



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 21, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

'Parenthood is awesome.' Hurricanes' Jaccob Slavin finalizes the adoption of baby girl

By Chip Alexander

Jaccob Slavin is about to enter a hockey season unlike any other for the Carolina Hurricanes, and it has little to do with the playoffs, amped up expectations or whether Justin Williams plays or retires.

Slavin is a father. He's a changed man. The Canes defenseman and his wife, Kylie, have adopted a baby girl and they introduced Emersyn Ruth Slavin to the world through social media, posting her photo with her name this month on Jaccob's Instagram account.

"No words can describe the joy in our house tonight! Emersyn Ruth is officially ours," Slavin wrote.

A man of strong faith, Slavin gives thanks to the Lord for bringing his daughter into his life, into Kylie's life. The adoption process can be long, emotional and draining and it was for the Slavins. But that's behind them now. It's all about family time, about providing a loving home for Emersyn Ruth, now more than four months old, and watching their first child grow.

"It's a blast, so much fun," Slavin said in an N&O interview Monday at Raleigh Center Ice. "I would consider her an easy baby, although I don't know anything else. She's been sleeping well for the most part. She's super fun, super outgoing."

Slavin smiled, saying, "She definitely has a little bit of a jabber mouth on her, but it's a lot of fun. Emersyn is a blessing, that's for sure. Parenthood is awesome."

Slavin said before the 2018-19 season that he and his wife were on a waiting list to adopt a child. Months passed before the adoption finally was approved -- during the Stanley Cup playoffs. Slavin took some personal leave days away from the team and once took Canes owner Tom Dundon up on his offer to fly Slavin back to Raleigh on his jet after one of the playoff games.

While announcing the adoption in April, the Slavins posted a photo that had a sunflower covering Emersyn Ruth's face. Once the adoption was finalized, the Slavins posted the new photo on Instagram.

"It's kind of crazy," Slavin said. "I put it on there (in April) and Kylie made me take it down right away, and then she said, 'OK, go ahead and put it back on.' It's weird because we had a flower over her face for a long time because (the adoption) wasn't finalized. There was some legal stuff and we weren't able to."

And now?

"It's a strange situation knowing that it's final but also knowing she has family out there," he said. "It's a working

relationship. The birth mother has been awesome. It's been good."

Slavin talked about the adoption and a new season Monday after putting in a voluntary skate at RCI with defenseman Haydn Fleury, again an early arrival. Equipment manager Jorge Alves was in the net serving as the goalie while Canes head coach Rod Brind'Amour worked with his youngest son, Brooks, and Alves' son, Jaxon, on the other end of the ice.

The NHL Network on Sunday listed what it called the best 20 defensemen in the league. Slavin wasn't on it, not that those things bother him.

The playoffs gave Slavin added exposure he didn't crave, and he had 11 assists in the 15 postseason games. He said he does want to be a more productive offensive player this season after finishing with eight goals and 23 assists in 82 regular-season games last year.

Then again, defensive partner Dougie Hamilton scored 18 goals last season, second in the NHL among defensemen. Once together, the Canes' No. 1 pairing was solid enough.

"I let him do the offensive side of the game and get the puck to him," Slavin said. "I take care of the defensive end and let him do his thing."

For the first time since 2009, Slavin and the Canes won't go into a season facing the nagging question of whether they're capable of making the playoffs. They made it. They ended the postseason drought.

The Canes also reached the Eastern Conference finals last season, surprising many who follow the NHL but not, Slavin said, themselves. Not after January, when things began falling into place and the Canes starting winning more close games. Not after beating the Washington Capitals, the 2018 Stanley Cup champs, in seven games in the opening round of the playoffs.

"We could sense it coming, taking it game by game, and when the playoffs came anything can happen," Slavin said. "We kind of got on a roll there. We had a great group of guys and a great dynamic in the room, and 'Willy' being the leader made it easy."

That would be Williams, the Canes' captain. He still is unsigned, his return -- or retirement -- still in question.

"I don't think he's going to make a choice that he's going to regret," Slavin said. "Obviously we're all hoping he comes back to play. If he doesn't, he obviously has a well-earned retirement."

One consideration for Williams, 37, is being away from his family so much the past 18 seasons. Slavin now will be getting a feel for that at 25.



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"It's going to be challenging this season," Slavin said. "It will be interesting. I know Kylie is excited for hockey to start but not me being gone.

"It will all work itself out. It'll be good. I've got to make sure I give them the time they need and I've got to do what I've got to do here at the rink. Obviously there are important things at home."

Here's a look at the Carolina Hurricanes' new road uniforms

By Chip Alexander

A new season will bring a new look for the Carolina Hurricanes.

The Canes on Tuesday revealed their road sweaters for the 2019-20 season. Gone is the Hurricanes logo on the front of the white jerseys. Replacing it: "Canes" with the letters spaced down and diagonally from left to right -- the "C" with two warning flags on it.

The Canes have had the logo on their uniforms since the team relocated from Hartford, Conn., in 1997 and rechristened as the Carolina Hurricanes. But the coming of

Tom Dundon as the owner in January 2018 has led to multiple changes and the new road uniforms are another.

The swirling hurricane logo will remain, albeit raised 3-D decals positioned on the side of the white helmets. The warning flags, the Canes' secondary logo, will be on the waistline.

Last season, the NHL approved the Canes wearing Hartford Whalers throwback jerseys, with the Whale's distinctive logo, in two regular-season games against the Boston Bruins -- the first in Raleigh, then at Boston. The Canes again will wear Hartford jerseys this season in the Jan. 11, 2020 home game against the Los Angeles Kings.

THE ATHLETIC

The Athletic Carolina celebrates Year 1: From the storm-surgng Jerks to losing Kemba, it's been a wild one

By Ken Bradley

Year 1 of *The Athletic* Carolina brought us the best of times (check out those Jerks in Raleigh), the worst of times (check out Kemba in ... Boston?) and a little bit of the in-between times (check out the Panthers' fast start and horrible finish).

If you'd asked this time a year ago which of the big three pro franchises in the Carolinas were closest to a championship, the order likely would have been the Panthers, followed by exaggerated eye rolls for the Hornets (they'd reached the playoffs just two of the previous eight seasons) and Hurricanes (they were riding a nine-year postseason-less streak).

Now it's the Hurricanes that look like the franchise most poised to make a run at a title after reaching the Eastern Conference Finals in Rod Brind'Amour's first season as head coach.

"I guess I'd already learned that anything is possible on the ice, but my first year covering the Hurricanes showed me what can happen off the ice," said our Hurricanes beat writer, Sara Civian. "Seeing the fan base come to life again, the little kids clapping along with the storm surge and buying their first pucks and the way people like Rod Brind'Amour and Justin Williams put their souls into what they do was something new. I remember Brind'Amour came up to me after that Bunch of Jerks story and said something like, 'Isn't this special?' It really is."

Sara hit the ground running when she stepped onto the Canes beat for the first time. She seized the moment Don Cherry called the Canes "a bunch of jerks.", she hung out

with Calvin de Haan in his tiny hometown of Carp, Ontario, and told his wonderful backstory, and she also generated ... ahem ... lively discussion with her coverage of the (gasp!) Sebastian Aho offer sheet.

About two and a half hours west in Charlotte, things were different. The Panthers began the season 6-2 and looked like a playoff contender. Then Cam's shoulder went and Carolina managed just a single win in its final eight games. Not even our Panthers beat writer, Joe Person, saw *that* coming.

