 30 points during the 2014-15 campaign. Girgensons' steadily declining production has shaken the Sabres' faith in his ability to continue to produce as a top-six, or even middle-six, talent, though. His ice time slipped from his 2014-15 career-high of 19-plus minutes to less than 14 minutes per outing last season.

Girgensons doesn't need to have some sort of earth-shattering year to get back on track. No one is expecting a 30-goal breakout or a 60-point campaign. But if the 24-year-old was able to stay healthy and match his previous career-bests, which remains 15 goals and 30 points, Buffalo or another organization may not be opposed to taking a shot on the restricted free agent-to-be come next summer. If his point total falls for a fourth straight season, though, he might be KHL bound next season.

ANTHONY DUCLAIR, COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

Duclair will soon celebrate his 23rd birthday, and while it seems hard to fathom that the league as a whole would give up on a speedy former 20-goal scorer so soon, that's exactly what happened with Yakupov. And after moving from the Arizona Coyotes to the Chicago Blackhawks and now the Blue Jackets, where he signed for league minimum, in a span of six months, it seems Duclair could be heading towards a last-chance situation.

Duclair has boom-or-bust potential, to be sure. That was evident enough when he wowed with a 20-goal, 44-point performance as a rookie in 2015-16 with the Coyotes. His scoring that season was inflated by a wicked 19 percent shooting efficiency, though, which has been followed by a combined 9.2 percent rate over his past two campaigns. If that's foretelling of Duclair's future scoring success, he's going to need to improve his defensive game, gain the trust of the Blue Jackets' coaching staff and prove he can become an effective bottom-six weapon. If, like Yakupov, he can't manage to do so, Duclair's next stop might be in a European top flight with potential for an NHL return down the road.

CURTIS LAZAR, CALGARY FLAMES

Not to pick on another 2013 draft choice, but Lazar, who was selected 17th overall, finds himself in a tough spot. After being given two seasons to prove his mettle with the Senators, Lazar's 2016-17 season saw him fall out of favor in Ottawa and he was shipped off to the Flames come the trade deadline. But a new address didn't do much to spark a turnaround for Lazar. Instead, the 23-year-old continued to be saddled with fourth-line minutes and produced a mere two goals and 12 points in 65 games. It was the third-worst rate of production of Lazar's four-season NHL career, and another campaign in which he averaged less than 10 minutes per outing.

Here's the thing with Lazar: it's not that he can't bring some value. He's capable defensively and he's a responsible bottom-six player. But given the 23-year-old has yet to really break out of his shell offensively, is he worth keeping around over another similar bottom-six player who might have more offensive upside? That will be the decision the Flames have to make after this season, and if Calgary passes, other GMs will face the same question if they kick the tires on the former Canadian World Junior Championship captain.

PAVEL ZACHA, NEW JERSEY DEVILS

Zacha is the youngest player on this list, a 21-year-old who was a sixth-overall selection of the New Jersey Devils at the 2015 draft. And given his age, the make-or-break tag associated with Zacha comes with somewhat of an asterisk. It's likely that if he fails to make good on his potential — he was outstanding in the OHL before making the jump to the pro game — he'll still get at least one more shot to prove his game translates. At the moment, though, there's concern New Jersey has already seen all Zacha has to give.

Take last season, for instance. Despite major injury issues down the middle, Zacha lost his shot at a top-six center job almost immediately. After skating 19 minutes in the season-opener, his ice time dipped over the remainder of the season to the point he saw a mere four-second increase in ice time from his rookie season. And it's not as if his production increased, either. After an eight-goal, 24-point freshman campaign, Zacha scored eight goals and 25 points as a sophomore.

Again, this season probably won't be it for Zacha in the NHL. But if he fails to prove himself as an impact player at either end of the ice, his future in the league may be much more bleak than it was even ahead of last season.

PETR MRAZEK, CAROLINA HURRICANES

Both of the Hurricanes' netminders, Mrazek and Scott Darling, could potentially fall into the same category. The reality, though, is that while Darling's value dropped tremendously after his troublesome 2017-18 campaign, he has at the very least proven himself a capable backup on a Stanley Cup winning squad. Meanwhile, Mrazek, once heralded as the heir to the Detroit Red Wings crease, has seen his stock plummet to the point his 2016-17 campaign resulted in him being made available at the expansion draft. That didn't light a spark under Mrazek, either. Instead, he had a similarly awful 2017-18, which culminated with a trade to the Philadelphia Flyers, where he posted disastrous numbers, the lowlight of which was his unsightly .891 save percentage.

Yet, there's still reason for some hope. Mrazek has all the tools and he's proven himself capable over long stretches. His first 94 games in the NHL saw him post a .920 SP, nine shutouts and more than 60 percent of his starts during that time were above league average. That level of talent doesn't simply disappear. A stronger defense in front of him, and Carolina has that, might allow Mrazek to get his confidence back, and that could be the first step for the 26-year-old in turning his NHL career around. If that doesn't happen, though, he would seem a lock for a KHL crease as early as the 2018-19 campaign.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018



#NHLTopPlayers: Top 20 Defensemen

NHL Network reveals best of current crop

by David Satriano

Whether it's breaking up a big play, setting up a goal, or scoring on the power play, some defensemen can do it all. NHL Network experts chose the top 20 defensemen in the League for a special program that premiered Sunday as the second in a nine-part series leading up to the regular season. Here is the list:

1. Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay Lightning

Hedman won the Norris Trophy last season. It was the first time he was voted the best defenseman in the NHL. He scored 17 goals, tied for the most among NHL defensemen with Ivan Provorov of the Philadelphia Flyers and Dougie Hamilton of the Calgary Flames, and his 63 points ranked fifth. His plus-32 rating was his NHL career high and second among NHL defensemen behind Josh Manson of the Anaheim Ducks (plus-34). The 27-year-old averaged 25:51 of ice time (fifth in the NHL) and had an NHL career-high 216 shots on goal.

"He's as good as it gets," said Ken Daneyko, an NHL Network analyst who was a New Jersey Devils defenseman for 20 seasons (1982-2003) and won the Stanley Cup three times (1995, 2000, 2003). "He takes what's given to him. With his size (6-foot-6, 223 pounds), his reach, he can shoot the puck, he can control the tempo of the game. The element that I love the most is the subtle element in the neutral zone. Nobody stands up like him."

2. Drew Doughty, Los Angeles Kings

Doughty led the NHL in total ice time for the second straight season and third time in the past four in 2017-18 (2,200:31). He had double-digit goals for the third straight season (10), and his 60 points were an NHL career high. The 28-year-old was plus-23 and played all 82 games for the fourth straight season. He won the Norris in 2015-16 and has been a finalist three of the past four seasons.

"For me, Drew Doughty is the total package," Daneyko said. "He's big, he can change the game with a hit, he has the puck on his stick more than any other defenseman in the NHL, and so I always say that he changes the complexion of the game. He controls the tempo of the game. ... There's nothing he can't do."

3. Erik Karlsson, Ottawa Senators

Karlsson managed to put up good offensive numbers last season even though the Senators finished with the second-

worst record in the NHL and were 25th in scoring (219 goals). He had 53 assists, the fourth time in five seasons he's had at least that many, and finished with 62 points in 71 games. The 28-year-old captain averaged 26:44 of ice time, third in the NHL behind Doughty (26:50) and Ryan Suter of the Minnesota Wild (26:47). A two-time Norris winner (2011-12, 2014-15), Karlsson had 120 blocked shots last season, second on the Senators behind defenseman Cody Ceci (171).

"I don't know if he was 100 percent, but you still can't drop him out of the top five because he's the best offensive defenseman in the game today," Daneyko said. "He's so dynamic [with] the passing ability, the skating ability, and just blowing past defenders when he has the puck on the stick. ... He can do things that no other defenseman can, and that's with his on-ice awareness."

4. Brent Burns, San Jose Sharks

After getting off to a slow start offensively (12 points through 25 games), Burns picked it up and finished with 67 points (12 goals, 55 assists), second among NHL defensemen behind Hedman. His 27 power-play points ranked fourth among NHL defensemen, and his 332 shots on goal were third in the NHL behind forwards Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals (355) and Tyler Seguin of the Dallas Stars (335). The 33-year-old won the Norris in 2016-17, when he led NHL defensemen in goals (29) and points (76), and hasn't missed a game in the past four seasons. Burns had at least 60 points each of the past four seasons. He was voted to the NHL First All-Star Team in 2016-17 and the Second All-Star Team in 2015-16.

"He's one of the rare defensemen that can beat a goalie clean with a wrist shot from the blue line because the velocity is so unbelievable and it's that heavy," Daneyko said. "I don't know how you pick up a guy like Brent Burns. ... He's one of the most dynamic players in the League."

5. P.K. Subban, Nashville Predators

Subban's second season in Nashville was one of the best of his NHL career, and he was voted to the NHL Second All-Star Team. His 16 goals were an NHL career high, and he had 43 assists, 59 points (25 on the power play) and a plus-18 rating in 82 games. The 29-year-old has scored at least 10 goals in five of the past six seasons and has topped 50 points in four of the past five. Subban won the Norris in 2012-13 with the Montreal Canadiens. He finished third in 2017-18, the third time in six seasons he's been a finalist for the award.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

"We know he has the offensive flare, the heavy shot and can beat players 1-on-1, but I think he's improved his defensive game tremendously since joining Nashville," Daneyko said. "Sometimes learning the defensive game takes years to really understand ... and he now uses his stick much better in his defensive positioning."

6. Seth Jones, Columbus Blue Jackets

Jones had NHL career highs in goals (16), assists (41), points (57), power-play goals (seven), power-play points (24), game-winning goals (four), shots on goal (249) and rating (plus-10) last season, his fifth in the NHL. The 23-year-old led the Blue Jackets in average ice time (24:36) and was third in blocked shots (124).

"His stock has risen more than any defenseman in the NHL," Daneyko said. "His skating ability, the shot, his physicality, he's getting to become the total package. He is the go-to man in Columbus." **20 Defensemen: Seth Jones**

7. Roman Josi, Nashville Predators

Josi continues to be a steady presence offensively and defensively. He had 53 points (14 goals, 39 assists), second among Predators defensemen behind Subban, and an NHL career-high plus-24 rating in 78 games last season. The 28-year-old captain scored double-digit goals in each of the past five seasons and had at least 15 power-play points in each of the past four. He also led the Predators in shots on goal (253), blocked shots (120) and ice time per game (24:28).

8. John Carlson, Washington Capitals

Carlson's 68 points led NHL defensemen last season, his 53 assists were tied for third, and his 32 power-play points were one behind Shayne Gostisbehere of the Philadelphia Flyers for first. Carlson had 146 blocked shots, second on the Capitals behind defenseman Brooks Orpik (168), and scored four game-winning goals. In the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the 28-year-old had 20 points (five goals, 15 assists) and was plus-11 with 12 power-play points (tied for second in the NHL) to help Washington win its first Stanley Cup championship.

"He showed it all year long and again in the playoffs when things heated up," Daneyko said. "He's got a terrific one-timer, wrist shot and it's accurate. He got better and better last year, and his gap control has become real strong. He's a big reason why the Washington Capitals won the Stanley Cup."

9. Alex Pietrangelo, St. Louis Blues

Pietrangelo had NHL career highs in goals (15) and points (54) in 78 games last season. The 28-year-old captain had a plus rating for the third straight season and fourth in the past five (plus-8). Pietrangelo had 13 power-play points and five game-winning goals, and he led the Blues in total ice time (2,007:27) and average ice time (25:44; sixth in NHL).

"He's a general on the back end," Daneyko said. "Everything is smooth, moves the pucks well, he changes angles so well in the offensive zone, terrific wrist shot. He's a big stud for the St. Louis Blues." **Top 20 Defensemen: Pietrangelo**

10. John Klingberg, Dallas Stars

Klingberg's 67 points in 82 games last season were one behind Carlson for the lead among NHL defensemen, and he led the position in assists (59). He increased his point total by 18 from the previous season, and his 204 shots on goal were 80 more than he had in 2016-17. Klingberg, who turns 26 on Aug. 14, was plus-10 and played 24:04 per game, an average that has increased three straight seasons. He had a shot attempts differential at 5-on-5 (SAT) of plus-187, which led the Stars and was 17th among NHL defensemen.

