



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 25, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

It's never too early for the Hurricanes to look to next season. Especially this year.

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes have never conducted their end-of-season interviews in August but times, as they say, have changed with a novel coronavirus that has been relentless in 2020.

On Monday, president and general manager Don Waddell and Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour took to Zoom — another sign of the times — to assess the disjointed 2019-20 season and its end last week in the playoffs in Toronto while looking to a new season and what might come.

Some quick news items:

- That awful looking injury to forward Andrei Svechnikov proved to be a high ankle sprain and he should be ready for preseason training camp.
- No one can say what veteran winger Justin Williams' plans are for next season.
- No decisions have been made on re-signing other unrestricted free agents: defensemen Joel Edmundson, Trevor van Riemsdyk and Sami Vatanen.
- There are still plans to play the Stadium Series outdoor game next season and the jerseys have been ordered but the game also could be pushed back a year.

Brind'Amour said he did not know if Williams will decide to retire or look to play a 20th NHL season. A member of the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup champions, Williams returned to Carolina in July 2017 with the stated goal of again making the Canes a playoff team, one that made others in the league take notice.

Williams has done that. But the winger will be 39 when the 2020-21 season begins. He's still physically fit but he'd be facing an 82-game grind, plus the playoffs, if he signed for a full season.

Brind'Amour said the Canes' final game, the series-ending playoff defeat to the Boston Bruins, was an emotional one given it might have been Williams' last.

"To me, he epitomizes what we're all about. Class, team first, then coming and doing your job every day," Brind'Amour said. "He did everything right, being here, taking on a leadership role. And, I think, helped put this place back on the map and get us back on track to where we all want to be. He helped right the ship.

"If he doesn't play anymore he left everything out there and that's something not many guys can say, or leave on those terms. He has absolutely nothing left in the tank. He gave it all."

WILL THE NHL PLAY AN 82-GAME SEASON?

Waddell said with or without Williams the Canes probably will not be making "wholesale changes" to a team that was 38-25-5 when the NHL season was paused in March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We think we've taken big strides here and our young players have taken another big step this year," Waddell said.

Sebastian Aho took that step, as did Svechnikov. The Russian forward took a nasty spill in the Boston series as he battled with defenseman Zdeno Chara in front of the Boston net, but Waddell said X-rays and an MRI revealed only a sprain.

The defensive group will continue to be a strength, Waddell said. That includes defenseman Brett Pesce, who had shoulder surgery in early March, is skating again and should be good to go at training camp, Waddell said.

"We want to keep our group together as best as we can.," Waddell said, referring to the pending UFAs.

No one can say or predict how the 2020-21 NHL season will unfold. Can the league get in 82 regular-season games and the playoffs? And what about fans in the stands?

Brind'Amour said Monday there was a degree of normalcy, in terms of hockey, being in the Toronto bubble the past month. That won't be the case when the new season begins and teams travel from city to city.

"Whenever we start we know it will be a condensed schedule and it might run into the summer again next year before we all get back on track," Waddell said. "I don't think the bubble idea is something that would work for the regular season. The economics just doesn't work if you not playing with some fans, let alone all the fans.

"What we went through was fine for trying to get this season in but I don't think it's something you can look at next year."

HURRICANES' REVENUE LOSS DUE TO CORONAVIRUS

Waddell said the Canes took a financial hit last season — a "big number," he said — in having the last eight regular-season home games canceled by the NHL. Waddell said the TV contract with Fox Sports Carolinas was fulfilled when the regional network carried the Canes' qualifying round games in Toronto but the lost home revenue was substantial.

Waddell said the Canes' local revenues alone have been about \$70 million to \$75 million a year. Carolina was 22nd in the NHL in average home attendance at 16,906 before the pause.

"If we don't play at full capacity the losses are going to be big," Waddell said. "These are tough times for everybody."

At the same time, Waddell said the team plans to spend close to the NHL salary cap, which will remain flat at \$81.5 million in 2020-21.



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"We are not talking about this team just making the playoffs anymore," Waddell said. "We're talking about how we're going

to build a team to go deeper in the playoffs and eventually get to where all our goals are, and that's winning the Stanley Cup."

THE ATHLETIC

How the NHL offseason will be impacted by the wreckage of the first round

By Scott Burnside

Just like that the NHL transitioned from Round 1 to Round 2 of its summer bubble odyssey.

While this gives little time for post-mortems and the obligatory heaping of dirt on the eight losing teams who were unceremoniously ushered from the playoffs, fear not. We are here, shovel in hand, to sift through the potential fallout for first-round losers, which includes the past two Stanley Cup champions and with one coach already losing his job.