"No way. Even the manner in which they lost at Pittsburgh, I thought it would be a hiccup on their way to the playoffs," Joe said. "Of course, none of us knew quite how bad Cam Newton's shoulder would get by the end. It just seemed like they were snakebitten. Every week for seven weeks, they found new and excruciating ways to lose."

But that didn't keep Joe from telling some great Panthers stories along the way. Like the behind-the-scenes conversations that were being held prior to the 2011 NFL Draft, when Carolina selected Cam Newton with the No. 1 overall pick. Not everyone was on the same page. It took convincing. Speaking of Panthers draft picks, Joe caught up with Armanti Edwards, who was never able to live up to the expectations after Carolina traded up to get him. People are still reading the touching story of Panthers LB Jared Norris and all that his fiancée has endured since last fall (33 procedures), and who can forget Graham Gano's 63-yard field goal to beat the Giants?

Expect even more of the good stuff in Year 2 on the Panthers beat because we've partnered Joe and Jourdan Rodrigue in *The Athletic* backfield (again). And Jourdan hit



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the ground running with a flurry of great offseason work: Luke Kuechly, the fly fisherman, Ryan Kalil opening up about returning to the NFL in an exclusive interview and the team physician operating on the franchise's most expensive arms, but the time he operated on his idol is another story (this story).

That brings us to the Hornets, who competed for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference until the end but fell short. Their reward? The franchise's greatest player didn't get the offer he was hoping for from the Hornets and now he's in Boston. Yes, that stings.

Rod Boone has given it to our readers straight about Kemba Walker in the weeks leading up to his departure. Rod also wrote about the return of the beloved arena voice, Patrick

"Big Pat" Doughty, the night Michael Jordan slapped (playfully, sort of ...) Malik Monk and the frustration of Kemba's 60-point night that came in a loss.

And that's just part of it. You also will find college basketball writer CL Brown bouncing around from Duke to UNC and NC State, radio host David Glenn weighing in on all things ACC, as well as Grace Raynor (Clemson) and Josh Kendall (South Carolina) on college football beats.

Thanks for joining us for the ride and join us Tuesday between 2 and 3 p.m. ET for a live chat with Sara, Joe, Jourdan and Rod to discuss the past year and the year ahead for each of the teams they cover (and anything else you want to ask). Here's to a bigger and better second one.



Hurricanes unveil 'modern take' on classic road uniform

By Josh Beneteau

The Carolina Hurricanes will be donning new road uniforms this season, featuring a Canes letter logo across the front.

The white uniforms with red pants and stripes also include redesigns of features from the team's other jersey sets. A new black and red version of the team's primary hurricane logo appears on the helmet, the team's secondary flag logo now sits on both shoulders, and variations of that flag logo can be seen on the waistline and "C" in the word Canes across the front.

"We looked at many options in the creative process and ultimately decided that we wanted to make this jersey stand apart from our home and third jerseys," Mike Forman, Hurricanes vice president of marketing and brand strategy said in an interview with Icethetics.com. "This uniform is intended to be a modern take on our classic road jersey."

The biggest addition to the uniform is the Canes letter logo that sits diagonally across the front. The look calls to mind

similar jerseys from the New York Rangers and Tampa Bay Lightning.

"We are proud of our new word marks that were introduced prior to last season," Forman said. "Our 'Canes' nickname is how the vast majority of our fans affectionately refer to us and we want to bring a piece of our fans with us on the road by featuring it as the crest logo."

According to the Hurricanes, the font will be consistent across all three team uniforms, but the new road jerseys will have red letters and a black border. The team will continue to play with their red home uniform, which features their primary hurricane logo, as well as the black jersey with their flag and green Hartford Whalers alternate jerseys they debuted last season. According to Icethetics, the Whalers jersey will return for a home game against the Los Angeles Kings on Jan. 11.

"We feel that we now have the most diverse uniform set in the NHL with three uniforms that utilize three different brand assets as crest logos," Forman said. "Not to mention a fourth uniform when you factor in our Whalers set."



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Hurricanes unveil new road jersey on Twitter

The Carolina Hurricanes revealed their 2019-20 road jerseys on Tuesday, sporting the word "CANES" diagonally down the front of the uniform. The move to the new jersey comes after the team wore their home red uniforms on the road multiple times last season because owner Tom Dundon was not a fan of their road jerseys.

Hurricanes revealed their 2019-20 road jerseys on Tuesday, sporting the word "CANES" diagonally down the front of the uniform.

"A new look for a new era," the Hurricanes captioned their tweet on Monday.

The move to the new jerseys comes after the team wore their home red uniforms on the road multiple times last season because, as TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun reported, owner Tom Dundon was not a fan of their road jerseys.

"We just ask, say something like 'Hey, we'd like to wear our red jerseys, what do you think?' and sometimes the other teams want to switch it up and show their fans their away jerseys. It's not really a big deal," Dundon told The Athletic in January.

The Hurricanes are expected to debut the jersey on Sept. 17, when they open their preseason against the Tampa Bay Lightning.



Grade the Hurricanes' new road uniform

By Adam Gretz

On Tuesday morning Carolina Hurricanes unveiled a new road uniform for the 2019-20 NHL season, ditching their primary storm logo on the front for some diagonal lettering that spells out "Canes."

It is a rather simplistic design, but it is clean and pretty sharp.

Along with the wording across the front, they also brought back the warning flags along the waistline of the jersey.

Have a look.

Other features as part of the new uniform: The new secondary logo (the hockey stick with the warning flags attached to it) appears on both shoulders, while the helmet will feature a raised 3-D sticker of the primary logo which you can see here.

You can check out all of the features at the Hurricanes' website.

What do you think, hockey fans?

Is it a good look? Does the diagonal lettering work for a team that is not the New York Rangers? What is your grade for the Hurricanes' new road uniform?



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Carolina Hurricanes go with 'Canes,' diagonal lettering on new road jersey

Nickname jerseys aren't always received well

By Pete Blackburn

The Carolina Hurricanes will have new road jerseys this upcoming season, and they're probably not what you expected.

The Hurricanes have decided to abandon their primary logo on the front of that jersey, instead going with a diagonal wordmark reminiscent of the New York Rangers. But the Hurricanes are also electing to go with their shortened nickname across the front, as the new jersey simply reads 'CANES.'

Nickname jerseys aren't always received well (just ask the Lightning and Senators) but this Hurricanes look isn't that bad. Some critics have already declared that it looks too much like a high school jersey, but it's clean while bringing a few cool details that may not jump out right away.

The 'C' on the front of the jersey includes two warning flags, signifying a hurricane warning.

The warning flags also return to the road jersey's waistline, matching the primary home uniform.

As a cool added touch, the helmets will also featured a raised, 3D decal of the Hurricanes' primary logo.

Here's a look at the team's full three-uniform set for the upcoming season:

Overall, the jersey isn't really spectacular, but it brings a little more personality than what Carolina has been wearing on the road for the past few seasons. At the very least, the new look stands out. For a team that's stepping into a new, more fun identity with the goal of separating from the stale, that's a good thing.



Carolina Hurricanes unveil new away uniforms

By Ailish Forfar

Take Warning, the Carolina Hurricanes have unveiled their new away jerseys featuring a distinctly different design.

The white threads will feature red "Canes" lettering diagonally across the sweater, with their secondary "warning flag" patch on both shoulders.

It's the third season in a row the Hurricanes have introduced new threads to their lineup. New features this year include a 3-D raised decal on the helmet, and warning flags have returned to the waistline pattern.

NHL.com's Michael Smith explained how the trio of jerseys will work in unison.