11. Dustin Byfuglien, Winnipeg Jets

Byfuglien had 45 points (eight goals, 37 assists) in 2017-18, the seventh straight full NHL season he's had at least that many. His plus-15 was an NHL career high, and his 22 power-play points ranked third on the Jets. The 33-year-old had 147 hits, topping 100 for the seventh straight full NHL season, and reached 100 blocked shots for the third straight season (100 in 2017-18; 124 in 2016-17; 105 in 2015-16). He had 16 points in 17 playoff games to help the Jets advance to the 2018 Western Conference Final, when it lost in five games to the Vegas Golden Knights.

"There's nobody that is 260 pounds and moves like him," Daneyko said. "He's nimble on the ice and has one of the hardest shots in the NHL, and yes, he'll make you pay the price. ... He's big and dynamic. He's a beast. He's a linebacker on skates and changes the game in many different ways."

12. Zach Werenski, Columbus Blue Jackets

Werenski has developed into a top-tier defenseman in his two NHL seasons. A finalist for the Calder Trophy as the top rookie in 2016-17, his average ice time increased from 20:55 to 22:35 last season, when he scored five more goals (16 from 11). The 21-year-old's 92 blocked shots ranked fourth on the Blue Jackets, and he was third on Columbus with an SAT of plus-245.

"Here's a kid that came in the League like a 10-year veteran," Daneyko said. "I get amazed by how he sees the ice so well. He never panics. He's so smooth for such a young defenseman. He has a terrific wrist shot and is poised for a young guy. He has great on-ice awareness and is only going to get better." **Top 20 Defensemen: Zach Werenski**

13. Kris Letang, Pittsburgh Penguins

Coming off of a neck injury in 2016-17, Letang didn't miss a step last season, leading Penguins defensemen in goals (nine), assists (42) and points (51). He had 20 power-play points and 222 shots on goal, the second-highest total of his 12-season NHL career. Letang, 31, had 109 hits and 108 blocked shots, and finished ninth in the NHL in ice time per game (25:20).

14. Ryan Suter, Minnesota Wild

Suter broke his right ankle March 31 and missed the final four games of the regular season and five playoff games after missing a total of eight games in the previous seven seasons. His 26:47 of ice time per game was second in the NHL to Doughty's 26:50. Suter had 51 points (six goals, 45 assists), the second time in three seasons he had at least 50 after failing to reach 50 in his first 10 NHL seasons. The 33-



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

year-old has been first or second in the NHL in ice time in each of the past six seasons.

15. Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Arizona Coyotes

Ekman-Larsson had 42 points (14 goals, 28 assists) in 2017-18. It was the fifth straight season he had at least 12 goals, 20 assists and 39 points. He had at least six power-play goals and 15 power-play points in each of the past six seasons, and has taken at least 200 shots on goal in three of the past four. The 27-year-old has led the Coyotes in total and average ice time in each of the past six seasons.

16. Torey Krug, Boston Bruins

Krug increased his assist and point totals for the third straight season, finishing with NHL career highs in goals (14), assists (45) and points (59) in 76 games in 2017-18. His 25 power-play points were one shy of his career high, and his 7.1 shooting percentage was the second best in his five NHL seasons. The 27-year-old, who played 20:24 per game, has been a steadying presence for the Bruins, who are tied for third in the NHL in goals-against per game since Krug became a regular in 2013-14 (2.49).

"He's a guy that competes extremely hard," Daneyko said. "He's great at breaking out the puck. ... He has a tremendous slap shot and gets all of his power into it. He's a terrific defenseman."

17. Shayne Gostisbehere, Philadelphia Flyers

Gostisbehere had 65 points last season (26 more than in 2016-17), including an NHL career-high 52 assists. He finished fourth in points among NHL defensemen, his 33 power-play points tops at the position. His plus-10 rating was his best since joining the Flyers full-time in 2015-16. The 25-year-old played an NHL career-high 21:27 per game last season, up from 19:36 in 2016-17. He has increased his hits and blocked shots totals in each of the past two seasons.

"He really came into his own last year," Daneyko said. "This kid is dynamic, and for me, I think there are some defensive liabilities, but because how offensive the game has become and defensemen being part of that offense, Gostisbehere can do it all. He's shifty and can make a pass in the blink of an eye for a great scoring chance."

18. Dougie Hamilton, Carolina Hurricanes

Hamilton's 17 goals for the Flames last season were tied for the NHL lead by a defenseman (Hedman, Provorov). He has scored double-digit goals and had at least 42 points (44 in 2017-18) in four consecutive seasons. Traded to the Hurricanes on June 23, the 25-year-old had NHL career highs in power-play goals (six), shots on goal (270) and average ice time (21:32).

19. Charlie McAvoy, Boston Bruins

McAvoy was impressive as a rookie last season, when he had 32 points (seven goals, 25 assists) and was plus-20 in 63 games. He had five points (one goal, four assists) in 12 playoff games. The 20-year-old played 22:09 per game on the top pair with 41-year-old Zeno Chara, who led the Bruins at 22:54.

"He's already shown flashes of what he can do," Daneyko said. "He sees the ice so well and moves the puck well. ... He's going to be a stud defenseman, and the way he played right out of college and in the playoffs (in 2017) really opened my eyes. He felt no pressure, and he's going to get better and better."

20. Ryan Ellis, Nashville Predators

Ellis' value to the Predators was shown in their record with and without him in the lineup. In the 44 games he played, they were 30-8-6; they went 23-10-5 in the 38 games he missed to begin the season while recovering from knee surgery. The 27-year-old had 32 points (nine goals, 23 assists) and a plus-26 rating, second highest on Nashville (Filip Forsberg, plus-27). His 0.73 points per game led Predators defensemen. Ellis, who played 23:21 per game, averaged nearly two blocked shots per game (1.91).

"He's a great skating defenseman who moves the puck so well, can shoot the puck, creates a lot of offense," Daneyko said. "He's a good all-around defenseman who sometimes gets lost in the shuffle because of how good the Nashville Predators defense is. ... The game is now about jumping in on the play, supporting the offensive attack, getting your shots through, and he does all those things so well."

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

SportScan

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

1102936 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes to be televised nationally once during 2018-19 season

BY BRETT HAENSEL

August 13, 2018 02:53 PM

Of the 109 games NBC Sports plans to air nationally on either NBC or NBCSN, the Carolina Hurricanes will be featured just once.

Carolina's lone appearance on a national broadcast will come on March 26, when the Hurricanes will face the Washington Capitals on the road on NBCSN. Meanwhile, the defending Stanley Cup champion Capitals will be televised 18 times on an NBC Sports network throughout the season.

Last season, every Canes game was televised, with 81 out of the 82 contests appearing on either FOX Sports Carolinas or FOX Sports Southeast. Carolina also had just one game broadcast on NBCSN a year ago.

The rest of the Hurricanes' 2018-19 television schedule has yet to be released.

The 109 games NBC Sports is set to broadcast are its most since acquiring NHL rights before the 2005-06 season.

News Observer LOADED: 08.14.2018

1102937 Carolina Hurricanes

New owner, new players, new coach. How Canes plan to sell those changes to fans.

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

August 13, 2018 11:22 AM

The "Redvolution" is ending, its purpose served.

For the Carolina Hurricanes, make way for "Take Warning." Expect to see it in promotions, time and again.

The Hurricanes have a new owner. They have a new head coach and assistant coaches. They will have a new look to their team roster when the 2018-19 season begins.

And a new marketing slogan.

"We knew we'd be pivoting away from 'Redvolution' toward the end of last season, when we knew we would not make the playoffs," said Mike Forman, the Canes' senior director of marketing and brand strategy. "It had a good run. To live three years as a marketing slogan, used by

media, the players, by fans, we were really pleased with the campaign. But we thought it had run its course."

"Take Warning" initially was to be used in introducing the Canes' new alternate jersey on June 22, when the team hosted an NHL Draft night party at Raleigh Beer Garden. Forman said the team was going to market game nights in which the Canes wore the black alternate jerseys — including 11 Fridays this season — as "Take Warning" nights.

"We used it with the (jersey) teaser to gauge the fan feedback on it," Forman said.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Scott Darling takes questions from young hockey campers during an appearance at Raleigh Center Ice on July 24, 2018. Darling later went on the ice to work with the goalies at the camp.

The feedback was strongly positive. As Forman put it, there is an "ominous" feel to it — the Canes also used "New Storm" on the jersey video tease.

The Canes had a new chief marketing slogan. "We think we found a winner," Forman said.

Forman said it was a collaborative effort but credits Dan LaTorraca with "tossing out the idea." LaTorraca is new, too, having been hired as the team's director of digital marketing after working for the Carolina Panthers and Brooklyn Nets.

The Hurricanes had the No. 2 overall pick in the 2018 draft after being the biggest winner in the draft lottery, and while owner Tom Dundon and management were ecstatic, the same was true for the team's marketing people.

Forman said Dundon and general manager Don Waddell quickly settled on Russian forward Andrei Svechnikov as the Canes' first-round selection, giving the marketing staff a nice headstart for the draft in Dallas.

"We were able to build out video clips, had posters available, jerseys with nameplates," Forman said. "We knew what number he'd have ahead of time (No. 37). Andrei was in town a few weeks early for a quick photo shoot, video shoot.

"It was great to get so much in advance. It's awesome they'd be so open with us and trust us that we wouldn't tell anybody what's going on. We had it all ready to go."

The team held its annual Summerfest Celebration the week after the draft, in conjunction with its prospect development camp. Posters featuring Svechnikov were scattered about PNC Arena — "This Seat Could be Yours!" — and the first 37 fans to buy full season tickets were promised a puck signed "by #37 himself."

After missing the Stanley Cup playoffs for nine consecutive years, the longest playoff drought in the league, the Canes are marketing youth and hope. The team is banking that young established players such as forwards Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen, with prospects such as Svechnikov and 19-year-old center Martin Necas, give its fans optimism about the future.

"There are so many new components with the team now with the new owner and new players. It's a new day," said Scott Dupree, executive director of the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance. "It makes all the sense in the world for them to have a new marketing campaign."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

Jonathan Jensen, an assistant professor of sport administration at UNC, called it smart marketing.

"When you've gone nine straight years without making the playoffs, there's not a lot to lean on," said Jensen, a former sports marketing executive. "I'm sure they've done an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, and what can they can leverage moving forward. Youth, hope and with the growth that's going on in Wake County and in Raleigh ... it all makes a lot of sense."

Jensen said there's data that 50 new people are moving into Wake County each day, many perhaps lured by the high rankings the area has received for livability and business. For the Canes, that's an influx of potential new customers and fans.

"Whatever perception people may have had about the Hurricanes — 'Oh, they're not winning, they're not innovative' — those things may not matter as much with so many people getting introduced to the brand for the first time," Jensen said. "I think it's an exciting time for the team. A million more people in Wake County in 10 years? The Hurricanes have that growth, so it's a matter of introducing those newcomers to the area to the brand."

And embracing an old franchise brand — the Hartford Whalers. The Canes still have plans to have a retro night at PNC Arena and wear the iconic Whalers jerseys if approved by the league. Under former majority owner Peter Karmanos, who moved the team from Hartford, Conn., in 1997, that would not have happened. Dundon wants it.

"Sticking your head in the sand like an ostrich and saying, 'Oh, we once were the Hartford Whalers but we're going to forget that ever happened,' that's really not smart," Jensen said. "It makes no sense to throw away all that history."

"Particularly since (Dundon) doesn't come from hockey and doesn't come from professional sports, it seems like they've been a lot more innovative and lot more willing to take chances."

When the franchise first came to North Carolina the brand was a new one — the renamed Carolina Hurricanes. A strong dose of traditional advertising and marketing helped build the brand, in the area and in the state, but so did winning.

In the first 12 seasons the team was in Raleigh, after two seasons in Greensboro, the Canes won the 2006 Stanley Cup, played in two Stanley Cup finals (2002, 2006) and reached the Eastern Conference finals (2009) while hosting the 2011 NHL All-Star Game and 2004 NHL Draft. The exposure, for the team and the Triangle, was widespread.