To freak out or not to freak out, that is the question

The dilemma for many GMs (and over-involved owners) of losing teams after the first round will be determining just how much the dynamics of bubble life and the experience of playing in August in the midst of a global pandemic weighed on the outcome. In short, did the desultory losses of teams with high expectations like Calgary, Carolina, St. Louis and Washington reflect the team's true identity? Or, to put it more bluntly, did the fact that eight teams took the high dive without any one team forcing a Game 7 – frankly a shocking turn of events given the parity that marks the NHL during a normal season – reveal a hitherto unknown of a lack of character? Or can those losses be chalked up simply to circumstance? How an organization chooses to answer that question will say a lot about what happens in the coming days and who ends up paying the price for these failures. The bottom line is likely going to be the arbiter of change versus status quo, and there will be a price paid for those teams that failed to meet expectations, whether it's in terms of management change, coaching change or uprooting established veterans. One longtime NHL coach expects the next three or four weeks to be pretty crazy.

A window closing, and a door opening in Washington

Always hate the explanation that pops up after a particularly disappointing playoff series loss that a team quit on a coach. Just seems too pat. Maybe it happens but it strikes me that the relationship between a coach and the players is a lot more complex than players collectively deciding 'we don't believe in you.' Still, there did seem to be some of that in the Capitals' lethargic five-game loss to former coach Barry Trotz and the Islanders. On Sunday, the team announced they had dismissed Todd Reirden after just two seasons as head coach. A lot to unpack there as Reirden was facing his former mentor and boss, and the man for whom he took over for in Washington after the Cup fun. The firing wasn't necessarily a surprise. As one longtime coach and NHL executive said: "Goes to show you, follow a Hall of Famer and you have to figure out how to do it your way." GM Brian MacLellan indicated he was looking for experience in filling the vacant coaching spot and one source close to the team suggested a Peter Laviolette type would be a good fit. Not a hard-liner but

one who will make players accountable. But this certainly isn't all on Reirden, who is one of the brightest defensive minds in the game. Clearly some of the personnel gambits didn't particularly work. Deadline acquisition Ilya Kovalchuk never hit any kind of groove with one assist in eight games. The depth scoring was non-existent with Carl Hagelin registering just one assist in eight games. Richard Panik had zero points in the first-round series loss. With an aging core, the belief that a next wave of talent is on the horizon was blunted in the embarrassing loss to the Isles. Jakub Vrana, whose play during the 2018 Stanley Cup run made it easier to say goodbye to Andre Burakovsky, who has blossomed in Colorado, had no points in eight postseason games and was denied on an overtime breakaway in Game 3 seconds before the Isles won to go up 3-0 in the series. Another forward who didn't fit the Caps plans, Chandler Stephenson, is flourishing in Vegas after being dealt there in December. On Monday, The Athletic's Corey Pronman began rolling out his team-by-team ranking of young talent in NHL organizations and the Caps were No. 31. Whatever happens next, you can dial up the urgency in D.C., with Alex Ovechkin about to head into the final year of his contract.

One thing to consider: Reirden was at one point courted by Calgary before he signed an extension with the Caps before the 2017-18 season. "He should be one of the top assistants pursued this summer," one source familiar with the NHL coaching world. And if Geoff Ward isn't back in Calgary, Reirden might be a fit there, the source added.

The Market for Holtby

Pierre Lebrun wrote about the UFA goaltending market and it's certainly going to be both crowded and fascinating, starting with Robin Lehner, Jakob Markstrom and two-time Stanley Cup champion Corey Crawford all pending UFAs. There's also Cam Talbot, Anton Khudobin, Mike Smith, Thomas Griess and Craig Anderson. But among the most fascinating subjects will be Braden Holtby, who appears to have played his final game as a Capital. At age 30, Holtby should still be considered in his prime and he was probably the Caps' best player in their five-game series loss to the Islanders after a disappointing opening game. He's a Vezina Trophy winner and, of course, led the Caps to the Stanley Cup in 2018, winning all 16 games after starting the postseason as backup to Philipp Grubauer. But Holtby's numbers have been in decline since he won the Vezina Trophy in 2016 and then shared in the William Jennings Trophy the following year as the Caps allowed the fewest goals in the NHL. Would he be an upgrade in Calgary? You can make that case. Would he be an upgrade in Edmonton? For sure. How about Buffalo? Definitely. But the issue for GMs will be how to balance a decline in Holtby's level of play with his experience in critical moments in coming up



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with a dollar and term that don't send a team down the rabbit hole.