"The resulting product is a bold addition to the Hurricanes' uniform collection, a white road kit that is quite unlike anything the team has ever worn. Together, the team has assembled three diverse uniform sets, with each jersey featuring a different, yet unquestionably Canes crest."

Canes fans can reserve the new away jerseys beginning today, and can be picked up at The Eye team store beginning September 16th.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes reveal new road white uniforms

The well-advertised new look for the Canes has finally been made public.

By Brian LeBlanc

We knew they were on the way, what with the owner's stated disdain for the previous jerseys, and on Tuesday the Carolina Hurricanes unveiled their new-look white sweaters for the 2019-20 NHL season.

If you haven't seen the hype video, here it is:

A few notes on the new threads:

- The warning flags have returned to the white jerseys for the first time since the 2012-13 season.
- Diagonally across the front is the "CANES" wordmark, with the now-familiar hurricane warning flags in the C. It calls to mind the Rangers' longtime uniforms, as well as the ill-fated "BOLTS" alternates that the Lightning tried for a few years.

- The third jersey logo is present on the shoulders of the new uniform, and the traditional Hurricanes logo is on the helmet, in a unique embossed representation.
- One of the things that defined previous ownership was that the old white uniforms featured red nameplates, so that the team could save a couple bucks in not duplicating the nameplates. That, mercifully, is no longer the case. Both the nameplates and the numbers are red outlined with black, and the font is the same as is present on the other two sweaters.
- Good question here by Brett, and I think he's right that this is unique at the moment in the NHL:
- And here's a look at the full ensemble of uniforms:

What are your thoughts on the Canes' new white uniforms?



No Hard Feelings Between Hurricanes and Aho?

By Ryan Szporer

One Sebastian Aho saga, with the Montreal Canadiens, has come to end. Another one, however unlikely, could be just beginning with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Aho Signs with the Canadiens

Considering the length of the five-year offer sheet Aho signed with the Habs, this hypothetical one could last longer. That's if the two sides fail to put any lingering uncomfortable feelings behind them... "uncomfortable" being a word Aho acknowledged as a way to describe the experience of the Hurricanes officially matching the \$42.27 million pact and a conversation afterward with owner Tom Dundon.

Ultimately, if it wasn't clear heading into free agency, the Hurricanes needed Aho more than he needed them. After all, No. 1 centers don't grow on trees. Now the Hurricanes have secured one in Aho through the prime years of his career at a relatively cost-effective cap hit of \$8.454 million per season.

There's no question the Hurricanes would have loved to sign Aho for less money and for a longer term, to eat up some of his unrestricted-free-agent years. Whatever resentment toward Aho they may be harboring, they should spare themselves the trouble and get over it for a variety of reasons.

For starters, all Aho did was do whatever most sane people would have done: sign for as much money as someone is willing to offer you.

Aho vs. Weber

Aho has stated that his heart is with the Hurricanes and that he signed the deal to get his next contract taken care of one way or another. That may be true, but it's readily apparent he would have found some way to make it work had Carolina declined to match and he ended up with the Habs. Money may not buy happiness, but it does a lot of coping mechanisms. In any case, what's done is done. Is it water under the bridge, though?



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The Canadiens remain relevant here, because of how their captain Shea Weber once signed an offer sheet of his own. Then a member of the Nashville Predators, Weber signed his current 14-year, \$110 million deal with the Philadelphia Flyers. The Predators obviously matched, but eventually dealt Weber less than a third of the term into the contract.

In the process, the Predators avoided two separate lump-sum \$8 million signing-bonus payouts. Granted, they did pay Weber \$13 million in bonuses each of the first four seasons of the deal, but there's a good case to be made the Subban trade was as much a financial transaction as it was a hockey trade. If it's a healthy relationship, it's hard to imagine money getting in the way to that degree with a player that for all intents and purposes meant the franchise.

Just look at the deal from the Canadiens' perspective. There was almost no conceivable reason to give up Subban, who is four years younger than Weber and a pillar in the Montreal community (even after the deal), unless you start to believe rumors of a rift in the relationship.

Canes in Good Shape with Aho Deal

It's of course hard to characterize Weber's relationship with the Predators, but they did make out like bandits with the trade. Even if they did just trade Subban out of salary-cap considerations, they reached the Stanley Cup Final his first season there. Meanwhile, the Canadiens have been less than stellar since. They've missed the playoffs the last two seasons, as Weber, who is admittedly still a star and the Habs' best player not named Carey Price, continues to slowly decline. He's 34 now. He'll be going on 41 by the end of the deal.

That's why the Hurricanes should let bygones be bygones, if they haven't already. Aho will only be turning 27 when his new five-year deal ends. Admittedly, that may be somewhat a bug of the new contract in the Hurricanes' eyes and not a feature, because they would have liked to lock Aho up for longer. That's a perfectly valid sentiment.

However, Aho is entering the most productive seasons of his career right now, and, considering the market for the services of a point-per-game No. 1 center, he'll be paid as he should be. Far too often in the NHL, it's the opposite, where players get rich based on how they've performed in the past only to slow down once they've signed on the dotted line come July 1. The Aho contract, while expensive, is unlikely to be one the Hurricanes look back on as more trouble than its worth like the Predators obviously did back in the day. By the end, it could even look like one of the better contracts in the league thanks to inflation.

The Hurricanes may already realize this. They may only be focusing their frustration, if they have any at all, at Habs general manager Marc Bergevin, for prematurely inflating their pay structure, especially seeing as there are plenty of conspiracy theories Bergevin extended the offer just to make it *look* like he was doing something to improve the Habs. In the end, he may have indirectly hurt them if the Hurricanes choose to retaliate when the time is right.

It would be there right to do so, but ultimately he did the Hurricanes a favor, even if it might not look like it. By his own admission, Aho's happier than he was. Sure, millions upon millions of dollars has a tendency to do that to a guy, but, regardless, you want to keep your stars happy. If your stars are happy, they'll end up staying when they might otherwise leave, say in about five years' time.

If the Hurricanes can keep Aho happy, the shorter-than-desired term of his deal won't matter. Make it so he needs you just as much as you need him and he'll stay. He may even take a hometown discount the next time around, not out of guilt, because he did nothing wrong by signing an offer sheet... just because he'll want to stay where he's wanted. The story doesn't have to end five years from now. It can last longer, with a happy ending to boot.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/canes-now/article234173802.html>

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/canes-now/article234176567.html>

<https://theathletic.com/1149220/2019/08/20/the-athletic-carolina-celebrates-year-1-from-the-storm-surgin-jerks-to-losing-kemba-its-been-a-wild-one/>

<https://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/hurricanes-unveil-modern-take-classic-road-uniform/>

<https://www.tsn.ca/carolina-hurricanes-unveil-new-road-jersey-on-twitter-1.1353417>

<https://nhl.nbc.com/2019/08/20/grade-the-hurricanes-new-road-uniform/>

<https://www.cbssports.com/nhl/news/carolina-hurricanes-go-with-canes-diagonal-lettering-on-new-road-jersey/>

<https://sports.yahoo.com/carolina-hurricanes-unveil-new-away-uniforms-163356984.html>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/8/20/20813735/carolina-hurricanes-reveal-new-road-white-uniforms>

<https://thehockeywriters.com/carolina-hurricanes-aho-offer-sheet-weber/>



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SportScan

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

1151099 Carolina Hurricanes

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BY CHIP ALEXANDER

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1151100 Carolina Hurricanes

'Parenthood is awesome.' Hurricanes' Jaccob Slavin finalizes the adoption of baby girl

BY CHIP ALEXANDER AUGUST 20, 2019 10:38 AM

Jacob Slavin is about to enter a hockey season unlike any other for the Carolina Hurricanes, and it has little to do with the playoffs, amped up expectations or whether Justin Williams plays or retires.