"I think a lot of the brand has to do, going back a bit, on the crowds and the noise in the building and the tailgating and most importantly a Stanley Cup championship and two Stanley Cup finals appearances," Dupree said. "I think that's still at the core of the brand nationally. They did enough good things and great things from 1997 to 2009 to establish the brand of a vibrant, winning professional sports franchise in the South and in Raleigh in particular."

"I think that's still there but obviously not as strong as it was 10 years ago and they have work to do ... but the base and the foundation is still there. I think it's very realistic to get back to that level of national awareness and national brand recognition that they may have lost over the last nine or 10 years. Marketing is important but winning is more important."

svechnikovscreenshot

The Carolina Hurricanes have a new marketing slogan and a new star, 2018 first-round draft pick Andrei Svechnikov, to promote in marketing.

Carolina Hurricanes

When Waddell, the former president and GM of the Atlanta Thrashers, was brought in as team president in 2014, he said he was pleasantly surprised to find the Hurricanes brand to be strong. But a big part of his job is filling the seats at PNC Arena, and the Canes' inability to reach the playoffs has been a challenge.

"The brand was strong," Waddell said last week. "Every place I went, everybody knew about the Hurricanes but we had lost connection with the community. But I think we've done a good job in reaching out to the community."

Waddell noted paid attendance increased \$3.5 million last season despite not making the playoffs.

One saving grace the past nine years: the rise of social media. The Canes use their social media platforms to directly connect with their fans. Their main Twitter account — @nhlcanes — has 355,000 followers and their Instagram account 186,000.

"With social, there is no salary floor, no salary ceiling," Forman said. "You can compete with anyone on social. If you engage with your fans it doesn't matter if it's the Hurricanes or Toronto Maple Leafs. You can build a phenomenal social brand, and that's what we're trying to do."

Looking to the 2018-19 season, Forman said the team may again offer a "Canes Pass," although no firm decision has been made. After Dundon became majority owner in January, the "Canes Pass" was introduced, allowing fans to pay \$97 to attend as many as nine home games in February. The team then extended the promotion into March and April.

Forman said 850 passes were sold in February and that several fans have become season-ticket holders.

The Canes will continue the College Colors Night, offering caps with the Canes logo and a college logo. The N.C. State and East Carolina promotions sold out last year and the Duke and UNC promotions were close to sellouts, Forman said, and the Hurricanes could add such schools as Appalachian State, UNC Charlotte and UNC Greensboro this season.

An early promotion will be Aug. 23, when the Hurricanes and Durham Bulls team up for Hockey Night at Durham Bulls Athletic Park. The Bulls will wear jerseys and caps patterned after the Canes jersey.

"The fact we've been able to build this brand and our (social media) follower base and the engagement we have, without a playoff appearance, gets all of us excited," Forman said. "If we can do that now, what's going to happen when we are in the playoffs? With so many eyes on us, I think we're going to have a lot of fun with it."

News Observer LOADED: 08.14.2018

1102961 NHL

What's in a name? For Seattle's future NHL team, more than meets the Sock-eye

Geoff Baker

So, let's pick a name for the National Hockey League franchise expected to land in the Puget Sound area these next few months.

The team might as well splash down in the Sound itself, as potential names floated my way by fans last week included Orcas, Killer Whales, Killer Orcas, Sea Lions, Sockeyes, Steelheads, SeaDogs and Seawolves. Plenty of sea life, which isn't surprising given geography and the fact our century-old Stanley Cup champion team's name, Metropolitan, has since been usurped by New York's second-most-famous baseball squad.

What, you thought this would be easy? It isn't.

Picking the Mighty Ducks name in Anaheim to ride the marketing coattails of a Disney movie was easy. Now, our very own Hollywood type, Seattle NHL co-owner and movie producer legend Jerry Bruckheimer, along with team managing partner David Bonderman, must



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

bankroll an expansion launch without a feature film to borrow liberally off of.

Actually, some Seattle fans want Bruckheimer to borrow from a fictional sea creature in his Pirates of the Caribbean movies and name his team the "Seattle Kraken." Unfortunately, that lends itself to disparaging jokes such as: "Kraken under pressure?"

I can't take credit for that jab, which came from reader Joshua Krenz, who suggested "Kraken" – despite growing cult popularity among local hockey fans – is too gimmicky.

Krenz prefers "Seattle Sockeye" – that's singular on the salmon – because it passes the local identity test, lends itself to two-syllable name chants like "Let's go Sock-eye!" and is "a fierce competitor who battles upstream, encountering bears, dams, and other Sockeye just to mate and die."

He adds: "It's a great double entendre. Sockeye. Sock. Eye. You can already picture the team logo, a fighting hellfish with a puffy shiner glaring at the enemy. 'I see you,' the Sockeye says, 'and you're no grizzly.'"

Whether it's ultimately "Sockeye" or "Sockeyes," there's an unmistakable fan penchant for saltwater fish.

The local Seattle Sin Bin hockey website held a weeklong, bracket-style, fan-vote contest between 32 potential names in which the saltwater trout "Steelheads" prevailed over a "Thunderbirds" moniker already used by our Kent-based junior hockey team. Of 1,531 final-round votes, Steelheads garnered 52 percent. Totems, Emeralds, Kraken, Sockeyes, Wolves and Sasquatch all made the Elite Eight round.

Otto Rogers, who runs the site with his namesake, Paul Rogers, said the most heated hockey discussions he has heard lately involve the future team's name.

"I think people want to be involved somehow in the team," Rogers said. "We're two years away from having the team play, so what can we really talk about? The one thing we can talk about is the team name and the team colors."

Rogers won't rule out traditional Seattle hockey names like Metropolitanans, Totems and Thunderbirds eventually getting chosen. He feels Metropolitanans – upended by Emeralds in his contest's Sweet Sixteen — would have won outright had fans merely picked one name off a list rather than voting in weekly elimination rounds.

Indeed, a tweet I put out last week seeking fan input got Metropolitanans and Totems as popular non-fish suggestions. Cascades, Emeralds and Sasquatch also received nods, while "Seattle Freeze" garnered sarcastic mentions.

NHL Seattle president Tod Leiweke told me last week his group "will for sure engage fans and our (season-ticket) depositors" on the name, but likely not until the league awards a franchise. Bonderman has already said any fan input won't include a name-the-team contest.

And that's not necessarily bad, with hundreds of millions of dollars at stake.

Over in England, the National Environment Research Council two years ago let the public vote on the name of a new polar-research vessel.

A local radio personality suggested "Boaty McBoatface" and some 124,000 online voters agreed, picking it by a 4-to-1 margin. The council promptly ignored the vote and went with RSS Sir David Attenborough instead, causing quite the uproar.

Not that public naming always flops. Our Major League Soccer team almost wasn't the Sounders until team official Gary Wright suggested a write-in vote by fans. The league, leery of a Sounders name linked to the defunct North American Soccer League, had approved only "Seattle Alliance," "Seattle Republic" and "Seattle FC" on a fan-voting shortlist.

But the write-in was allowed and fans overwhelmingly submitted "Sounders" which, today, seems the logical choice.

Conversely, Vegas Golden Knights owner Bill Foley got in hot water by unilaterally picking that name. West Point graduate Foley originally wanted "Black Knights," like Army calls its athletic teams.

But the Army resisted, so Foley went with "Golden Knights" instead. That still wasn't good enough for the Army, which has a parachute team with that name and filed notice of opposition with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

The dispute was only settled three weeks ago, with both sides working out a "coexistence agreement" on how each uses the name.

John Barr, who runs the NHL to Seattle fan website, a go-to hockey voice that has lobbied years for a team, wonders whether similar "name-appropriation" issues would rule out Thunderbirds or Steelheads here. Barr notes an ECHL team in Idaho and an Ontario Hockey League squad in Mississauga, Ontario, both are called Steelheads.

Reviving the Totems name might prove sensitive with Native American groups, he adds. For those reasons, Barr understands why a fan vote wouldn't work.

"It's much more complex than a simple vote."

Barr cites Metropolitanans, Totems, Steelheads and – sigh – Kraken as names he's heard fans discuss most. But he also feels we're jumping the gun.

"I've never engaged in the name game," Barr said. "I think there's a lot to be done between now and then. And maybe I don't want to jinx it or something."

Given the years spent approving an arena project here, one can hardly fault his reticence. When a team finally does show up, for many, the "Seattle Process" might prove the most fitting name of all.

Seattle Times LOADED: 08.14.2018

1102983 Websites

The Athletic / NHL farm system rankings: No. 20 New Jersey Devils

By Corey Pronman Aug 13, 2018

Corey Pronman's deep dive into the farm system of every NHL organization includes a ranking of all of the team's prospects, broken into tiers based on their projection; the impact on the upcoming season and an overall ranking of all players under 23. Further explanation of Pronman's system and the complete ranking of all 31 teams can be found here.

The Devils used to be mainstays toward the bottom of my farm rankings. There is still work to be done here — as using high picks on Pavel Zacha (considered a graduate) and Michael McLeod don't look great a few years later — but there has been progress. Their 2017 draft provided a ton of depth to the system, 2017 second-rounder Jesper Boqvist has looked very good and 2018 first-rounder Ty Smith was dominant in the WHL.

Team's 2017 ranking*: No. 5

Prospect Rankings

VERY GOOD NHL PROSPECT

1. Ty Smith, D, Spokane-WHL

Smith is a good skater who can get up the ice and lead a rush. He has above-average puck skills and can make the odd dynamic play, showing



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

skill on the attack or creating space for a zone exit. His best trait is his hockey IQ, as his instincts and decision-making with the puck are very good. He's so smooth handling the puck and rarely seems to get pressured, even in tight spaces. For better or for worse, he likes to slow the game down. He has a unique look to his game, where he always has his head up processing everything going on around him. Smith is small, but he's decent defensively due to his feet and IQ. He works to get to pucks and can be trusted to play in all situations — even if his calling card is more on the offensive side of the puck.

2. Jesper Boqvist, C, Brynas-SHL

Boqvist injured his wrist early in the season, which might have taken longer to heal than ideal, but there were still moments from him, such as at the World Junior summer camp and in the SHL, where he looked very good (although he was mediocre at the world juniors). When he's going, Boqvist can drive a line. He's a very skilled and quick forward who makes plays and run a power play. The issues with Boqvist are outside his skill set. He's not the biggest guy, tends to disappear and gets pushed off pucks too easily. The upside with him is massive, though.

LEGIT NHL PROSPECT

3. Michael McLeod, C, Mississauga-OHL

This was a mildly disappointing season for McLeod. He was still a very good OHL player but did not raise his game to an elite level as you'd expect for his age and toolkit. He's one of the best speedsters outside the NHL, which at a bulky 6-foot-2 frame will make him a tough player for any NHL defender to deal with. He's a competitor who battles for pucks and has good offensive ability. The thing with McLeod is a lack of high-level hockey sense. He's very north-south and doesn't make a ton of plays.

4. Joey Anderson, RW, Minnesota-Duluth-NCHC

Anderson had his second straight good season at Duluth, as he continues his trend of producing at seemingly every level and tournament he competes at despite not being blessed with all-world talent. Anderson is a coach's favorite, with U.S. world junior coach Bob Motzko often joking that he'd like to steal him. He has good speed, skill and hockey sense — none of which are high-end — but his defining trait is that he competes his butt off at both ends and finds a way to make plays through willpower.

HAVE A CHANCE

5. John Quenneville, LW, Binghamton-AHL

Quenneville has his second straight good AHL season but stagnated a bit. The things to like are obvious. He's got size, good skills, skates fine for his size and, when he's on, can be a powerful presence. But Quenneville tends to fade a little too much into the background for a guy whose value comes from his style and his conditioning is a problem. He'll need to continue to round out his game and find more consistency, but the tools are there to at least be a bottom-six forward.

6. Mikhail Maltsev, C, SKA-KHL

Maltsev had a decent season, as a top player for Russia at the world juniors but not getting a ton of ice time on a loaded SKA club. Maltsev is a tall center with good two-way abilities. With the puck, he displays above-average skill and intelligence, showing the instincts to create some offense. He's also a hard worker who can play his position well and take tough minutes. He's not a great skater or incredibly flashy, but he's a guy who has been consistently effective in games I've watched.