Uncertainty for the Blues

Speaking of Stanley Cup winners facing uncertainty, the St. Louis Blues threw a lot into the storyline hopper in their six-game loss to up-and-coming Vancouver. When they bounced back from an early 2-0 series deficit to tie things up, it looked like experience and the will that saw them overcome myriad obstacles last season in winning the Cup would be brought to bear against the Canucks. But injuries whittled down the roster and the goaltending sprung a leak as Jordan Binnington, benched for wins in Games 3 and 4 and then pressed back into service for Game 6, couldn't find the magic. Now the pressure will be on next season to prove that he's not a one-and-done kind of goaltender. Speaking of which, GM Doug Armstrong's decision to go short-term with Binnington, who has one year left on his bridge deal at \$4.4 million, appears to be an astute move. The critical question of the offseason is what will become of captain Alex Pietrangelo, who may have played his last game as a Blue. Hard to see how he and the team can find a way to make it work unless Pietrangelo, headed to unrestricted free agency after playing his entire career in St. Louis, is willing to take an enormous hometown discount. Earlier this season it looked like Pietrangelo might be a nice fit in Vegas, but with Alec Martinez coming over from Los Angeles with another year left on his deal, not sure that's a fit. Toronto is often mentioned as a landing spot for the right-hand shot Pietrangelo, but the Leafs have cap headaches aplenty. So maybe the Blues do find a way, although the seven-year contract extended to Justin Faulk at the start of the season as a kind of insurance policy against Pietrangelo's possible departure seems like an enormous anchor with its \$6.5 million cap hit and no-trade clause given Faulk's disappointing season as a Blue. "Don't think his series against Vancouver is going to help," said one former NHLer and analyst. "He seems to thrive on lesser teams where he can play a bigger role."

Flames on the hot seat after icy finish vs. Dallas

Certainly lots of hard questions being asked in Calgary where for the second straight year the Flames were undone by a lack of production from their top players and lost a series they had in their grasp. Was it the goaltending or the coaching that undid the Flames? Interim head coach Geoff Ward yanked starter Cam Talbot after Talbot allowed three goals on eight shots to erase a 3-0 Flames lead in the deciding game. Overall Talbot was excellent for the Flames and was especially solid in their qualifying round win over injury-ravaged Winnipeg. But Talbot is an unrestricted free agent and with a glut of experienced goaltenders on the market, including Dallas netminder Khudobin, it's hard to imagine the Flames don't take a good hard look there before inking Talbot to a new deal. The bigger questions remain as to what to make of a cadre of stars led by the top line of Sean Monahan, Elias Lindholm and Johnny Gaudreau, who made zero impact at even strength against the Stars as in zero combined 5-on-5 points. GM Brad Treliving pooh-poohed rumors that Gaudreau was on the market before the season, but it seems clear this core isn't up to the task of winning when it matters given it faded out in two straight playoff seasons. In St. Louis, Armstrong made hard decisions on key personnel like T.J. Oshie, David Backes and

Kevin Shattenkirk before finding a lineup that brought home a Stanley Cup. Treliving may be looking at a similar dynamic if this talented team is to ever achieve liftoff.

Another coaching question in Calgary

As for interim head coach Ward, does the failure to keep pace with Dallas cost him a chance at the full-time coaching gig? Hard to believe it won't with coaches like Bruce Boudreau, Gerard Gallant, Peter Laviolette and Mike Babcock on the market. Also his handling of the goaltending was not the stuff that inspires confidence. "Colossal game/goalie mismanagement," one longtime netminder and analyst said. "Pulling Talbot was a panic move and it had the opposite effect desired; 3-3 tie, half of an elimination game left, and they put in (Dave) Rittich, who was brutal the second half of the season and colder than Antarctica." Why not call a timeout, the source asked? Fair enough. Still, another veteran NHL coach said he thinks Ward deserves another chance and, given the carousel of coaches that has been the Calgary coaching job during Treliving's tenure, maybe patience is a virtue. "He knows the room. He's been there and he can change lines with anybody," the coach said. "I know it's always the perception but my guess is he stays. He's a good man."