Slavin is a father. He's a changed man. The Canes defenseman and his wife, Kylie, have adopted a baby girl and they introduced Emersyn Ruth Slavin to the world through social media, posting her photo with her name this month on Jaccob's Instagram account.

"No words can describe the joy in our house tonight! Emersyn Ruth is officially ours," Slavin wrote.

A man of strong faith, Slavin gives thanks to the Lord for bringing his daughter into his life, into Kylie's life. The adoption process can be long, emotional and draining and it was for the Slavins. But that's behind them now. It's all about family time, about providing a loving home for Emersyn Ruth, now more than four months old, and watching their first child grow.

"It's a blast, so much fun," Slavin said in an N&O interview Monday at Raleigh Center Ice. "I would consider her an easy baby, although I don't know anything else. She's been sleeping well for the most part. She's super fun, super outgoing."

View this post on Instagram

No words can describe the joy in our house tonight! Emersyn Ruth Slavin is officially ours! Thank you every one who has prayed with us along this journey! God is so so good!

A post shared by Jaccob Slavin (@jsslavin74) on AUG 6, 2019 AT 5:42PM PDT

Slavin smiled, saying, "She definitely has a little bit of a jabber mouth on her, but it's a lot of fun. Emersyn is a blessing, that's for sure. Parenthood is awesome."

Slavin said before the 2018-19 season that he and his wife were on a waiting list to adopt a child. Months passed before the adoption finally was approved -- during the Stanley Cup playoffs. Slavin took some personal leave days away from the team and once took Canes owner Tom Dundon up on his offer to fly Slavin back to Raleigh on his jet after one of the playoff games.

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And now?

"It's a strange situation knowing that it's final but also knowing she has family out there," he said. "It's a working relationship. The birth mother has been awesome. It's been good."

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The NHL Network on Sunday listed what it called the best 20 defensemen in the league. Slavin wasn't on it, not that those things bother him.

The playoffs gave Slavin added exposure he didn't crave, and he had 11 assists in the 15 postseason games. He said he does want to be a more productive offensive player this season after finishing with eight goals and 23 assists in 82 regular-season games last year.

Then again, defensive partner Dougie Hamilton scored 18 goals last season, second in the NHL among defensemen. Once together, the Canes' No. 1 pairing was solid enough.

"I let him do the offensive side of the game and get the puck to him," Slavin said. "I take care of the defensive end and let him do his thing."



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For the first time since 2009, Slavin and the Canes won't go into a season facing the nagging question of whether they're capable of making the playoffs. They made it. They ended the postseason drought.

The Canes also reached the Eastern Conference finals last season, surprising many who follow the NHL but not, Slavin said, themselves. Not after January, when things began falling into place and the Canes starting winning more close games. Not after beating the Washington Capitals, the 2018 Stanley Cup champs, in seven games in the opening round of the playoffs.

"We could sense it coming, taking it game by game, and when the playoffs came anything can happen," Slavin said. "We kind of got on a roll there. We had a great group of guys and a great dynamic in the room, and 'Willy' being the leader made it easy."

That would be Williams, the Canes' captain. He still is unsigned, his return -- or retirement -- still in question.

"I don't think he's going to make a choice that he's going to regret," Slavin said. "Obviously we're all hoping he comes back to play. If he doesn't, he obviously has a well-earned retirement."

One consideration for Williams, 37, is being away from his family so much the past 18 seasons. Slavin now will be getting a feel for that at 25.

"It's going to be challenging this season," Slavin said. "It will be interesting. I know Kylie is excited for hockey to start but not me being gone."

"It will all work itself out. It'll be good. I've got to make sure I give them the time they need and I've got to do what I've got to do here at the rink. Obviously there are important things at home."

News Observer LOADED: 08.21.2019

1151101 Carolina Hurricanes

The Athletic Carolina celebrates Year 1: From the storm-surfing Jerks to losing Kemba, it's been a wild one

By Ken Bradley Aug 20, 2019

Year 1 of The Athletic Carolina brought us the best of times (check out those Jerks in Raleigh), the worst of times (check out Kemba in ... Boston?) and a little bit of the in-between times (check out the Panthers' fast start and horrible finish).

If you'd asked this time a year ago which of the big three pro franchises in the Carolinas were closest to a championship, the order likely would have been the Panthers, followed by exaggerated eye rolls for the Hornets (they'd reached the playoffs just two of the previous eight seasons) and Hurricanes (they were riding a nine-year postseason-less streak).

Now it's the Hurricanes that look like the franchise most poised to make a run at a title after reaching the Eastern Conference Finals in Rod Brind'Amour's first season as head coach.

"I guess I'd already learned that anything is possible on the ice, but my first year covering the Hurricanes showed me what can happen off the ice," said our Hurricanes beat writer, Sara Civian. "Seeing the fan base come to life again, the little kids clapping along with the storm surge and buying their first pucks and the way people like Rod Brind'Amour and Justin Williams put their souls into what they do was something new. I remember Brind'Amour came up to me after that Bunch of Jerks story and said something like, 'Isn't this special?' It really is."

Sara hit the ground running when she stepped onto the Canes beat for the first time. She seized the moment Don Cherry called the Canes "a bunch of jerks," she hung out with Calvin de Haan in his tiny hometown

of Carp, Ontario, and told his wonderful backstory, and she also generated ... ahem ... lively discussion with her coverage of the (gasp!) Sebastian Aho offer sheet.

About two and a half hours west in Charlotte, things were different. The Panthers began the season 6-2 and looked like a playoff contender. Then Cam's shoulder went and Carolina managed just a single win in its first eight games. Not even our Panthers beat writer, Joe Person, saw that coming.

"No way. Even the manner in which they lost at Pittsburgh, I thought it would be a hiccup on their way to the playoffs," Joe said. "Of course, none of us knew quite how bad Cam Newton's shoulder would get by the end. It just seemed like they were snakebitten. Every week for seven weeks, they found new and excruciating ways to lose."

But that didn't keep Joe from telling some great Panthers stories along the way. Like the behind-the-scenes conversations that were being held prior to the 2011 NFL Draft, when Carolina selected Cam Newton with the No. 1 overall pick. Not everyone was on the same page. It took convincing. Speaking of Panthers draft picks, Joe caught up with Armanti Edwards, who was never able to live up to the expectations after Carolina traded up to get him. People are still reading the touching story of Panthers LB Jared Norris and all that his fiancée has endured since last fall (33 procedures), and who can forget Graham Gano's 63-yard field goal to beat the Giants?

Expect even more of the good stuff in Year 2 on the Panthers beat because we've partnered Joe and Jourdan Rodrigue in The Athletic backfield (again). And Jourdan hit the ground running with a flurry of great offseason work: Luke Kuechly, the fly fisherman, Ryan Kalil opening up about returning to the NFL in an exclusive interview and the team physician operating on the franchise's most expensive arms, but the time he operated on his idol is another story (this story).

WE'RE READY! PIC.TWITTER.COM/S2IUQCQPMB

— JOURDAN RODRIGUE (@JOURDANRODRIGUE) AUGUST 12, 2019

That brings us to the Hornets, who competed for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference until the end but fell short. Their reward? The franchise's greatest player didn't get the offer he was hoping for from the Hornets and now he's in Boston. Yes, that stings.

Rod Boone has given it to our readers straight about Kemba Walker in the weeks leading up to his departure. Rod also wrote about the return of the beloved arena voice, Patrick "Big Pat" Doughty, the night Michael Jordan slapped (playfully, sort of ...) Malik Monk and the frustration of Kemba's 60-point night that came in a loss.