7. Reilly Walsh, D, Harvard-ECAC

Walsh made a strong impression on me this season as a freshman at Harvard. Like any good Harvard player, he's very smart, displaying great hockey sense moving the puck with the ability to QB a power play at a high level with skill. He can push the pace when he needs to, but for his size, he lacks an explosive gear. He's a smaller defender who isn't that

physical and has to work on cleaning up on the defensive side of the puck.

8. Blake Speers, RW, Binghamton-AHL

Speers first pro season was OK, with a little rougher transition to the pro pace than I thought he'd have. The qualities I like about him are still there. He makes plays, he's quick and he plays hard. He might not be a big scorer as an NHLer, but he could be a penalty killer who holds his own at even strength due to having good but not great skill qualities.

9. Jeremy Davies, D, Northeastern-Hockey East

Davies was one of the best defensemen in the country this past season, earning first-team All-American honors. His offensive IQ is his best trait, as he is fantastic at moving the point. He ran arguably the most dangerous power play in the NCAA this past season. He's skilled and can make tough plays from the blueline. He's not explosive for a small guy, but a fine skater overall who can lead the occasional rush. This season he took the tough defensive minutes at the collegiate level, but questions linger about how he'll defend versus men.

10. Fabian Zetterlund, RW, Farjestad-SHL

Zetterlund had a surprisingly solid world juniors, struggled at times versus men this season but looked good in a top role when loaned out to the Allsvenskan briefly. Zetterlund has a lot of components to his game that I like. He's skilled, makes smart plays, has a big shot and works incredibly hard. He skates fine, but ideally he'd be a tad quicker. Regardless, he has enough tools to be an NHL player.

11. Nikita Popugaev, RW, CSKA-KHL

After being just so-so to start his third WHL season, Popugaev left Canada midseason for Russia, where he got inconsistent playing time. There's a lot to like about Popugaev and a lot to be worried about. The pros: He's 6-foot-6, quite skilled and has a big shot. The cons: Very bad skater, compete level isn't great and hockey sense is average. He has the talent to be a scorer, but he's going to need a while to put his game together.

12. Nathan Bastian, RW, Binghamton-AHL

I've talked to some scouts who think Bastian could still be a player and believe he has offensive talents. Others think he's a low skill, muck-and-grind type, if he makes the NHL. He was OK as an AHL rookie, as one of the youngest players in the league. I think he can make plays, not a ton, but he has touch and good instincts/vision. Bastian's not the best skater, though, and he projects to be more useful down low and in front of the net due to his size.

DEPTH NOTES

13. Xavier Bernard, D, Drummondville-QMJHL: Bernard is a 6-foot-3 defenseman who is mobile and can move the puck. His hands are subpar, but I do see value as a two-way, even strength guy because he makes stops with his size, feet, IQ and work ethic.

14. Aarne Talvitie, C, Espoo-Jr. A. Liiga: Talvitie is small, but he competes very hard and is a smart two-way player with good skills. He lacks dynamic qualities for his size but could be a nice checker.

15. Akira Schmid, G, Langnau-Swiss Jr: Schmid's athleticism is about average but good for his size. I like his IQ. He's very aware processing the play going on around him and anticipating how teams will attack. The issue with Schmid is he's very underdeveloped physically.

16. Yegor Sharangovich, C, Minsk-KHL: Sharangovich has a nice skill set for a big man. He's able to beat guys with his hands or by using his big frame and powering his way to chances. I wouldn't characterize him as dynamic, though. He skates decent, although he could clean up his stride a bit. But he's strong on his skates and doesn't lose a ton of battles.

17. Jocktan Chainey, D, Halifax-QMJHL: Chainey's hockey sense stands out at a high level. I don't think the rest of his game between his feet,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

skills or size is anything more than average, and he'll need to improve at something to be an NHLer, but the way he moves the puck and defends is a good place to start.

18. Mackenzie Blackwood, G, Binghamton-AHL: Blackwood's pro career hasn't gone as hoped. I think I overrated his hockey sense as an amateur. He has the size and fine athletic traits that have some value.

2018-19 Impact

McLeod should get a look at camp, but I believe some AHL time will be best for him. The most likely candidate for NHL time is Quenneville, but he'll need a big summer to improve his conditioning. I also think he needs AHL time, but I've learned never to bet against Joey Anderson.

Organizational Top 10 (23 and Under)

Nico Hischier, C

Jesper Bratt, LW

Pavel Zacha, C

Will Butcher, D

Ty Smith, D

Jesper Boqvist, C

Steve Santini, D

Michael McLeod, C

Miles Wood, LW

Joey Anderson, RW

Last year's No. 1 overall pick, Hischier had a great rookie season for an 18-year-old, being a legit top-six center for the Devils. His elite hockey sense, combined with very good hands and skating ability will make him an impact player for the Devils. Bratt was one of the surprises of the season. He's so talented with fantastic IQ and playmaking ability. It wasn't just the offense that stood out, but his two-way play, as well, made him one of the Devils' most used penalty killing forwards. Zacha's development continues to be slow and steady. The toolkit is there between his size, speed and skills. I think he can still be a top-six guy, but I'm not sold on his hockey IQ being good enough for him to be an impact guy.

Butcher had a fantastic rookie season. He's such a smart puck-mover that, in talking to some NHL scouts this season, his success was often used as an example when talking about similar small defensemen. The reason being is why he has good feet and hands, but he's not as dynamic as you'd expect for a smaller guy with his results. Santini will never be a big offensive producer or an All-Star, but he's developed into a steady defender. He's smart, mobile and plays hard, but his hands will limit how he's deployed. Wood is a decent player. He can be quick, he can bring physicality and he has some skill to create offense.

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The Athletic / NHL farm system rankings: No. 21 Colorado Avalanche

By Corey Pronman Aug 13, 2018

Corey Pronman's deep dive into the farm system of every NHL organization includes a ranking of all of the team's prospects, broken into tiers based on their projection; the impact on the upcoming season and an overall ranking of all players under 23. Further explanation of

Pronman's system and the complete ranking of all 31 teams can be found here.

I've been critical of the Avs' drafting over the past decade, but steadily I've liked the direction they've gone. I don't see many impact guys in this system aside from fourth-overall pick Cale Makar, but they have been adding some nice pieces over the past two years. With the young assets they have and will get in the Matt Duchene trade, for the most part, this is an organization moving in the right direction.

Team's 2017 ranking*: No. 20

Prospect Rankings

HIGH-END NHL PROSPECT

1. Cale Makar, D, Massachusetts-Hockey East

Makar had a very good, albeit unspectacular, freshman season at UMass and was one of the top defensemen at the world juniors. His skating is fantastic. He explodes out of his first step and can push the pace with the best of them. Makar is also a highly skilled puck handler and puck mover. He can make a skilled play off the rush, but also has the hockey IQ to make difficult feeds and run a power play. With Makar, the notable drawback is defense. He's not the biggest guy and his overall play in his own end is average at best in terms of his positional work.

LEGIT NHL PROSPECT

2. Conor Timmins, D, Sault Ste. Marie-OHL

Timmins was one of the best defenders in the OHL and at the world juniors this past season. He's never going to wow you with an end-to-end rush or big display of speed and skill. What he does do though is move the puck with pace and exhibit high-end hockey sense. He has great vision, makes good decisions and plays an efficient game. Timmins is also solid defensively and can be a solid shutdown defender. There are minor upside questions with him, but his game should transition to the pro level well.

3. Vladislav Kamenev, C, San Antonio-AHL

Kamenev was part of the Duchene trade, coming from Nashville. He missed most of the season due to injury. Kamenev isn't a super flashy player, but he's good at a lot of things. He's a very good passer with great overall two-way hockey sense. Kamenev makes plays due to his vision and offensive touch, but he's also a center with size who can win battles. His ability to make plays at both ends earns him the tough minutes from coaches. His speed isn't bad, but it's just decent.

4. Martin Kaut, RW, Pardubice-Czech Extraliga

Kaut isn't a dynamic offensive player, but he has a lot of above-average qualities with arguably no weakness in his game. He has noticeable skill with the puck and is able to create space with his coordination and creativity. He has very impressive vision and seems to always be in the right place at the right time. Kaut is a two-way forward who can kill penalties due to his work ethic and smarts. He also shows decent puck protection skills. He's an average skater, not slow, but I don't see a separation gear.

HAVE A CHANCE

5. Shane Bowers, C, Boston University-Hockey East

Bowers, traded from Ottawa to Colorado as part of the Duchene trade, had a very good freshman season at BU. He's a high-end skater with a fantastic first few steps and ability to push the pace versus pros when he gets to that level. He's a solid two-way forward, as well. Bowers has some playmaking ability, and admittedly he showed more offense this season than I expected. His ultimate offensive upside and creativity is still something I have skepticism about.

6. Nikolai Kovalenko, RW, Yaroslavl-MHL



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

Kovalenko's skills are good, not great, but he can make plays in tight spaces and create with his hands. His best offensive trait is his brain. He's a very good playmaker, showing high-end capability there. Kovalenko is a fierce competitor who, despite not inheriting his father's size, has the same fire in how he battles for pucks, gets to the net and kills penalties. His skating is decent, he's not slow, but he could be quicker for a small guy.

7. Igor Shvyrev, C, Magnitogorsk-KHL

Shvyrev is a very interesting prospect. I haven't seen him a ton, but when I have over the past few years, my notes have been generally positive. He's skilled and has the offensive instincts and creativity to make some tough offensive plays. He has pro size and isn't slow. I don't think he's exceptionally quick, but he can skate with pros. I don't think he's a dynamic scorer, but the tools are there that he could be something.

8. Ty Lewis, LW, Brandon-WHL

I had my skepticisms of Lewis heading into the season, but he was quite impressive every time I watched Brandon. He's a small guy, and he's not incredibly dynamic, but he does a lot well. He's skilled with the puck, he makes plays and, on the power play, he can be dangerous due to his setup skills and his shot. He doesn't skate incredibly well for a smaller guy, but he has speed and can pressure defenders. As a pro, maybe he's a scorer, maybe he's more of a PK type who chips in at even strength, but there's ability to work with here.

9. Nicolas Meloche, D, San Antonio-AHL

Meloche had a brief ECHL stint this season, but for most of the campaign, he was a solid contributor to his AHL club. When I talked to the coaching staff they mentioned Meloche as the guy who showed the most improvement over the season. He's a big defenseman who can skate and move the puck well for his size. He's not going to be a highlight reel guy, but he can make plays. He was a little inconsistent this season with his battle effort and decision making, but still showed he could be a fine two-way defender.

10. Sampo Ranta, LW, Sioux City-USHL

Ranta's a great skater, and combined with the fact he's 6-foot-2, 190 pounds, it makes him quite appealing. He's a high-end athlete who is built like a truck and, when he comes barreling down the wing, there's little defenders can do. Ranta can make plays off the rush, showing fine, if not above-average, hands and the shooting skills to finish chances from long distance. The issue with Ranta is upstairs. I don't think he has great instincts and doesn't make a ton of plays when he's not moving in straight lines.

11. Tyler Weiss, LW, USNTDP-USHL

Weiss is a high-end skater who can gain the offensive zone with ease. He has good, albeit not high-end, hands and can be a quality playmaker, making things happen from the outside. There are times when he can dominate a shift and give you optimism about his potential. Weiss is not without some worrying issues, though. He's a small, slight winger who isn't very physical and doesn't get to the dirty areas as much as you'd like to see.

DEPTH NOTES

12. Justus Annunen, G, Karpat-Jr. A Liiga: Annunen's a big goalie at 6-foot-4 with a calm demeanor in the net and quality hockey sense. Annunen makes a lot of saves seem easy, absorbing pucks into his chest and being in the right spot a lot. My concern with him is he doesn't have a ton of quickness.

13. Denis Smirnov, RW, Penn State-Big 10: He's a highly skilled forward with fantastic vision, but he's small and not a great skater particularly for his size.

14. Cam Morrison, LW, Notre Dame-Big 10: Morrison is a forward with size who has some skill and good offensive instincts. He's not a great skater nor that physical, and his offensive touch isn't that great.