Disaster in the desert

Yes, technically the Coyotes won their first playoff round since a surprise run to the 2012 Western Conference final when they dumped hapless Nashville in four games in the preliminary round. But was there a more embarrassing turn by a team in the first round of the playoffs than the Coyotes who not only lost in five games to Colorado but managed to close out the series with twin 7-1 shellackings? Asked and answered. Hey, Colorado should have won this series. They're a better team, but for ownership of the Coyotes, this has to be a humbling experience and an illustration of just how far away this team is from being anything. As one western-based scout asked: What is their identity? They're not particularly fast, not particularly physical, not particularly anything. It reinforces what I wrote on the eve of the playoffs when GM John Chayka shockingly quit the team, leaving assistant GM Steve Sullivan in charge, as there remains a veritable mountain of work to be done and ownership needs to make sure they have the right people in place to do that work. They don't have a lot of time to make those decisions with the compacted time leading up to a planned start of the 2020-21 season in early December. They are set in goal with Darcy Kuemper under contract at a manageable number for the next two years (\$4.5 million), but have looming holes on the blue line and are not nearly good or deep enough down the middle. A number of sources indicated they didn't think that Sullivan was ready for a full-time GM role, but the clock is ticking on ownership to start making decisions that will keep this team from sliding back into the abyss.

Whither Taylor Hall?

So, what about the elephant in the Arizona room, the articulate and thoughtful but ultimately underwhelming Taylor Hall? Several sources said they think former Hart Trophy-winner Taylor Hall and the Coyotes are close to a deal to keep him in Arizona. But Hall's two-point, nine-shot performance against Colorado – both points came in Game 3 – should reinforce what has been obvious since the potential unrestricted free



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agent was acquired from New Jersey and what scouts have been saying for a long time: Hall does not drive play and is not a cornerstone player. So, how do you determine what the appropriate dollar and term is for Hall? More specifically, how do you come to that decision without waking up with a Jeff Skinner-like albatross on your hands that cripples your team for years? One interesting thought a longtime NHL executive and talent evaluator raised: Watch Nashville. The Predators were embarrassed by Arizona in the qualifying round and need to change the pieces – again – to try and keep their Stanley Cup window open. They'd have to move some money (i.e. trading or buying out Kyle Turris and more) but Hall's best moments were under Nashville coach John Hynes when both were in New Jersey. Just saying.

Caniac collapse

The simple way to unpack Carolina's disappointing five-game loss to Boston is to make excuses. Andrei Svechnikov was injured. So was Brett Pesce. Dougie Hamilton was coming back after a long layoff due to injury. But coach Rod Brind'Amour is not an excuses guy, so it's not likely he's buying that. The plain fact is this was a significant setback. It's also a formal changing of the guard as former captain, Mr. Game 7, Justin Williams will be retiring for good, assuming he maintains the plan he set out to us earlier in the season that this would be it for him. That means that this is now Sebastian Aho's team, and it means that Aho, who was very good against the New York Rangers but not so great against Boston, needs to learn from having been schooled by Zdeno Chara, Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand. If Aho and the rest of that young core – including Svechnikov, Aho's oft-times linemate Teuvo Teravainen, Vincent Trocheck and Martin Necas – can absorb the lessons from this beat-down and begin to understand that it's not just how good people say you are but how much will you have that dictates playoff success, then this will be an important moment for a team many like to be a perennial contender given its skill set and coaching.

A question of goaltending in Raleigh

How close are the Canes? Some would have you believe that if this team is healthy they are just a top-end starter in goal away from being a contender. Maybe. Petr Mrazek's laissez-faire play at the end of the first period in Game 5 that allowed Boston to score what would be the game-winner, not to mention the rotating of Mrazek and James Reimer throughout the postseason, does suggest that the Canes aren't quite good enough in goal. Not good enough to be taken seriously as a Cup contender. We know that the Hurricanes had shown interest in Robin Lehner before Lehner went to Chicago last offseason and maybe he's the answer. Both Mrazek and Reimer are under contract for next season at a total of \$6.525 million against the cap, so something would have to happen there but that doesn't seem like a Herculean task.

Future so bright you'll need sunglasses

When is a first-round loss not really a loss but a kind of win? True, coaches and players rarely speak in terms of moral victories when their teams are bounced from the playoffs, but quietly there has to be real enthusiasm in Montreal, Columbus and Chicago as all three teams won hard-fought qualifying rounds against teams that on paper were superior in Pittsburgh, Toronto and Edmonton, respectively. And all three teams gave as good as they got in squaring off against Philadelphia, Tampa and Vegas in the first round. Montreal, Columbus and Chicago all entered the return to play with significant questions and answered most, if not all, affirmatively, especially when it came to the surprising play of young guys like Kirby Dach or Dominik Kubalik in Chicago, or Pierre-Luc Dubois or Liam Foudy in Columbus, or Nick Suzuki or Jesperi Kotkaniemi in Montreal. It's still an uphill battle for all three teams to be considered sure-fire playoff teams next offseason, but all three seem to have seen their organizational evolution accelerated through this most strange of offseasons.