And that's just part of it. You also will find college basketball writer CL Brown bouncing around from Duke to UNC and NC State, radio host David Glenn weighing in on all things ACC, as well as Grace Raynor (Clemson) and Josh Kendall (South Carolina) on college football beats.

HEY, TUESDAY IS A BIG DAY FOR THE ATHLETIC CAROLINA.

SO WE'RE BRINGING THE ENTIRE BAND TOGETHER FOR A LIVE Q&A FOR OUR SUBSCRIBERS. FROM 2-3 PM ET, HIT UP @SARACIVIAN @JOSEHPERSON @JOURDANRODRIGUE & @RODBOONE FOR ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING.

IT'LL BE A FUN ONE. PIC.TWITTER.COM/WL8NGZDLIL

— THE ATHLETIC (@THEATHLETICCAR) AUGUST 19, 2019

Best of The Athletic Carolina's first year: Read our best work here.

Thanks for joining us for the ride and join us Tuesday between 2 and 3 p.m. ET for a live chat with Sara, Joe, Jourdan and Rod to discuss the past year and the year ahead for each of the teams they cover (and anything else you want to ask). Here's to a bigger and better second one.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.21.2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 21, 2019

1151136 Websites

The Athletic / How important is toughness in the modern game?

By Ian Tulloch Aug 20, 2019

As a hockey writer, I get a lot more freedom in the summer to dive into topics that aren't necessarily at the forefront of the news – largely because there isn't much buzz around the league in August. Rather than write a piece about RFA negotiations and the threat of an offer sheet, I thought it would be fun to tackle a more divisive issue in hockey circles.

How valuable is "toughness" in the modern game?

I've always found this question difficult to answer because of the limited research we have on the topic. I'm someone who always likes basing my opinions on tangible evidence, whether it's through the use of qualitative information (video analysis) or quantitative data ("the numbers").

The tricky part about "grit" and "toughness" is that they aren't as easy to measure as offensive metrics like shots, passes, zone entries or even defensive metrics like shot attempts against, gap control and takeaways. This is often why we tend to hear about the "intangible" value of toughness, but that implies we aren't able to accurately identify it in the first place.

I'm not satisfied with that conclusion.

What aspects of 'toughness' can we identify?

As much as I love using numbers, it's important to consider the value of video analysis when we're breaking down the components of a player's game – and toughness is no exception. Keep in mind, I'm not referring to mindlessly elbowing a player in the head or starting a fight right after a whistle. When I think of grit, I'm looking for the productive component that helps your team win.

For example, if you can intimidate an opposing defenseman on the forecheck with a clean (but terrifying) hit, it can be extremely valuable.

This is something that won't show up on the box score, but the next time Tom Wilson comes roaring in on the forecheck, the defenseman is much more likely to "hear the footsteps" and make an ill-advised pass. That's going to result in more defensive zone turnovers for the opposition, which we know lead to high percentage scoring opportunities.

We could also bring up the "intimidation factor" of a player known for crossing the line with illegal hits, but I feel like that would take us down a path where we end up arguing about the shortcomings of the NHL Player Safety Department. I don't want to get into that discussion in this article, so we'll leave that topic for another day (but you know which players I'm referring to).

Getting back to how we measure toughness, video is probably the best way to identify which players are providing "sandpaper" in the corners, but it's worth pointing out that we do have ways of quantifying it. Something as simple as Hits per 60 minutes at even strength can be telling; private companies like Sportlogiq can track things like Puck Battles Won per 60; there's also my personal favorite – Hits Against per 60.

The reason I'm such a fan of the latter is that it fits my definition of what a "tough" hockey player needs to do – take a hit to make the right play. It's easy to level an opposing defenseman on the forecheck after they get rid of the puck, but it's brutal taking a hard hit in the corner to help your team maintain puck possession.

This is why players like Zach Hyman, Patric Hornqvist or Joonas Donskoi can be so valuable at 5-on-5. They're getting to the tough areas on the ice and taking the physical beating that's necessary to help their team

maintain control in the offensive zone. This helps explain why Hits Against per 60 in the offensive zone is a significant variable in EvolvingWild's WAR metric – productive grit can have big-time value.

Now, this is where we need to bring up the fact that not all grit is productive. If you're constantly racking up hit totals (but rarely getting hit yourself), it's likely because your team doesn't have the puck and you're chasing the game. This is why we can't just sort players by Hits and call it a day – we'd end up with mostly replacement level forwards. First and foremost, you need to be a good hockey player (drive play and produce offense). The ability to overpower the opposition in the tough areas can be the icing on top of a cake – but no team wants a cake made of icing on their roster in 2019 (e.g. Colton Orr).

What about fighting?

This could be a separate article in itself, but I'd be remiss if I didn't discuss the value of fighting in 2019. It's nowhere near as much of a factor as it was in the past, with fighting rates dropping significantly over the past decade.

With teams prioritizing speed and skill in the modern game, the "enforcer" role has all but gone extinct. You won't see any Bob Proberts or Marty McSorleys in 2019, but you will find guys like Tom Wilson.

It's difficult to accurately measure how much impact a fight like this can have on the game, but I think it would be naïve to assume it has none. When you think of a heated playoff series, you'll remember all the scuffles players like Wilson get into throughout a seven-game grind.

That intimidation or "piece of shit" factor may not be the deciding factor in a game, but I wouldn't be shocked if it had a 1-2 percent impact on things that we haven't been able to detect yet (and as Dom Luszczyszyn likes to say, the extra 2 percent matters). In a hectic playoff series, it's tough to say you wouldn't want a play like Wilson, Dustin Byfuglien or Zdeno Chara on your side. The reason I bring them up is that they're actually going to see significant minutes in games that matter (unlike fourth-line grinders like Michael Haley or Chris Neil in years past).

I know that the research on deterrence in hockey is murky, to say the least, but it's important to remember that absence of proof isn't proof of absence. In criminological studies, the evidence suggests that the severity of punishment doesn't deter criminals, but the certainty of punishment will.

In this regard, I'd argue you could be highly certain Wilson is going to take a run at one of your players if you take a run at one of his teammates. As I type that out, I'm starting to realize how absurd this all sounds in a game where the objective is to put the puck in the net, but if we're going to allow fighting and borderline hits in the playoffs, we need to treat it as something that has value (even if most fans tend to overvalue it, while some of us nerds might be undervaluing it).

It's tough to put a number on it, but I think it's fair to say that something like this is going to have a non-zero impact on a playoff series (outside of missed time due to injury or a suspension).

'Creating' the next Tom Wilson

I've mentioned Wilson's name quite a few times in this article. This isn't because I'm a huge fan of him personally (in fact, I think he's a dangerous player that should be suspended much more often than has been in the past). With that being said, we can't ignore that he's extremely good at what he does.

Among players in the top 100 of hits and fighting majors since 2017, here are the only forwards who managed to score at a top-six rate:

Tom Wilson

Micheal Ferland

Zach Aston-Reese

Brendan Lemieux



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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There simply aren't many players left in the league who can intimidate the opposition on the forecheck, drop the gloves and produce offense at a top-six level. As much as we tend to label Wilson as a goon, he's been one of the more productive players in the league at 5-on-5 since moving up into Washington's top six.

What's interesting is that he didn't use to be a top-six player. As early as 2016-17, he was your typical fourth-line grinder (19 points in 82 games), so what changed? In a word: linemates. We hear all the time about how important the quality of competition is, but the research indicates that a player's quality of linemates has a significantly bigger impact on their performance.