15. A.J. Greer, LW, San Antonio-AHL: Greer's a big, strong winger who plays hard and has decent skills. He's not incredibly quick or creative, though. He's looked decent at the AHL level the last few years.

16. Nick Henry, RW, Regina-WHL: Henry had a rough season, possibly due to a prolonged recovery from shoulder surgery. He doesn't jump out to you in terms of his speed or skill, but he's an intelligent two-way player who works hard. He moves the puck well, and has a fine shot.

2018-19 Impact

Kamenev could be an NHL guy from Day 1, if not be the first option on a call-up. I think he could be a solid top-nine contributor, as well. Greer provides depth for a call-up, if needed.

Organizational Top 10 (23 and Under)

Nathan MacKinnon, C

Mikko Rantanen, RW

Cale Makar, D

Tyson Jost, C

Samuel Girard, D

Conor Timmins, D

Vladislav Kamenev, C

Martin Kaut, RW

J.T. Compher, C

Shane Bowers, C

MacKinnon was one of the best players in the NHL this past season. His elite speed, high-end skills and pace of play make him a franchise center. Rantanen was also fantastic. He's such a skilled playmaker for a big man who can finish, as well, shooting better than 15 percent the past two seasons. Jost wasn't amazing this past season, but he was solid for a teenager. He has a well-rounded toolkit, and I can see him developing into a good 2C. Girard is such a fun player to watch with the way he skates and his high-end offensive creativity. He's probably never going to be the first guy over the boards to kill a penalty, but he'll make a ton of plays each game. I'd put Nikita Zadorov in the 11th spot. After a tough start to his career, he's become an OK regular. Big men who can skate and win battles have value, even if he's not the most instinctive puck mover.

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The Athletic / Wheeler: A tentative preseason look at top 31 prospects for the 2019 NHL Draft

By Scott Wheeler Aug 13, 2018

Yes, it's already that time of the year again.

The inaugural, newly minted Hlinka Gretzky Cup has come to a close, and the 2019 NHL draft season is off to a dramatic start thanks to Canada's controversial semifinal victory over Team USA.

As always, I will be releasing my draft rankings in three installments this season: A preliminary top 62 in November, a midseason top 62 in February, and a final top 100 in May. But having spent a lot of my summer prepping for next season and watching back games from last year, I wanted to close out the Hlinka Gretzky Cup with a pre-emptive



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

look at my top 31 prospects for this draft, as well as a couple of dozen other names to keep an eye on. Because it is so early, and a lot is subject to change over the next 10 months, I have broken down the top 31 into five tiers. Rather than individually rank all of the players, this early look at the class does not rank the players within their tiers. As things stand today, those tiers are as follows: 1, 2, 3-12, 13-19, 20-31.

Here are some broad notes on my ranking and the class off the top:

It's a strong year for USA Hockey's national development program (eight of 31 players listed here) and the WHL (seven of the 31 players listed).

After back-to-back drafts where defence was a strength, this year is really weak at the top end (only three of my top 20 prospects right now are defencemen).

This looks like it will be one of the weakest OHL classes in the league's history (there are no OHL players in my top 11, though Ryan Suzuki could creep in).

All in all, 2019 looks like a mediocre draft that projects to be carried by the strength of Jack Hughes, arguably the third-best first-overall talent in the past 10 drafts at this point in his development.

First overall

Jack Hughes: C, USDP

What Jack Hughes has accomplished in the past year with the development program domestically and Team USA on the international stage has ever been done better by only one player at the same age: Auston Matthews. Last year, Hughes' 1.89 points per game in his D-2 season playing up a year with the U18 team trailed only Matthews' 1.95 points per game in his D-2 year — and Hughes was four months younger than Matthews was while he did it. His 15 points in six games at U17s? The second-best performance in the tournament's history, ahead of names like Ilya Kovalchuk and John Tavares. His 12 points in seven games as an underaged player at U18s? The best performance since Connor McDavid's 14 points in seven games five years ago. Last year, across all competitions, Hughes posted 197 points in 100 games. While he didn't look as dominant in some of his World Junior Summer Showcase appearances, Hughes remains with Matthews in the conversation as the best American prospect of the past decade, and he has positioned himself ahead of Jack Eichel. While he doesn't have the pure scoring touch that Matthews does, Hughes plays a more elusive game backed by superior playmaking ability.

Second overall

Kaapo Kakko: RW, TPS

This is one of those years where media types will be disappointed by the lack of debate at the top of the draft. Not only does No. 1 lack a challenger, but it looks like No. 2 is established extremely early, too. There's a chance some competition develops for No. 2, but Kakko is fresh off one of the best under-17 seasons in the history of Finland's top junior league, where he posted 55 points in 38 games, good for third in points per game with 1.45, just shy of Jesse Puljujarvi and Mikael Granlund. On top of that, Kakko led Finland's U18 team in scoring as an underaged player, with 10 points in seven games (one more than 2018 third overall pick Jesperi Kotkaniemi) on the way to a gold medal. Kakko's size, puck protection, anticipation, shot and playmaking ability are all already high-end enough that he'll be a terror if he can get even a little quicker in transition.

Top-five contenders

Players currently ranked in the 3-12 range.

Matthew Boldy: RW/LW, USDP

He can get lost in the Hughes Show, but here's the complete list of under-17 names who've outproduced Boldy's 1.25 points per game with the national program before last season: Kessel (1.53), Kane (1.43), Bracco (1.37), Keller (1.31). Very little of Boldy's production last year was

driven by Hughes, who played just 24 games to Boldy's 61 with the U17 team, too. Boldy is more of a playmaker than a scorer, but he plays extremely fast without actually being an extremely quick player because he sees the ice a step or two ahead of everyone and has the creativity to make the next play. Boldy has the size necessary to get a little stronger and continue to work on his explosiveness. I loved his game at U17s and have huge expectations for him in his final year with the program this season. I'm also just a sucker for a talented lefty who thrives on the right side and adds a different dynamic to his line.

Here's a look at Boldy's goal from my final viewing of him last season in Game 3 against Youngstown (he also picked up an assist on a jam play late in the game):

Alex Newhook: C/LW, Victoria Grizzlies

One of my favourites in this class and a sleeper to break into the top five, Newhook is a driven, playmaking forward with outstanding linear and lateral skating ability and explosiveness. The reigning BCHL Rookie of the Year and a first-team all-star at 16, Newhook is fresh off one of the most impressive Tier 2 Canadian junior seasons in recent memory. His 1.47 points per game bested Tyson's Jost's 0.98 in 2014-2015 at the same age, and Kyle Turris' 1.26 a decade before that. Newhook, a Newfoundland native, is electric as a primary carrier and could have torched the QMJHL if he'd opted for Halifax instead of Victoria (and later Boston College). I wouldn't be surprised if he followed in Jost and Turris' footsteps and challenged two points per game in his draft year. It's absolutely crazy that he was cut from Canada's Hlinka Gretzky Cup team.

Alex Turcotte: C, USDP

Turcotte is just one of those well-rounded centres who bring a lot to a team. He's heavy on the puck without being overly physical off it, he's got a powerful stride, he's reliable in his own zone, he works hard. While he won't wow you with skill or his ability as a scorer, Turcotte is a great playmaker and a positive influence with and without the puck who has excelled playing behind some uber-talented players, Hughes included. He was rewarded with an extended stint with the U18 team over Boldy last season, and he didn't look out of place and continued to produce. If he can work on his shot, he's got serious upside.

Kirby Dach: C, Saskatoon Blades

It can be hard to get a gauge on players who are as big as Dach (he's already 6-foot-4), especially when they don't score goals. Dach is not a scorer and never will be — it's just not in him — but he's so good as a towering playmaking centre that it's hard not to salivate at the upside. After finishing third on the Blades in points per game with 0.88 (46 in 52), Dach was a handful for opposing teams as one of Canada's best players not named Alexis Lafreniere at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. He protects the puck well, has excellent hands for a player of his size, skates at a high level for his size (which enables him to be a threat in transition driving into the middle of the ice), and can run a power play from the wall or the goal line. He needs to shoot more this season, though.

Peyton Krebs: LW, Kootenay Ice

Krebs, taken first overall in the WHL's 2016 Bantam draft, has posted an impressive 60 points in 73 career games ahead of his draft year. He's a fabulous skater and creator on a team without either of those two things, and produced with little help last season before starring for Canada at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. Krebs is one of those players who just keep coming at opposing teams in waves until they can make something happen. He's not afraid to try things, and he works really hard to hunt the puck back when they don't work. He could stand to get a little stronger and work on his shot, but he's got everything else going for him.

Dylan Cozens: C, Lethbridge Hurricanes

Last season, Cozens led all WHL rookies in goals (22) before winning the league's rookie of the year award. That, coupled with his 0.93 points per game (first among all under-17 WHLers), is enough to make him a top prospect. But it was actually Cozens' playoff performance that really sold



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

me on his game. As Lethbridge's opponents got tougher and tougher, Cozens' game rose to the challenge and he finished their run with seven goals and 13 points in 16 games. He's a big kid (6-foot-3) who can really skate and has room to add some muscle. He's also got better release than most of his high-end WHL counterparts. Cozens was everywhere in Canada's win over Sweden in Saturday's gold-medal game.

Maxim Cajkovic: RW/LW, Saint John SeaDogs

After finishing second among under-17 players in points per game (0.75) in Sweden's top junior league, Cajkovic wowed the scouting community with a phenomenal display at U18s, where he posted 11 points in five (!) games for Slovakia. The first overall pick in this year's CHL Import Draft, Cajkovic now joins a young, rebuilding Saint John's team in the QMJHL, where he should be afforded a big offensive role and the chance to really establish himself near the top of this class. His impressive play continued at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, where he posted three points in as many games on a weak Slovakian team. Cajkovic is an athletic scorer who can flat out shoot the puck and make plays.

Bowen Byram: LHD, Vancouver Giants

In a class with very few high-end defenders, Byram stands alone at the top, or close to it. By the time last year's playoffs rolled around, Byram looked fearless, if not borderline cocky, with the puck. He's already a strong defender in his own zone, his offensive game is coming along really quickly, he skates well, and he's poised beyond his years as a patient handler and passer. He picked up steam as the Hlinka Gretzky Cup progressed and was arguably the Giants' best player in their tight first-round loss to Victoria. His Games 3-5 of that series were as good as it gets for a 16-year-old.

Watch the way he activates here, blowing by two Royals for the first of three playoff goals:

Anttoni Honka: RHD, JYP

The best right-handed defenceman in this class, Honka has already played half a season of pro hockey in Liiga to positive results. He is helped by a late birthday as one of the older players in the draft, but that doesn't take away from some standout play as a 17-year-old. Honka posted nine points in 20 games to finish second among all under-18 players in scoring with a 0.45 points per game rate (ahead of 2018 first-round pick and forward Rasmus Kupari, and just shy of third overall pick Jesperi Kotkaniemi's 0.51 points per game). Honka's U18 season was the third best in Liiga history in terms of production by a defenceman — and the best since 1981. Not to mention that he followed it up by playing extremely well at U18 worlds to help propel Finland to Gold. He's on the smaller side and needs to work on his defensive game, but he's a great skater and should play a lot more than the 11:31 he averaged last season this year.

Vasili Podkolzin: RW, SKA St. Petersburg

Podkolzin looked borderline unstoppable at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup (11 points in five games) for Russia and is set to begin his first full season in the MHL, where he should factor in as one of the league's best young players. He has been fantastic at all three of this year's international tournaments, which are important for some of these Russian kids ahead of their draft year because their junior-level leagues are so weak. He's stronger than he looks and can break teams down off the rush and burn defenders. Plus, he creates just as dangerously as a playmaker as he does as a scorer. I'm impressed by his defensive awareness, and Podkolzin's one of the more raw talents offensively in the class. I'll let his work, with Russia down and on the brink of elimination in the dying minutes of their semi, speak for itself:

Or I'll let this shot in the bronze-medal game speak for him:

Or how about this one?

Top-10 potential

Players currently ranked from 13-19, with the potential to move up.