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Five Takeaways: Waddell & Brind'Amour Close Out 2019-20 Season

GM and head coach assess one-of-a-kind season, look ahead
by Michael Smith

The best start in franchise history. Two lacrosse-style goals. A veteran returns mid-season. One of the league's premier defensive defensemen wins Accuracy Shooting at NHL All-Star Skills. A career-long 14-game point streak. An emergency back-up goaltender triumph. Trade deadline splashes. A rookie's eye-catching debut. A pause. A one-of-a-kind, expanded postseason tournament. Back-to-back playoff appearances for the first time in nearly two decades.

What a weird, fun, strange, unprecedented season.

What began as a totally normal 82-game campaign ended in completely unexpected fashion almost a full calendar year later. From start to finish, the 2019-20 season was wildly unpredictable and one that will likely never be replicated.

It was a roller coaster of highs and lows for the Carolina Hurricanes, who, after breaking a decade-long playoff drought the season prior, hit the ice with a renewed sense of expectation and promise.

The team now moves forward better for the experiences they lived, including seeing their season end in the First Round of the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Not yet a week removed from that decisive Game 5 in Toronto, Canes President and General Manager Don Waddell and head coach Rod Brind'Amour sat down to analyze the past and theorize about the future.

Here are five takeaways from Monday's end-of-season virtual press conference.

1. Taking Strides

The Canes' magical run in 2018-19 ended in the Eastern Conference Final when they were swept by the Boston Bruins.

After sweeping the New York Rangers in the 2020 Stanley Cup Qualifiers, the Canes again drew the Bruins - the ninth-ranked team in the NHL facing off with the Presidents' Trophy winners, of all match-ups - in the First Round of the playoffs.

Though the Canes' season again ended at the hands of the Bruins, this time in five games, there were evident strides in how the Canes matched up against and responded to Boston.

"I felt like this year we were in every game, even though I don't even know if we played our best in every game," Brind'Amour said. "We definitely closed the gap there, and it certainly felt different this year than last year playing them. The result was the same at the end of the day, but I feel like our guys took a big step, especially our younger players. Like I said after, as long as we learn from that, that experience will be valuable moving forward."

If 2019 was first learning how to walk in the postseason, 2020 was a tough lesson in staying on your feet, and the Canes' young core will be mindful of that moving forward.

2. Will to Win

The Canes' young core is highlighted by Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov, cornerstones of the team's offense.

Aho finished the postseason with a team-best 12 points (3g, 9a) in eight games. Svechnikov, even though he missed the last two games of the First Round with a high-ankle sprain, led the teams in goals (4), three of which came via the franchise's first postseason hat trick in Game 2 of the Qualifiers.

"The talent is there with those two guys. What excites me - and you've heard me say this all the time - is their will to get better. These guys are not satisfied with where they are individually and certainly not team-wise. Especially seeing Sebastian after we were done, the look on his face, the pure devastation, really. This guy wants to win," Brind'Amour said. "When you have that will to win and the desire to work at it - everyone wants to win, but not everybody wants to do what it takes. With Svech, it's the same way. When you have those two guys as our superstar players, and they're our young guys, that's what makes you excited about where we're at and where we're headed."

3. Decisions, Decisions

With every offseason comes player movement, and for the Canes, the 2020 offseason will be one that likely brings changes to an already crowded blue line.

Joel Edmundson, Trevor van Riemsdyk and Sami Vatanen are unrestricted free agents, while Haydn Fleury is a restricted free agent.

"We think our defense is one of the better defenses in the league, and we want to keep the group together as much as we can," Waddell said. "Right now, I couldn't give you definite answers on any of those guys, other than we do feel that's the strength of our hockey club, and we need to continue that moving forward."

Fleury, the seventh overall pick from the 2014 NHL Draft, impressed with his play in the postseason, especially in the First Round, when he tied for the series team lead in goals (2) and was a plus-3. He'll be the most likely to re-sign of that bunch, with the unrestricted statuses of the other three likely leading them to explore alternatives.