If you're looking for a great case study, look no further than Wilson. He struggled to drive play and generate offense on Washington's fourth line, but when he was thrust into a first-line role alongside Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom, he thrived. We see this with a lot of players (e.g. Jonathan Marchessault, Erik Haula, Nino Niederreiter), which makes me wonder: how many other Tom Wilsons are out there that haven't been given an opportunity yet?

This isn't to say I'm advocating for fighters to rule the league again as they did in the old days. With that being said, Washington has proven that if you can slot in an intimidating grinder next to two star players, it can pay dividends. They have one of the better first lines in the league despite playing what used to be a fourth-line enforcer at left wing. This allows them to spread more talent throughout their lineup, with a player like T.J. Oshie getting more touches on the second line.

Now, how do we find the next Tom Wilson? It might be as simple as slotting in a tough guy alongside star talent and seeing what happens. For example, here's a look at what Matt Martin accomplished in Toronto when he got an extended look with Mitch Marner.

Is Martin a first-line caliber forward? Absolutely not, but it's possible he could have provided some Zach Hyman-esque value alongside Marner and Nazem Kadri, which would have allowed them to spread more talent throughout their lineup. This also would have given Toronto an intimidating presence in their top six, which as we discussed, is becoming a rarity in today's game.

There's no way to know for certain if a player like Wilson or Martin is going to work in your team's top six, but if Washington has taught us anything, it's that there's no harm in trying it. Worst-case scenario, you scrap the idea after a few weeks and go back to what works. If you can find an intimidating player who can thrive in that role, though, you may have just "created" your very own Tom Wilson, which I would argue has significant value considering how rare those players are in the modern game.

When it comes to the role of toughness in hockey, there are bound to be major disagreements (which I'm sure will show themselves in the comments section). I don't think fighting should be allowed in the league anymore. Since it is, though, it's something we need to take into account when we're looking at the game, much like we do with physicality. If you can find a player with those qualities, who can play in the top half of your lineup, it's become a market inefficiency in 2019.

To make a cross-sport reference, every NBA team became a smaller, more skilled "pace and space" team in the mid 2010s, which made a "grit and grind" team like the Memphis Grizzlies so tough for teams to play against (they actually gave Golden State the most trouble in 2015 prior to them winning the championship).

I feel like we could see a similar trend with toughness in the NHL. It's by no means the first thing teams should value when they're building a contender (you need elite talent to win in the modern game), but if you can find a player who can be effective at 5-on-5 while providing the "intimidation factor" that we've seen have an impact in the playoffs, I think it can still serve a purpose in today's game.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.21.2019

1151137 Websites

The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Why the 10 worst NHL teams (according to the numbers) may actually be good

By Sean McIndoe Aug 20, 2019

I have kind of a love-hate relationship with preseason predictions.

On the one hand, they're all sorts of fun. Readers flock to them, even when they disagree. And I've always believed that everyone should put their predictions on the record before the season starts, if only as a form of accountability for when something unexpected happens and we all pretend we knew it all along.

On the other hand, well, I'm bad at this. And I'm not alone. Every year, there are a few teams that everyone agrees will be terrible who turn out to be pretty good. Two years ago it was the Golden Knights, Avalanche and Devils. Last year, it was the Islanders, not to mention the mid-season turnaround from the Blues. Sometimes we underestimate the impact of an offseason change, or we fall in love with a narrative. Sometimes, hockey is just weird and stuff happens. But I'm always very wrong about at least a few teams, and you probably are too.

Well, the first step in solving any problem is to recognize that you have one. The second step is to overcompensate by steering way too far in the other direction. That's what we're going to do today. My pal Dom Luszczyzyn has kindly given me a sneak peek at the ten teams his model expects to have the worst seasons in 2019-20. I'm going to try to figure out why it's wrong, and why those bottom-feeders will actually turn out to be playoff teams, if not Cup contenders.

Can I do it? Let's just say that some teams will be easier than others. To keep from pulling a muscle on some of these reaches, I'll warm up by starting with the best teams on Dom's bottom-ten list and working my way down to the dregs.

No. 10. Columbus Blue Jackets

Dom says: A point total in the high 80s and a roughly 1-in-4 chance of making the playoffs. (We won't reveal the model's exact predictions until a little closer to the season, and the specific order for the bottom ten could shift between now and then.)

Why he's probably right: The Blue Jackets' offseason drama has been well-documented. They went all-in on the 2019 playoffs and pulled off a legendary first-round upset that provided the greatest moment in franchise history, but then watched all their top UFAs walk away, including Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin. When a team that barely squeezed into the playoffs in the final week loses two of its three best players, it's not hard to see where things are headed.

But hear me out ... : Losing Bobrovsky should hurt. But it might not because they've got a couple of good young goaltenders in Joonas Korpisalo and Elvis Merzlikins. If one of them runs with the job, the Blue Jackets should be fine in goal, and maybe even improved. Will that happen? Maybe, because as we'll probably end up saying in just about all of these, goaltending is voodoo and unexpected things happen every year.

The loss of Panarin is tougher, and with apologies to Gustav Nyquist, there's really no replacing his production. So how can a team recover from watching their best forward walk for nothing in return? Well, let's ask the Islanders, who did exactly that last year. And that Islanders surprise came on the heels of a year where the team wasn't very good. The 2018-19 Blue Jackets had 47 wins and 98 points. They probably don't even need to improve to be playoff contenders. They just need to fall a few points rather than a whole bunch.

See? This hope stuff is easy. Let's keep the positivity going with Dom's next team.



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No. 9. Chicago Blackhawks

Dom says: A point total in the high 80s and a roughly 1-in-4 chance of making the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: The Hawks weren't great last year, and that was with Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews having unlikely career seasons at 30 years old. If those two revert a bit, look out.

But hear me out ... : For the second straight entry, we can invoke last year's Islanders to give hope to one of this year's also-rans. The Hawks' biggest offseason acquisition was goalie Robin Lehner, who was so good for the Islanders last year that he somehow won the Jennings for the Rangers. Between adding Lehner and the possibility of Corey Crawford getting back to full health, the Hawks looks pretty set in goal after watching Cam Ward torpedo half their season last year.

Mix in the possibility of Kane and Toews continuing to play at a high level and continued development from youngsters like Alex DeBrincat and Dylan Strome, and there's some decent room for improvement here. And don't forget that this will be the first full season for head coach Jeremy Colliton. Everyone was ready to write off Jared Bednar in Colorado after one year despite being hired on the eve of the season starting, but he's settled in as a solid coach once he had a full offseason to work with. Colliton is young and learning, so as he gets better, the Hawks should too.

Will it be enough to compete in a Central that may not be top-heavy but should be deep? Probably, because these are the Blackhawks and the dressing room is still knee-deep in Cup rings and magical know-how-to-win dust. See? Optimism!

No. 8. Vancouver Canucks

Dom says: A point total in the mid-80s and a roughly 1-in-4 chance of making the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: They haven't finished over .500 in terms of points percentage in four years, in a league where the standings are rigged so that everyone can finish over .500. They're bad.

But hear me out ... : They're a young team that took a decent step forward last year, improving by eight points. If they do that again, they're at least in the playoff mix.

Can they? Sure. Most of their best players are young enough that they should improve just based on aging curves. They added guys like Tyler Myers, Micheal Ferland and J.T. Miller, and while we can debate the long-term wisdom of those moves, they should make the team better in the short term. And Jacob Markstrom continues to develop into a legitimate No. 1 goaltender.