Valentin Nussbaumer: C/LW, Shawinigan Cataractes

Nussbaumer has been on the hockey world's radar for a while as one of the best young prospects to come out of Switzerland, and that was enough to make him the fourth overall pick in this year's import draft. He's on the older side of this draft and was nearly eligible for the 2018 draft, so expectations should be high on him to step into the QMJHL and produce immediately. Nussbaumer spent the majority of last season playing a depth role professionally in Switzerland. My biggest concern with his game is that he has a lot of individual skill but he hasn't been able to put it altogether, in large part because he's nothing special as a skater and he's weak on the puck.

Cole Caufield: RW, USDP

Outside of Jack Hughes, Cole Caufield may be the most talented player in this class. He's also arguably its most dangerous pure scorer. Last year with the national program, Caufield scored 77 goals alongside just 36 assists in 91 games. He notched another eight goals in six games at U17s, and another four in seven at U18s. But he's also 5-foot-6, which really does matter in terms of projecting a player at the NHL level. Still, I'm higher on Caufield than most because of the raw talent. He finds holes, and he buries every chance he gets.

Raphael Lavoie: C/RW, Halifax Mooseheads

There were times last season when I watched the Mooseheads play and Lavoie, on a team with Otto Somppi, Filip Zadina and Maxime Fortier, looked like the best player on the ice. He's on the older side of this draft with his late-September birthday, but Lavoie nearly cracked a point per game last season and did it while playing at 6-foot-4 — and before scoring five goals in as many games to lead Team Canada in goals at U18s despite being one of the team's younger players. He didn't play as well in the playoffs, but I wouldn't be surprised if he threw down 80 points this season. He's not a playmaker, per se, but he can create and finish.

Jakob Pelletier: LW/RW, Moncton Wildcats

Pelletier didn't star at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup in the same way some of the other players on this list did (in part because of an injury in the semi), but he was every bit as dynamic last season and found ways to make the QMJHL's all-rookie team and break a point per game (which none of these other CHL kids can say). Pelletier's biggest obstacle is his size (he's 5-foot-9 and roughly 160 pounds) and his ability to shed checks and get to the middle of the ice. A third overall pick into the QMJHL, Pelletier is a deft skater who lacks and explosive gear but thrives on his edges. He's shifty enough with the puck that his high-end cross-ice vision and excellent puck skills could make him a sleeper in this draft. Hopefully his injury doesn't last or impact his season.

Arthur Kaliyev: LW, Hamilton Bulldogs

In a class full of playmaking forwards, Kaliyev is its powerful, shot-first winger. He impressed for Team USA at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, but my biggest concern with his game is that he'll top out as a one-dimensional option who is too focused on driving the net. Kaliyev needs to learn to use the attention he gets to open up the ice for his teammates, rather than looking shot all of the time. Kaliyev also lack tempo, and needs to make decisions quicker and work on compacting a wonky stride. He may be one of the only CHL draft-eligibles to break 40 goals next season, though.

Ryan Suzuki: C, Barrie Colts

I've been waiting for Suzuki, the OHL's first overall pick in 2017, to use the unique talent he has and really begin to break out as a dominant, dynamic offensive threat. He wasn't afforded that chance on a strong Barrie team last season, when he was expected to play more of a supportive role. At the Hlinka Gretzky Cup that changed, and Suzuki was electric. He needs to get a little bit stronger, but when he's feeling it and playing with pace he's one of the more gifted playmakers in this class. If Suzuki can put it together, he won't last in this tier for long. Suzuki's always going to look pass first, which will limit his ability to score, but he makes enough high-end plays to potentially break out in the OHL this



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

season. And when he wants to shoot, he's actually got a quirky, dangerous release (notice how he releases from his toe, below):

Cam York: LHD, USDP

In a strong group of development program defencemen in the 2019 class, York is the most purely talented of the bunch. He's on the smaller side (5-foot-11, 165 pounds) and will have to get stronger to settle in at the pro level, but he'll have the runway to do that at Boston College. York is a gifted carrier who lacks a top gear but does a wonderful job slowing the game down to create control entries — or speeding it up with his ability as an outlet passer. York looked great in an extended promotion to the U18 level last year, can quarterback a power play, and was outstanding at U18 worlds, where he out-produced first-round talents like K'Andre Miller with six points in seven games as Team USA's highest-scoring, and youngest, defenceman.

Mid- to late-first-round talents

Players currently ranked from 20-31, with upside that could put them into the early teens.

Matthew Robertson: LHD, Edmonton Oil Kings

You're probably noticing a WHL trend by now. Robertson was arguably Canada's best defenceman alongside Byram at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup, though I didn't like his game in their semi against Team USA. He's not as strong in his own zone as Byram, but he's got a size advantage that should serve him well over time. Robertson, a seventh overall pick in the Bantam draft, has a big shot, makes a clean first pass, and has risen a ton for me over the past six months.

Trevor Zegras: C, USDP

Zegras is a player who is universally loved in the scouting community because of the versatility to his game. He can skate, he can pass, he can play in transition, he's crafty on the cycle, and he's got good enough hands to make himself a threat to score around the net. I don't think he has the pure upside of Boldy, Caufield or Turcotte, though. He's also a long way away and will need time to get stronger as he attempts to become more dangerous as a scoring threat. I also suspect he may end up as a winger at the pro level rather than a centre.

Simon Holmstrom: RW/LW, HV71

In 34 combined games at Sweden's top junior level last season, Holmstrom posted 38 points and led all under-17 forwards in goals, assists, and points. He can cheat a little too much for offence for my liking, and that's reflected in a weak game away from the puck, which could keep him below the SHL for longer than his talent merits. But Holmstrom is also a late-May birthday who has time on his side and the skill to become a top-six forward at the pro level. He makes a lot of plays off the wing and thrives in transition as a passer.

Blake Murray: C, Sudbury Wolves

As with Newhook, I was really surprised when Murray was cut by Team Canada ahead of the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. Murray did a lot with little last season and finished the year as Sudbury's leading scorer (21 goals and 44 points in 57 games) after the team moved some bodies at the trade deadline. He's got size, he's responsible in his own zone, he's a July birthday, and I still think there's untapped potential there as a skater. Murray has decent puck skills and should be a go-to option on the always-rebuilding Wolves below first overall pick Quinton Byfield.

Samuel Poulin: LW, Sherbrooke Phoenix

Poulin is a heavy winger who plays a powerful, net-driven game and already has the frame to play pro. On top of that, he has the skill to match that strength. But he hasn't yet developed his skating enough to truly become a force. If he can pick up a stride or two, he'll be a lot to handle. Otherwise, he's probably more of a mid-round talent than a first-round option. I'm intrigued, though. He's built like a truck and can play.

Tobias Bjornfot: LHD, Djurgardens

Bjornfot doesn't have the offensive flair of a lot of the defencemen Sweden has produced in the past few drafts, and he's unlikely to rise much higher than the late first round as a result. But he's so reliable in both ends that he remains a pretty solid bet to end up as a late first/early second. What's most impressive about Bjornfot is that he led all under-17 defencemen in SuperElit scoring last season and did it without getting a ton of power-play time while playing below Wild draftee Simon Johansson and Bruins second rounder Axel Andersson. He's just a smart, cerebral player.

He's also the kind of player who often leaves you wanting more because when he picks his spots and jumps up into the play he has proven dangerous. One viewing from January at the J18 Allsvenskan level comes to mind. He picked up three points in the game, including an assist on a simple headman play he routinely makes. But he also scored twice. The first looked like this (Bjornfot is No. 33 in white and activates off the rush to join the play):

The second looked like this, in almost the exact same location:

Nolan Foote: LW, Kelowna Rockets

Foote has the size and strength of his big brother and his old man, but he lacks the pure talent the pair have/had. Nolan became the first of the trio to play forward and, like Cal (Lightning, first round), he needs to work on his skating. He remains one of the more talented Canadian players in this class, but he projects more as a third-line forward than a top-six option. As players like Kole Lind and Dillon Dube move on from the rockets, Nolan will have to assert himself as a go-to offensive option.

John Beecher: C, USDP

Beecher's a heavy two-way centre who has been lost in the limelight side-by-side with some pretty talented players with the national program. That said, he's got some redeemable qualities and really came alive in last year's playoffs, when he posted seven points in eight games as the team's third-leading scorer. Sometimes, it's just about opportunity. His biggest asset is his skating. You won't find many 200-pound 17-year-olds who are the fastest players on the ice — and that's enough to make him really, really interesting.

Josh Williams: RW, Medicine Hat Tigers

Williams didn't wow me last year, but he can score with his shot from anywhere in the offensive zone. That was evident in Canada's Hlinka Gretzky Cup run, particularly in their semi when he scored cleanly twice (including the overtime winner). In the right situation, he could have a big season with Medicine Hat this year. When you can keep up with the play as a skater and finish in a split second (see the OT winner in the semi below), you'll draw enough attention to be dangerous on any line:

Yaroslav Likhachyov: RW, Gatineau Olympiques

One of the youngest players (in this class, he was days away from being 2020 eligible), the 16-year-old Likhachyov was outstanding for Team Russia at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. Taken 22nd overall in the CHL Import Draft by Gatineau, Likhachyov is a skinny, uber-talented winger with creativity that has blown me away in more than one viewing. He plays with the puck on a string and makes plays you're not supposed to be able to make at full speed. An electric talent who is just scratching the surface.

Henry Thrun: LHD, USDP

Thrun is a gifted two-way defenceman who really grabbed control of his season after York joined the U18 team. Thrun played big minutes and contributed offensively in the second half of the season and into the playoffs. I don't think he's got the offensive game to become a top pairing player at the next level, but I wouldn't be surprised if Harvard sped up his commitment (Thrun is slated to go begin his NCAA career in 2020). If it doesn't, he'll likely play in the QMJHL for Drummondville, which took him 14th overall in the American import draft. I believe Thrun deserves to be in the conversation as the second-best defenceman in the program,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

which isn't a popular opinion given how high people are on Marshall Warren and Alex Vlasic. He definitely has the best shot of the bunch.

Philip Broberg: LHD, AIK

Broberg is a rare breed in that he's got the big shot and the physicality you'd expect in a heavy 6-foot-3 defenceman, but he's also an A-level skater. He's one of those players who could slip into the middle of the draft if he doesn't progress as a passer and carrier but has shown enough between his standout play at the end of last year and an incredible showing at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup to warrant some excitement about what his game might look like if he can put all together. In a lot of ways, he reminds me of K'Andre Miller before the beginning of last season. I ultimately finished lower than most on Miller by year's end but that doesn't mean he wasn't/isn't a fascinating package.

Names to keep an eye on (26, in no particular order): Grant Silianoff, Marshall Warren, Dmitri Sheshin, Ben Brinkman, Vladimir Alistrov, Daniil Gutik, Albin Grewe, Ryder Donovan, Anthony Romano, Mikhail Abramov, Luke Toporowski, Graeme Clarke, Artemi Knyazev, Drew Helleson, Sasha Mutala, Ilya Mironov, Case McCarthy, Alex Vlasic, Victor Soderstrom, Mikko Kokkonen, Brady Meyer, Xavier Simoneau, Robert Mastrosimone, Spencer Knight, Mike Koster, Pavel Dorofeyev.

If you have any questions about the above players, leave them below and I'll answer.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.14.2018

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The Athletic / The next big save: How the 'lateral release' can give goaltenders edge on shooters

By Fluto Shinzawa Aug 13, 2018

It wasn't Tuukka Rask's fault.

David Krejci had committed the primary mistake up the ice by losing the puck to Mitch Marner. By the time Marner accelerated to the red line, Zach Hyman had jumped aboard for a two-on-one rush. The outcomes of such situations do not usually go in a goalie's favor.

Rask, however, could have given himself better odds of foiling the goal that Marner scored during the Bruins' 7-3 playoff win on April 14.

Rask is a slider. He is exceptional at hitting the deck smoothly and closing nearly every opening along the ice. The 6-foot-3 Rask's posture is so skyscraper-straight that when he drops into the butterfly, enough of his torso remains upright to blot out soft spots upstairs.

One of Rask's strengths, however, is at risk of exploitation. Shooters are weary of thudding pucks into the goalies who have turned ice level into private property. They have adapted.

Now, shots go high. Cross-ice options are considered. Skaters pass when goalies expect them to shoot.