Not even taking into consideration potential signings or larger trades, if the Canes were to re-sign Fleury, their top six for the 2020-21 season would essentially be set with Jaccob Slavin, Dougie Hamilton, Brady Skjei, Brett Pesce (he's



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skating now and will obviously be healthy for the start of the season, Waddell said), Fleury and Jake Gardiner. Toss in Jake Bean as a seventh defenseman, and the Canes' blue line again has the makings of one of the best in the league.

The only expiring forward contracts on the NHL roster belong to Warren Foegele, a restricted free agent, and Justin Williams, with more on him below. In net, both Petr Mrazek and James Reimer are under contract for next season.

But that isn't to say that the Canes won't look to improve their roster at any position. If anything, a First Round playoff exit suggests the team should indeed at least make some peripheral tweaks.

"We want to be careful. If we can upgrade our team at any position, we'll certainly look at that, but we're not out here saying we have to make wholesale changes to our lineup," Waddell said. "We're talking about how we're going to build a team to go deep in the playoffs and win a Stanley Cup. ... We all want to win. That's the bottom line."

4. Williams' Future

After stepping away from the game for half a season, Justin Williams returned to the Canes' lineup in January in a quest to win his fourth Stanley Cup, a journey that fell 15 wins short.

"It was pretty emotional after the game talking with him," Brind'Amour said.

When Williams re-signed with the Canes in mid-January, he didn't commit to anything beyond the remainder of the season - and even that went deeper into 2020 than he or anyone could have expected.

On Oct. 4, Williams will turn 39 years old. Does he have any fuel, fumes or otherwise, left in the tank? That's a question for a later day, but the impact he's made on the organization is evident.

"To me, he epitomizes what we're all about. Class. Team first. Coming and doing your job every day. This guy did everything right. He came here and took on a huge leadership role, especially when I took over. He helped put this place back on the map and got us back on track to where we want to be," Brind'Amour said. "If he doesn't play anymore, he left everything out there. I don't think many guys can say they go out on those terms."

5. Uncertainty Ahead

The NHL is well on its way to awarding the Stanley Cup, a testament to the tireless work behind the scenes in safely and effectively pulling off this postseason tournament.

"You have to give credit to everybody involved. To be honest with you, it couldn't have run any smoother," Brind'Amour said. "From when we first came back here to train and the way our staff handled everything to the league taking over when we got to the bubble and how smoothly everything ran, they did everything the way they needed to do it. I have to give them full marks for that."

The Cup Final will conclude in late September or early October, typically the time the puck drops on a new regular season. The NHL Draft will be conducted virtually on Oct. 9 and 10. Free agency will open soon after, and beyond that, the calendar is littered with question marks. Tentative dates are set for the opening of training camps and the start of the 2020-21 regular season, but those remain moving targets dependent upon a number of COVID-19-related factors.

According to Waddell, the league remains committed to a full 82-game season for 2020-21, even if it begins in December or January.

"We all know it's going to be a condensed schedule, and it might run into the summer again next year before we get back on track," he said.

Waddell added that the economics of a bubble concept wouldn't make sense for a full season, but there's also no guarantee that fans will be allowed in buildings around the league by the time the puck drops again.

"We've done all kinds of models," Waddell said. "If we don't play at full capacity, the losses are going to be big, but that's around the league. ... These are tough times for everybody."

The 2021 Stadium Series, currently slated for Feb. 20 at Carter-Finley Stadium, is likely to be affected, as well.

"The date is obviously going to be in flux depending on where we're at with how many people you can have in the building, inside or outside. A lot of that is driven by the state," Waddell said. "It could even get pushed back a year depending on what happens with the schedule. We actually just in the last few days had to order our jerseys for it, so we're still proceeding as if it's going to happen. We just can't say it's going to happen in February. That will be more dictated once the schedule gets set and the NHL decides we're going to open up."

Just as it was in March and the months that followed, it's a waiting game - for now.



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Svechnikov should be healthy for start of next season with Hurricanes

Forward feeling better after sustaining high ankle sprain in East First Round against Bruins

by Tom Gulitti

Andrei Svechnikov is expected to be healthy for the start of next season after the Carolina Hurricanes forward missed the final two games of the Eastern Conference First Round against the Boston Bruins with a high right ankle sprain.

"He'll be ready," Carolina general manager Don Waddell said Monday. "He's actually feeling very good. He's doing treatment right now. It's basically a sprain that he had. We did both X-rays and an MRI and they showed nothing, nothing more than a sprain."

Svechnikov was injured when he got tangled with Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara in front of the net in Game 3 of the best-of-7 series, which Boston ended with a 2-1 win in Game 5 on Wednesday in Toronto, the hub city for the East.