Add it all up, and the Canucks should improve at least a bit. But if Elias Pettersson or Brock Boeser have the sort of big breakout that players their age sometimes have, or Markstrom reaches the next level, the Canucks could move up significantly. And if all of those guys make the leap – which hardly seems impossible – the Canucks could be that team that hits fast forward on the rebuild and zooms straight to contention.

No. 7. Arizona Coyotes

Dom says: A point total in the mid-80s and a roughly 1-in-4 chance of making the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: To be honest, I'm a little surprised to see the Coyotes show up here. Dom's model isn't projecting any significant improvement for the Coyotes, despite them being a young team that battled through injuries and just added a legitimate star winger.

But hear me out ... : Their big problem last year was that they couldn't put the puck in the net; Clayton Keller led the team with just 47 points, which wouldn't even have cracked the top five on a dozen teams. So they went out and got Phil Kessel, who always wears out his welcome eventually but scores plenty in the process. That won't turn them into some sort of offensive juggernaut, but it will help.

Meanwhile, the Coyotes finished sixth in goals against, largely on the strength of Darcy Kuemper's breakout. He's no sure thing to repeat that performance, but they're also getting Anti Raanta back and have some depth in the system. Pencil them in for another top-ten finish defensively and add a few more goals from Kessel and the kids, and the Coyotes should finally have the breakout we've all been waiting for. Granted, sometimes those breakouts never come. But as the 2017-18 Jets and 2018-19 Hurricanes remind us, sometimes they do, and when it happens the jump can be a big one.

No. 6. New York Rangers

Dom says: A point total in the mid-80s and about a one-in-five shot at the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: For one thing, the East is shaping up as the tougher conference to make the playoffs in, which is why the Rangers' odds take a bit of a dip even though they have roughly the same points outlook as the last three Western teams. But more importantly, New York just has a lot of ground to make up. They finished last year 20 points out of a playoff spot and would have four teams to pass, so they could improve by a half-dozen wins and still not be all that close to the postseason.

But hear me out ... : That half-dozen wins is exactly what the numbers say the Rangers added through the NHL's best offseason, thanks to big-ticket acquisitions like Artemi Panarin and Jacob Trouba. We have to balance that out by factoring in the departure of guys like Kevin Shattenkirk, which doesn't seem like a big deal, and a full season without Mats Zuccarello, which might be. Still, it's clear that the Rangers have shifted gears from the teardown stage of the rebuild to aiming for playoff contention.

The big question will be Henrik Lundqvist. At 37, he's been good-but-not-great for the last few years of rebuilding, and it's possible he's just not an elite goaltender anymore. But maybe seeing his team load up is enough to inspire a return to form. If so, or if Alexandar Georgiev or Igor Shesterkin can push him, the Rangers could start to look scary. And we haven't even mentioned Kaapo Kakko, who might be the league's best prospect and has the sort of talent to make a big difference right away.

Chances are, this is a transition year in New York and the Rangers need another season before they're really ready for prime time. But is it that hard to imagine Panarin and Trouba having an immediate impact, Lundqvist having his best season in four years and Kakko winning the Calder while they roll to 95+ points or even more? Not especially.

We're already halfway down the bottom ten, and I have to be honest, this whole exercise in optimism hasn't even been all that hard. I sure hope the difficulty level goes up soon! (Checks next team.) Ah. Well then.

No. 5. Edmonton Oilers

Dom says: A point total in the low 80s and about a one-in-five chance of making the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: They're the Oilers. Come on, is this your first day here?

But hear me out ... : First of all, I refuse to completely rule out the possibility that Connor McDavid eventually just snaps and reels off something like a 60-goal and 150-point season without ever smiling once, dragging this team to contention all by himself. He's that good. I have no idea what his ceiling is in Edmonton, but we haven't seen it yet.

More realistically, the Oilers' path back to the playoffs probably includes some combination of healthy seasons from McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, dependable goaltending from the combo of Mike Smith and Mikko Koskinen, a classic change-of-scenery rebound year from James Neal, the Pacific continuing to be weak, some first-year Dave Tippett magic and probably a couple of savvy additions that Ken Holland hasn't made yet. None of those things seem impossible or even all that unlikely, but it's a long list.



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That could get the Oilers into the playoff hunt. But the idea here wasn't just to find an unlikely playoff team, but one that could make a Golden Knights or Islanders style leap all the way to borderline Cup contention. Is there any sort of realistic scenario that gets the Oilers there? I'm not sure there is. But I would have said the same about the Knights or Islanders, so who knows. If everyone stays healthy, the goaltending voodoo works in their favor for once and they become one of the two or three teams every year that PDO their way through more wins than they deserve, the Oilers could maybe make a run at the division.

I mean, it's incredibly unlikely, sure. But not impossible. Hey, at least they're not the Sabres, right? (Thunder rumbles ominously.) Oh no.

No. 4. Buffalo Sabres

Dom says: About 80 points and less than a one-in-ten chance of making the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: As bad as the Oilers have been, Dom's current projections take its real dip once we get to the bottom four. He has the Sabres in rough shape, and very likely to miss the playoffs for the ninth straight year. It's hard to argue, given that this is a 76-point team that didn't exactly make wholesale changes over the offseason.

But hear me out ... : The Sabres didn't make as many headlines as last summer when they pulled off big trades involving Ryan O'Reilly and Jeff Skinner. But Jason Botterill was still busy, adding pieces like Marcus Johansson and Colin Miller that should help. There's also the lingering chance of a Rasmus Ristolainen deal, which could provide a boost if done right. Mix in Jack Eichel and Rasmus Dahlin improving with age, and the Sabres should be better.

But how much better? There's room for improvement in plenty of categories, and some are more likely to improve than others, as John Vogl ran down recently. They didn't upgrade the goaltending, so the best hope of a major leap comes down to new coach Ralph Krueger having an immediate impact. That could happen; Krueger was an intriguing choice and could represent a big upgrade over Phil Housley. But unless he's a Jack Adams candidate right away, or Eichel and Dahlin both make big leaps at the same time, the Sabres are probably playoff afterthoughts again.

No. 3. Los Angeles Kings

Dom says: About 80 points and less than a one-in-ten chance of making the playoffs.

Why he's probably right: The Kings bottomed out last year, finishing last in the West. The good news is that the plunge was so steep that it made Rob Blake's job clear: rebuild this thing, preferably in time to still get something out of what's left of Drew Doughty and Anze Kopitar's primes.

But hear me out... : This is where our whole journey in optimism goes from difficult to almost futile. The Kings are bad, they know it, and they seem resigned to stay bad for a while. At this point, the question around the Kings is more like "can they be good by 2023", so predicting big things in 2019-20 seems silly.

But maybe not quite as silly as you might think, if only because unlike almost all of these other teams, the Kings aren't all that far removed from being decent. Last year was a disaster, but they had 98 points the season before that. That team had the same core as this one, albeit a few years younger. Get Kopitar and Doughty back to something like their 2018 level, mix in a strong year from a healthy Jonathan Quick and factor in a big upgrade behind the bench from Willie Desjardins to Todd McLellan, and the Kings could be in the mix in what figures to be a weak division. At least until they sell at the deadline.

No. 2. Detroit Red Wings

Dom says: A point total in the low 70s and about a 1-in-100 chance of making the playoffs. Yes, 1-in-100. That's, uh, not great.

Why he's probably right: The Wings are rebuilding, and with hometown hero Steve Yzerman returning as GM, there should be all sorts of

patience for some short-term pain. They had 74 points last year, and even if everything goes according to plan this season, they might be even worse.

But hear me out ... : Uh, Yzerman comes back and centers the first line?