So when Marner sauced the puck to Hyman, Rask slid from left to right to deny the shot. He did it well. The slide is the preferred alternative to the old-school two-pad stack, a desperation save from which a goalie has little chance to recover.

But instead of shooting, Hyman returned the puck to Marner at the far post. Because he slid, Rask had taken himself out of the play. By the time he recovered, Marner put the puck in the net.

It's impossible to determine whether Rask could have stopped Marner's shot with a different technique. But given the chance to replay the

sequence, Rask would have been better served using the goaltending move of the future: the lateral release.

A simple technique

The lateral release is a technical term for a straightforward maneuver: shuffling along the ice. If a goalie is tracking the puck from left to right, he pushes off his left leg and holds the ice with his right edge. It is the vanilla base for exotic toppings to follow.

After executing the lateral release, a goalie can drop into the butterfly — trail pad down first, followed by the lead pad — and shutter the five-hole. He can glove the puck or punch it out with the blocker. If a cross-ice threat materializes, a goalie is in better position to react, perhaps with a desperation slide or dive.

The lateral release, in other words, is a less sexy but more practical foundational tool than the slide. When executed correctly, the lateral release leaves a goalie big and square to the puck and exposing less of the net.

This is a critical starting point considering the variables working against goalies in the NHL: shrinking equipment, sharper shooter accuracy, more deceptive releases, the hiring of skills coaches, and secondary playmaking options.

"What was happening a few years ago with the gear getting smaller and smaller, sliding around and trying to be big wasn't an option anymore," said U.S. National Team Development Program goaltending coach Thomas Speer. "So we started implementing the lateral release. It's the concept of holding your edges and staying on your feet as long as you can. We tell the guys that if you're late and you slide, it's because you have to. The only time you should be sliding is if you're late, and you're sliding as hard as you can to seal the space as fast as you can."

In Speer's opinion, Jake Allen of the Blues, Braden Holtby of the Capitals, and Frederik Andersen of the Maple Leafs are among the NHL goalies who best employ the lateral release. It may not be a coincidence that all three are 28 years old. At their age, they've had time to learn the technique, reconsider previous ones, and fold it into styles that are not as rigid as those of older goalies.

But the concept's simplicity belies the challenge of doing it right. A goalie needs strong legs to stay on his feet and hold his edges. Greater five-hole exposure tempts goalies to go down instead of remaining upright.

It does not help that the lateral release is black to what goalies knew as white.

"It's a little tricky," said Speer, "because it's the exact opposite of the slide."

Cause and effect

Peak puckstopping took place in 2014-15 and 2015-16. NHL goalies posted a .915 average save percentage in each of those two seasons, the highest since 1963-64. Carey Price set the standard in 2014-15 with a .933 save percentage. Big and mobile goalies like the 6-foot-3 Price dropped into the butterfly and stayed there, eliminating the up-and-down transitions that worried goalie coaches.

Perhaps the most significant factor in goalies' favor was their mastery of the reverse vertical-horizontal (RVH).

Goalie geeks believe RVH originated in Sweden. They agree that it exploded after 2012 when Jonathan Quick rode RVH to the Stanley Cup.

The explosive and freakishly flexible Quick helped to revolutionize post coverage with his regular employment of RVH. The former UMass Amherst goalie locked his toe into the strong-side post, slammed his lead pad flush on the ice, and cocked his trail pad at a 45-degree angle. By the time Quick jammed his lead shoulder and arm into the post, he had created an airtight strong-side seal, all while taking away everything down low and leaving few openings up top.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

Shooters were perplexed. Goalies were thrilled. RVH became their save of choice.

The figurative puck, however, was not guaranteed to remain in the goalies' corner. Hockey has always cycled between the shooter's call and the goalie's response. The goalie's mask was the answer to the shooter's high shot. When shooters ditched wooden sticks, goalies inflated their equipment.

Shooters adapted to RVH — namely, goalies' reliance on the technique. RVH was so dependable for post coverage that goalies slid straight into the position as a default setting. They used RVH when it wasn't necessary.

The supremely skilled shooters picked the strong- and short-side holes next to goalies' ears. Their less talented counterparts considered cross-ice and point alternatives or waited for net-front reinforcements. Goalies that automatically slid into RVH locked themselves into post coverage and left the rest of the net vulnerable.

"Some goalies use RVH as a style and not as a tool," Speer said. "Then you get exposed more often than that. I don't think RVH is a problem. But most goalie coaches would agree that it's overused. If you're in RVH watching the play develop, you're not doing the right thing."

Collective save percentage slipped to .913 in 2016-17. It went down to .912 last season. Shooters now have the upper hand through a combination of the following: understanding RVH, going bar down more frequently, passing instead of shooting, stuffing goalies' sightlines, and taking advantage of their reduced gear. Goalies will be down another card to play next season, when they'll be required to wear streamlined chest protectors.

But goalies, especially young ones, are practicing the lateral release. It is only a matter of time before they figure it out.

Rewiring goalies

In 2016-17, Rask, with guidance from goalie coach Bob Essensa, tried to stay on his feet more. He recorded a .915 save percentage, same as the previous season, while his goals-against average dipped to 2.23 from 2.56.

But Rask went back to more RVH last season. His save percentage improved to .917. The 31-year-old Rask was more comfortable being down than holding his edges.

In that regard, it's easier for younger goalies to practice new techniques. Old habits aren't baked in.

"For most goalies, at least for myself, I grew up where everything sliding worked," said four-year Harvard puckstopper Merrick Madsen. "It's easier to just slide and throw your weight. But you're at the point where little things are the 1-percent difference. If you want to make it to the next level, you've got to hold your edges. Those are the kind of things that make a difference. It's not easy. If it was easy, everyone would do it."

The 22-year-old Madsen, like most goalies his age, was drilled in the standard techniques: butterfly, RVH, taking away the ice. It helps that Madsen is 6-foot-5. Amateur shooters do not find it easy to snap pucks above a goalie so tall, even when he's in the butterfly.

But practicing against an elite scorer like Ryan Donato and training under goalie coach Brian Robinson helped Madsen understand that professional shooters with passing options do not have such problems.

"Toward the end of my college career and now moving toward pro, it's a big part of it," said Madsen, now Arizona property after being traded by Philadelphia. "If you butterfly too soon and the guy doesn't end up shooting the puck and moves it over, you're caught dead in the water."

Madsen was a very good college goalie. As a sophomore, Madsen recorded a .931 save percentage. He was at .923 as a junior, and .918 last season.

One of his habits, though, was sitting in RVH too often. If the puck went in another direction, Madsen would have to scramble out of his RVH rocking chair.

"If you just sit down in RVH on your post and a pass gets out all the way across the ice, it's hard to push off the post like that," Madsen said. "It's just awkward. It's just not as fast. Where if you gain your feet before that pass gets made, you can just shuffle out there."

Practice is helping goalies like Madsen incorporate the lateral release. It is not just a physical technique. An even bigger challenge for goalies to overcome is the fear of staying on their feet.

"It's a huge part of it," Speer said of confidence. "If a goalie's confident and knows he can beat a puck on his feet, he can usually do it. If a goalie's not confident, if he gets scored on and gets a little shaken, he starts dropping and sliding. Then you're getting into trouble."

The slide is not considered forbidden. It is a fast and effective way to get to a location.

The problem comes when the puck doesn't arrive as expected. In such situations, the lateral release is a better tool. If a goalie, for example, uses the lateral release to mark the strong-side post, he still has the use of his edges to push — to slide, even — if the puck goes to the weak side.

Once current NHL goalies or up-and-coming ones like Madsen master the lateral release, the pendulum will swing back toward the puckstoppers. The cycle continues.

Contrasting the styles

In these two situations, Tuukka Rask of the Bruins slides to face one situation and surrenders a goal, Jake Allen of the Blues uses the lateral release in another to hold his edges and makes a save.

Tuukka Rask vs. Toronto, April 14, 2018

1: Mitch Marner has Zach Hyman on his left with Kevan Miller defending the two-on-one. Marner is beginning to pass to Hyman. Tuukka Rask is holding his edges and square to Marner as the primary threat.

2: Marner has passed to Hyman. Rask has read the pass and is starting to slide to his right.

3: Hyman has received Marner's pass on his backhand. Rask's pads are down and he is in mid-slide.

4: Instead of shooting, Hyman is about to return the puck to Marner, who is driving to the far post. Rask is recovering, but the slide has taken him out of position, leaving the right side of the net exposed.

5: Hyman has backhanded the puck, which will get through Miller. Rask, having committed to the shot, has little chance to recover in time.

6: Marner has scored. Rask tried to push back to his left, but could not get there in time.

Jake Allen vs. Nashville, Feb. 25, 2018

1: Craig Smith (puck carrier), Kevin Fiala, and Kyle Turris have gone on a three-on-two rush against Alex Pietrangelo and Vladimir Sobotka. Smith has options: pass to Turris (No. 8) at the point, pass to Fiala driving back door, or shot on net. Jake Allen is square to Smith while being aware of the other threats.

2: Smith has passed to Fiala (No. 22). If Allen had read Fiala primarily as a shooter, he could have slid from right to left. But Allen uses the lateral release to shuffle toward Fiala while remaining mindful of Nashville's other options.

3: Instead of shooting, Fiala has set up Turris for a partial one-timer. Had Allen slid to deny Fiala, he would not have been in good position to recover for Turris's shot. Instead, Allen is square to Turris, who does not have much room to shoot at.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

4: Turriss has gone high glove, but Allen has caught the puck. Staying square to Turriss helped Allen deny the odd-man rush.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.14.2018

1102987 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Gulutzan talks boosting Oilers' speed, Lucic's redemption potential

Mark Spector | August 13, 2018

EDMONTON — Who has had a better vantage point than Glen Gulutzan of the anomaly that is the Edmonton Oilers?

From a record-breaking decade out of the playoffs, to 103 points, to 78 points and a playoff miss last season, Gulutzan has schemed against Edmonton from behind the bench in Dallas, Vancouver and, for the past two seasons, on the opposite end of the Battle of Alberta.

Fired by the Calgary Flames, this summer he was recruited as Todd McLellan's assistant coach in Edmonton. So was Trent Yawney, who spent the past four seasons as an assistant coach in Anaheim.

It's a Made in Alberta twist on the old saying: If you can't beat 'em, get them to join you.

"If we can cut down on our goals-against, there is enough fire power here, from an opposing coach's point of view," Gulutzan began. "The game we got shut down the most all season last year was Game 1 right here in Edmonton (a 3-0 loss). We didn't get a sniff. It's a reminder for Edmonton: Those (chances-against) have to come down in order to have success."

That season opener, as we look back, was nearly perfect for Edmonton. Connor McDavid scored all three goals and goalie Cam Talbot had perhaps three tough saves all night.

In the end, however, it helped to create the perfect storm, contributing to a feeling among the Oilers that another 100-plus-point season was preordained — that it would be easy to repeat what they'd accomplished the previous season.

Gulutzan said the coaching staff has already met this summer, including new assistant Emanuel Viveiros, and planned some changes.

"The biggest thing you'll see is in pace of play," Gulutzan said. "We've put in a couple of adjustments, but one we think will take — for lack of a better term — some of the thinking out of some of our schemes. That will allow us to play a little bit quicker.

"When you have skill players like we do ... they just need some more arbitrary bounces, some loose pucks that they can make road hockey plays with. We're looking to create a few more of those opportunities. Pace of play is going to change is some of our attacking formations."

Acquiring speedy winger Tobias Rieder will help the Oilers' team speed, but other than him, the team did not up its team speed this summer. However, you can play fast without acquiring faster skaters, Gulutzan says.

"North-south. Shorter passes. More support to the puck. Less D-to-D passes. More quick-ups. Cleaner breakouts. Different forechecks," he listed. "You can play quicker, rather than just playing that traditional style. We've gone over every one of those things and identified three areas where we want to change.

"Pace of play, overall, is what the people in the seats will be able to say, 'Hey, they look quicker.'"

What about specific players?

As a guy who has spent much of the past decade figuring out how to beat the Oilers, Gulutzan can't wait to get his coaching hands on Milan Lucic.

"For Trent and I, coming from Anaheim and Calgary, we still think he is one of the most feared players in the league. There are two guys in the league who get a lot of room because of their presence. One is a fourth-line guy in (Ryan) Reaves, and the other is Looch. I know teams are leery to play against him.