The No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, Svechnikov was third on the Hurricanes with 61 points (24 goals, 37 assists) in 68 regular-season games. He led Carolina with four goals and was second on the Hurricanes with seven points in six postseason games (Sebastian Aho, 12).

"Those high ankle sprains, they can be one week, they can be five weeks," Waddell said. "He's doing treatment right now. He's actually walking very good. I saw him in the last day or so and he said he's feeling good, so no reason to think he won't be ready."

The NHL has not announced a start date for next season.

Waddell also said defenseman Brett Pesce was getting close to being ready to play before Carolina's season ended. Pesce had surgery on his right shoulder March 5 after being injured against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Feb. 22.

"He's right on target," Waddell said. "It was basically a six-month injury, which was right about today, or I should say next week. He's been skating. ... He would have been ready not the next round but possibly the third or, for sure, in the [Stanley Cup Final] if we had gotten that far and we needed him. So it looks like he'll be ready to roll."

Pesce scored 18 points (four goals, 14 assists) in 61 games this season. He had six assists in 15 Stanley Cup Playoff games during the Hurricanes' run to the Eastern Conference Final last season.



Playoff trips have Hurricanes aiming for growth, deeper run

By Aaron Beard

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The Carolina Hurricanes have moved past a long playoff drought and look ready to remain a postseason fixture. They just have to figure out what changes will carry them even farther.

"We're not talking about this team just making playoffs anymore," president and general manager Don Waddell said Monday. "We're talking about how we're going to build a team to go deeper in the playoffs and eventually get to where all of our goals are — and that's winning the Stanley Cup."

The Hurricanes have a young core under contract — highlighted by Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov — and quality defenseman depth behind Dougie Hamilton and Jaccob Slavin. That group got Carolina to the Eastern Conference finals in 2019 after a nine-year postseason drought, followed by this year's playoff return in Toronto.

But they lost both years to the Boston Bruins, first in a 2019 sweep and then in a five-game first-round series that ended last week.

Now it's about balancing how to improve the team while sticking to plans that have brought the franchise to back-to-back postseason appearances for the first time since 2001-02.

Coach Rod Brind'Amour is counting on maturing players learning how to elevate their play against a veteran opponent like Boston, this year's Presidents' Trophy winner with a league-best 100 regular-season points.

A year earlier, the Bruins won three times in the four-game sweep by at least three goals. This time, four of the five games were decided by one goal.

"We definitely closed the gap there, it certainly felt different this year than last year playing them," Brind'Amour said, adding: "As long as we learn from that, that experience will be valuable moving forward."



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Some things to watch for during the Hurricanes' offseason:

WILLIAMS' FUTURE

Justin Williams provided veteran leadership in both playoff pushes, including when the 38-year-old rejoined the team on a one-year deal after sitting out the first half of this season. But it's unclear whether the three-time Cup champion – including with Carolina in 2006 – will return.

Brind'Amour said he "can't tell you one way or the other" and that Williams "certainly didn't let on to what he's thinking" after the Game 5 loss.

INJURY UPDATES

The Hurricanes didn't play long enough in Toronto to buy time for defenseman Brett Pesce to return from March shoulder surgery expected to sideline him roughly six months. Waddell said Pesce remains "right on target" and should be "ready to roll" next season.

Additionally, Waddell said Andrei Svechnikov should be fine. The 20-year-old former No. 2 overall draft pick from 2018 missed the last two games after going down late in Game 3 when his right leg twisted awkwardly beneath him as he fell while jostling with Zdeno Chara for position.

But Waddell said Svechnikov's injury was a high ankle sprain, with no additional injury detected by X-rays and an MRI.

FREE AGENTS

The Hurricanes have restricted free agents in winger Warren Foegele and defenseman Haydn Fleury, both 24 years old and 2014 draft picks by the team. Waddell said he "fully" expects to reach deals for both.

Carolina's unrestricted free agents include Justin Williams and three defensemen: Joel Edmundson, Trevor van Riemsdyk and Sami Vatanen – who was acquired from New Jersey at the February trade deadline.

IN GOAL

The Hurricanes rotated Petr Mrazek and James Reimer in net during the Bruins series as well as during a three-game sweep against the New York Rangers in a best-of-5 qualifying series. Both are under contract through next season.

PURSUING A FIRST

The franchise hasn't made three straight playoff trips since relocating to North Carolina in 1997 from Hartford, Connecticut.