OK, coming up with a scenario in which the Wings zoom to the top third of the standings is near impossible. They're not good on paper, they're not really focused on getting better in the short-term and unlike most of the other teams on the list, there's not even a new coach or goaltender or NHL-ready first-round pick who could conceivably show up and change everything. Instead, we'd need to count on a major leap from Dylan Larkin, the team's only legitimate star. We'll also need Jimmy Howard or one of the backups to have one of those incomprehensible .930 seasons that veteran goalies occasionally have for no particular reason. And even then, we'd probably also need a few unexpected breakouts from guys in the Anthony Mantha and Tyler Bertuzzi tier.

If all of those things happen, well, the Wings probably improve all the way up to 90 points and still miss the playoffs. But mix in some momentum from a hot start – which is possible, with seven of their first 11 games against teams who missed the playoffs – and some old-fashioned "nobody believes in us" swagger, and crazier things have happened. Not much crazier, though.

Whew, that was tough. Drop down in the comments and let me know what you think of these nine teams and... oh no, there's one more left, isn't there?

No. 1. Ottawa Senators

Dom says: Abandon all hope ye who enter here.

Why he's probably right: If you've subscribed to The Athletic's hockey coverage over the last year, you have a.) read plenty of articles about why the Senators are bad and b.) spent more cash doing it than Eugene Melnyk did on trying to improve his team this summer.

Last year's Senators finished dead last with 64 points, and that was with Mark Stone and Matt Duchene in the lineup for most of the year. They're still a few years away from when that promised "unparalleled success" will kick in, the new head coach has never done the job before and their main offseason acquisitions included a player who may not be very good and another who'll never play again.

Forget optimism. If you're a Senators fan, can you even find a reason to get out of bed in the morning?

But hear me out ... : It's all about the kids. The Sens are farther along in the rebuild process than teams like the Kings or (maybe) Red Wings, so they've got a few pieces in place. Thomas Chabot and Brady Tkachuk look like they could be stars in this league, and there's more on the way thanks to a strong farm system and a bunch of extra picks. Most of that help won't arrive by opening night, but some will and guys like Erik Brannstrom, Christian Wolanin and Drake Batherson could all at least make an impact at some point this season.

From there, you've got ... well, not much. There just isn't enough NHL talent here to fill out a full roster. The one wildcard could be Craig Anderson, who's coming off two straight years of below-average goaltending. But he was very good in 2016-17, and if he got back to that level it would be worth a bunch of wins. At 38, that scenario is exceedingly unlikely, but Anderson has been written off before during his career and proven the doubters wrong. Maybe he has one more big season in him.

If Anderson is great, Chabot makes an Erik Karlsson-like leap and challenges for the Norris, D.J. Smith turns out to be one of the best coaches in the league and pretty much every young player exceeds expectations, could the Senators be good? Maybe. Is that likely to happen? Not remotely. But would the 64-point Senators suddenly turning into a 95-point team really be any more bizarre than the 48-point Avalanche doing the same thing two years ago? (Remembers which



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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team had Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen.) Look, I'm doing my best here.

The point is that an unexpected lurch forward from the Senators (or the Wings, or the Kings, or the Sabres) wouldn't be unprecedented. And even if Dom's model is mostly right about 90 percent of the league's teams, that will still leave a few outliers who'll surprise us. If it happens to one or more of these teams, just remember who called it. OK, fine, remember who told you it was vaguely possible. It might be as close as I come to a correct prediction all season.

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Sportsnet.ca / Elias Pettersson pumped for sophomore year after summer of 'progress'

Vancouver Canucks superstar Elias Pettersson comments on his rookie season and what he'll have to do to be successful this season.

Chris Johnston

STOCKHOLM — Don't pinch Elias Pettersson. He doesn't want to wake up.

Sitting here in a hotel conference room in the calm of summer, you get the feeling he still doesn't entirely believe all that's happened to him. He arrived in North America like a supernova last season and instantly changed the way we view the present and future of the Vancouver Canucks.

Even with some small struggles in the later stages of the year — struggles that have informed Pettersson's approach to this off-season — he can look back now on his Calder Trophy campaign with awe and wonder.

"I'm living my dream," Pettersson told Sportsnet. "I always worked hard and always believed I would make the NHL, but didn't really think that I would be the guy. So I'm just living my dream and I'm enjoying every second of it."

Strange as it may sound, Pettersson once wondered if he was practising enough to become a special hockey talent. With the benefit of hindsight, he now sees his childhood routine in rural Ånge, Sweden as the reason why it happened.

He often spent several hours a day on skates.

"I've been playing hockey ever since I can remember," Pettersson said during the NHL/NHLPA European Player Media Tour. "I come from a village where 3,000 people live, my dad drove the Zamboni and had a key to every door, so he always dropped me by the rink and cleared the ice and I was there after every school day.

"Got home, ate dinner and then it was practice again. I was on the ice all my childhood and I think that was a big part where I learned stuff earlier than other kids because I had a lot of ice time."

It probably explains the unique style that helped earn Pettersson his label "The Alien." He was given freedom to try things outside of the traditional organized boundaries of the sport.

He's a player that sees things his peers don't.

Like this play.

Or this one.

Or this one.

Still, Pettersson freely admits he hit a wall before the end of the Canucks' 82-game schedule. When it came time to craft his workout plan for this summer, it was built with that fall-off in mind.

"I feel like at the end of the season a lot of teams were making a push to make the playoffs, so definitely they were tougher games at the end of the season," he said. "And also for myself, I felt like I didn't have 100 per cent energy coming into every game, so that's been a big thing for me. That I have better conditioning, I have more strength and power in my legs, and just trying to get stronger and faster.

"It was my first year in the league and you just learn from it. Always have it back in your head that you want to play good even when you have a tough day."

A planned visit to teammate Brock Boeser's off-season home in Minnesota never materialized because of conflicting schedules, so Pettersson ended up spending most of his time around family and friends in Sweden.

He put a lot of focus into his gym sessions.

"For me, I'm not the biggest guy out there, I don't have the biggest muscles," he said. "So of course it takes a little more time for me to gain all those muscles, but I'm working on it. More conditioning, get better in shape and I made some progress this summer. And, yeah, I can't wait for the season."

Remember that some questioned how his six-foot-two, 176-pound frame would hold up last fall. His weight was a major talking point during Canucks training camp and then he rendered those conversations moot by putting up 10 goals and 16 points in his first 10 NHL games.

The 2017 fifth-overall pick finished with .93 points per game and earned a ton of respect from his peers after playing just one full season in the top rung of Swedish hockey. He may have won both the regular season and playoff MVP awards while leading the Växjö Lakers to a title in 2018, but there was no guarantee he'd immediately find the success he did in Vancouver.

"He got to the SHL and that year he was ridiculously good," said Nashville Predators forward Viktor Arvidsson. "He carried that team to that championship by himself, basically. He was so good. I didn't know how it would transfer to the NHL, but he's been on fire since he got there.

"I'm happy for him. Great player and a great person."

In the last 12 months, life has changed for Pettersson. He's now viewed as a star on both sides of the Atlantic and acknowledges that there's "a lot more pressure on me."

He's tried to counteract that by finding more balance in his life — making sure to carve out space where he takes a break from thinking about hockey.

The long summer afforded him the chance to devote energy to his other major passion: Golf.

He's played often these last few months and whittled his handicap index down to 6.7 in the process. He counts making the first eagle of his life as the highlight of his play so far and nearly one-upped it with a close call on what would have been his first ever hole-in-one.

"It's like hockey: You can never master it," Pettersson said of his second-favourite sport. "You can always get better."

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