"Everyone here knew that. But I don't know to the extent that they knew it had an effect on other teams. I think we have to tap into that, and Trent thinks that too. Looch wields a pretty big stick in this league, as far as room and presence."

As a player whose reputation was forged partially on the back of his fighting ability, Lucic has to reap those same benefits in an era when the gloves stay on more often than before.

"But, their bark is effective too. That resonates with guys, and can give you a little more time and space," Gulutzan points out. "I can say, from the other side, it certainly does."

Lucic is just one of many Oilers looking to bounce back after off-years in 2017-18. From Talbot to Oscar Klefbom, to Andrej Sekera, to Zack Kassian — who Gulutzan has a special bond with from their time in Vancouver — this coaching staff's job will be to get this group back to the level they were at two seasons ago.

"Less video, more communication," Gulutzan said. "The one thing we sometimes undervalue as coaches is confidence. At this high level, a lot of it is mental, and sometimes it's about clearing guys' plates and letting them focus in on certain areas. And building their game up.

"When I say less video, I'm saying it's more on the mental side. 'Let's not worry about this. Let's just focus on this.'"

Fresh eyes and an opponent's perspective. If you can't beat 'em...

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TSN.CA / Senators' Tkachuk has eyes on the NHL this season

Ian Mendes

The Ottawa Senators might have three options for what they can do with Brady Tkachuk next season, but if you ask the teenager about where he wants to play this fall, he has only one destination in mind.

"I think it's with Ottawa and in the NHL," Tkachuk told TSN 1200 radio on Monday afternoon. "For me it's a dream of mine to play there. I think I'm physically ready and mentally ready for the grind that comes with the NHL. I think I'm definitely ready and that would be the best place."

On Monday, the Senators announced they had agreed to terms on a three-year entry-level contract with Tkachuk, who opted to leave Boston University after his freshman campaign. The soon-to-be 19-year-old admits that the decision to leave the NCAA was one that he wrestled with for several weeks.

"BU was such a great spot to me, so it was hard to leave," Tkachuk admitted. "But it had to happen eventually. It's a dream of mine to be in the NHL and I thought this was the right time."

While it may be Tkachuk's dream to play in the NHL this season, the Senators do have two other options for where the young power forward



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 14, 2018

can play this season. They can loan him to the London Knights of the Ontario Hockey League, who own his junior rights. They could also assign him to the Belleville Senators of the American Hockey League, if they feel like playing professional hockey against older competition would be beneficial for his development.

"At the end of the day, it's where the management thinks is best for me," admitted Tkachuk. "But I'm going to try my best to be on Ottawa for the whole year."

Many observers believe the most likely route for the Senators to take is to give Tkachuk a nine-game trial to start the season in the NHL. If he doesn't thrive in that scenario, they could opt to send him down to London, where he could play a significant role with a powerhouse team. If that unfolds, it would be a foregone conclusion that Tkachuk would be loaned to USA Hockey to participate in the World Junior championship in December.

Tkachuk spent the weekend back home in the St. Louis area, where he was able to take in the Friday and Saturday sessions at the PGA Championship at the Bellerive Golf Club. He was in the Tiger Woods' gallery while the golfing legend was making a charge up the leaderboard and described the hysteria around Woods "crazy".

But the main reason for his return to St. Louis was to connect with his family for a final consultation with his father Keith – who scored 538 goals in a brilliant NHL career – and brother Matthew, who is a member of the Calgary Flames.

"I just wanted to be together with my family and get their perspective on it," Tkachuk explained. "They wanted me to pick what I wanted and what was best for me. My thought process was, 'Where can I make an impact in the short term – and I also want to have a long career'".

Tkachuk would love to follow in the footsteps of Matthew, who made an immediate impact with a 48-point season with the Flames as a teenager in 2016-17. He says that he's been picking his older brother's brain to see what has allowed him to become a legitimate top-six forward in his first two seasons in the league.

"It's been nice to live with him this summer. I've learned so much about his experience. I'm definitely going to try and ask him about what he learned to make the team his first year," Tkachuk added.

If there is a silver lining for Tkachuk, it's that it appears as though the Senators are on the verge of a re-build – or at the very least a movement towards a younger roster this season. Over the past few months, they have jettisoned veteran players such as Derick Brassard, Nate Thompson, Dion Phaneuf and Alex Burrows, which should theoretically open up some roster spots for younger skaters.

Head coach Guy Boucher appears to be on board with the youth movement as well for the 2018-19 campaign. In one of his only media sessions over the past few months, Boucher said he was excited about integrating some of Ottawa's young prospects into his lineup on a nightly basis.

"I'm looking forward to, if we can, have a young guy on every line," Boucher said in late June. "It depends on how they do, but I would love to have the greatest number of young guys make our team."

That puts Tkachuk in the mix with some other forward prospects including Logan Brown, Colin White, Alex Formenton, Filip Chlapik and Drake Batherson – all of whom could theoretically have a chance to crack the opening night roster.

Tkachuk admits it would be special if he could start the season with Brown as his centreman – considering the two grew up playing Triple-A hockey together in the St. Louis minor hockey system.

"It would be unbelievable," Tkachuk said of the chance to play with Brown on opening night. "We were best friends growing up."

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TSN.CA / An early Top 5 Craig's List for the 2019 Draft

Craig Button

The World Junior Showcase and Hlinka Gretzky Cup are the perfect starting point to look ahead to the 2019 NHL Draft and this early 'Craig's List' provides a Top 5 right now going in.

5. Vasilii Podkolzin, RW: He's a complete winger with all the qualities that you want in a player. He's competitive and smart, he can score and make plays and he kills penalties. He has some of the things that Pavel Datsyuk had - strong on the puck and manoeuvres the puck in tight and you can't get it away from him. He's got that uncanny ability to open up the puck for great opportunities. This young Russian is a top-end talent for the 2019 draft.

4. Kaapo Kakko, RW: A really well-rounded Finnish winger who can also play the middle of the ice. He was one of the top players at the U-18 tournament earlier this past April as Finland went on to win gold. He can skate and he can think well on the ice. He's got an "unremarkable" quality, yet he's always in the middle of everything making smart plays. He could very well be at the World Junior tournament this December in Vancouver and Victoria.

Must See: Podkolzin dangles American defence before undressing goalie

Just seconds after the United States got to within one goal of Russia late in the third period, Vasilii Podkolzin put a bow on his hat trick by scoring a sensational goal that took him through the heart of the American defence before he undressed goaltender Derek Mullahey.

3. Philip Broberg, D: The best defenceman available for the 2019 draft. He has exceptional skating ability and exceptional command of the game in every single regard. Offensively, he can move the puck up the ice with his skating, he's got great poise and makes great plays under pressure. Everything about his game screams top pair defenceman, if not a No. 1 defenceman in the NHL. His improvement in the last year has been tremendous and you saw that on display at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup.

2. Dylan Cozens, C: The WHL's rookie of the year last season is a five-tool hockey player. He can skate, make plays, he can shoot, he's exceptionally smart and he's highly competitive. His motor revs at high RPMs and he can play the game any way you want him to play it. Defensively and offensively, he has scratched the surface and is only getting better and he matures physically. He will not be around long at the 2019 draft.

1. Jack Hughes, C: There's no doubt in my mind that there's any chance he'll be caught for No. 1. He led the U.S. to the gold medal at last November's Under-17 challenge and led the tournament in scoring. He then led the U-18 tournament in scoring in April and led the U.S. to the gold medal game. At last week's World Junior Showcase, he was nothing short of brilliant. He'll shatter records for points this season and will be on the World Junior team as the No. 1 centre for Team USA.

Hughes continues to impress with his incredible vision

USA's Quinn Hughes played the role of setup man in Josh Norris' overtime winner against Sweden on Thursday, with the assist he continues to impress the hockey world with his elite skills.

Must See: 2019 projected first overall pick Hughes scores with quick shot

USA's Jack Hughes, the projected first overall pick in 2019 NHL Draft, makes a sharp move in front of a Swedish defender, and scores with a quick shot at the World Junior Summer Showcase.



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TSN.CA / Jets fans getting excited about Connor, Roslovic

Travis Yost

The Winnipeg Jets finished with the NHL's second-best record last year, and followed up that regular season run with a Western Conference Final appearance. Naturally, expectations are sky-high heading into 2018-19.

The biggest victory for the Winnipeg front office? They were able to preserve almost all of last year's core – the same core that turned Winnipeg into an indomitable force one season ago. The only notable casualty to the active roster was Paul Stastny – a trade deadline acquisition that added tremendous depth to their forward ranks. Winnipeg had hoped to re-sign Stastny, but he moved south to Las Vegas in the off-season.

Winnipeg was quiet in terms of summer off-season additions, but that was mostly expected. A number of soon-to-be expiring skaters – headlined by star wingers Blake Wheeler and Patrik Laine, and defenceman Jacob Trouba – are expected to eat significantly into the 2019-20 salary cap if they are retained. And, of course, it's worth mentioning that defenceman Josh Morrissey is in immediate need of a new contract.

So the Jets are largely just trying to run it back next year. But that doesn't mean they can't take another step forward.

One of the biggest reasons for excitement in Winnipeg this year concerns a pair of 21-year olds forwards in Kyle Connor and Jack Roslovic (who, ironically, were both selected in the first round of the 2015 NHL Entry Draft). Connor became a household name during his rookie season, amassing 57 points in 76 games and finishing fourth in the Calder Trophy race. Roslovic was called up mid-season after averaging over a point-per-game for the AHL's Manitoba Moose, and amassed 14 points in 31 games with the big league club.

After their respective rookie years, it would be very reasonable to conclude Connor is further along in his development than Roslovic. But one thing I have found quite interesting is that Roslovic – albeit in limited minutes – compares reasonably well after their rookie campaigns.

The below graph shows how Connor and Roslovic graded out against their forward peers around the league during the 2017-18 season and, of course, how they measured against one another. Here, the 100th percentile would indicate no forward around the league was better by way of that statistical measure; 0th percentile would indicate the opposite.

Connor, who played primarily with Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler, immediately evolved into a terrifying individual scorer. Surely there are benefits to playing with two incredibly gifted playmakers but Connor never looked out of his comfort zone in those top-six minutes. Obviously, Connor's highest grades come on the individual scoring front – on a rate basis, his goals per-60 minutes and assists per-60 minutes were easily first-line calibre, and his individual shot generation rates were just about there. On the other hand, it is noteworthy to see that Winnipeg at the team level didn't get decisive shot or goal advantages with him on the ice. Some of this is because the Jets' depth last year was so strong, but Winnipeg was more than three points better in terms of possession and two points better in terms of goals when Connor's line was off the ice.

That brings us to the other 21-year old in Roslovic. He tended to play further down the lineup against a bit weaker competition, his most common linemates including Bryan Little and Mathieu Perreault. But on a

rate basis, he was just as reliable a scorer. In fact, Roslovic was the highest rate scorer on the entire Jets roster, amassing 2.3 points per-60 minutes (Connor was second at 2.2). And although the individual goal-scoring – and usage, more generally – wasn't there for Roslovic like it was for Connor, it's interesting to see that Winnipeg as a team did tend to get better results with him on the ice. The Jets saw 61 per cent of the goals with Roslovic on the ice, also the highest number for any qualified Jets skater. Again, context matters here – Roslovic was insulated quite a bit more than Connor and didn't carry nearly the same expectations by season's end. But that shouldn't minimize his rookie debut, either.

Out of curiosity, I wanted to see which players around the league Connor and Roslovic most likened to during their rookie season. Similarity Scores show a number of talented comparables; for Connor, it's almost exclusively first-liners, and for Roslovic, it's a strong mix of top-six attackers. (A 1.0 measure here indicates a relationship where two players were perfectly comparable; a -1.0 indicate a relationship where two players were polar opposites.)

This only serves to reemphasize the point that I think Jets fans realized earlier than most. Connor looks like he's already an impact player, and Roslovic proved after his call-up that he's ready to have a similar type of impact. If both of these players take another developmental step forward in 2018-19, the Jets are going to be flush with talent going forward.

Heck, they already are.

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