"One thing you want to be careful of is always chasing something that might not be there," Waddell said. "We've got a good bunch of guys here. ... If we can upgrade our team at any position, we certainly will look at that. But we're not out here saying we've got to make wholesale changes with our lineup."



2020 NHL playoffs: Stock watch for all 24 postseason teams

By Greg Wyshynski

The Stanley Cup playoffs are lot like the stock market, and not just because they're a venue through which very rich people invest very large sums of money for (sometimes) very little return.

Both are infamous for their fluctuation. Stock prices climb and fall and climb again. NHL teams and players exhibit the same streakiness from game to game. The goat on one night can become the G.O.A.T. by the end of the series. It's the unpredictability that can enrich one's life or turn one's portfolio to trash.

For the 24 teams that entered the NHL postseason, there are some individuals whose stock has risen and some whose value has dropped. As you read this Stanley Cup stock watch, keep in mind the context: The stressful, isolating life inside the NHL "bubbles" is going to affect players in different ways, and there's no telling how many have seen their stock drop because of it.

With that, let's see which players have raised their valuation this postseason, and whose price is headed in the wrong direction.

Still standing

Boston Bruins

Stock up: David Krejci, C

Krejci has 10 points in nine postseason games, including a seven-game point streak that continued in the Bruins' Game 1 win over the Lightning. Boston fans shout out "Playoff Krejci" on social media with every new exploit, a reference to his elevated postseason play (36 points in his past 45 playoff games) compared to solid but unspectacular regular-season numbers (43 points in 61 games this season).

Stock down: Zdeno Chara, D

Some of the Bruins' spare parts and role players haven't performed up to standards, but we'll give a slight tick down in stock price to the veteran blueliner. He's still a physical presence around the crease, but there have certainly been times when he has struggled to handle the speed in the restarted season. His underlying numbers -- 42.59 Corsi for percentage, 41.25% expected goals for while on the ice at 5-on-5 -- reflect that.

Colorado Avalanche

Stock up: Nazem Kadri, C



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With 12 points through nine games -- including points in eight of those nine -- Kadri began the postseason as the Avalanche's best offensive player not named Nathan MacKinnon. But it is his tenacity while toeing the line of legality, with just one minor penalty thus far, that sets him apart. He brought sandpaper to a lineup that needed it; and, in turn, showed the Maple Leafs how much they missed it in his absence.

Stock down: Nikita Zadorov, D

While the defenseman's fashion choices have been on point in the bubble, his game has been inconsistent. Zadorov and Ian Cole have been the Avalanche's most porous defensive pairing in nine games. With Cole moving up to play with Samuel Girard, Zadorov gets a chance to get that stock back up with a new partner. He'll have to be better to get it there.

Dallas Stars

Stock up: Miro Heiskanen, D

The 21-year-old defenseman has 13 points in his first 10 playoff games this season, making him one of the leading scorers in the league. In a "Quinn vs. Cale" world of standout young defensemen in the West, Miro has entered the chat. "He's an exceptional player. He's an exceptional person. He does have Norris Trophy written all over him," coach Rick Bowness said.

Stock down: Andrej Sekera, D

The veteran defenseman has been paired with both Stephen Johns (before his injury) and Taylor Fedun, and both pairings have been outscored at 5-on-5. He has zero points and is a minus-4 in 10 games. He has seen his ice time fall below 11:33 in four of the past five games.

New York Islanders

Stock up: Anthony Beauvillier, LW

He leads the Islanders with six goals, to go along with three assists. He scored the series-clinching goals against the Panthers and the Capitals. His line with Brock Nelson and Josh Bailey has been absolutely on fire, with an expected goals rate of 4.05 per 60 minutes at 5-on-5.

Stock down: Casey Cizikas, C

Stocks are inherently a speculative venture. While he is by no means an offensive force, there was some thought that Cizikas could have an uptick in production in the playoffs after scoring 30 goals over the past two regular seasons combined. He has one assist in 10 games, and his line has been on the wrong side of shot attempts during the postseason. But when the Islanders are rolling like they are, this is an annoyance rather than a major malfunction.

Philadelphia Flyers

Stock up: Carter Hart, G

There was an image of Hart and Montreal goaltender Carey Price at the end of their quarterfinal series shaking hands. Not pictured: the torch being passed from one generation's great Canadian goaltender to the next. Hart, 22, posted a .943 save percentage through eight games for the Flyers, including

back-to-back shutouts. We're still getting used to this whole "goaltending is the least of the Philadelphia Flyers' worries" thing, but here we are.

Stock down: James van Riemsdyk, LW

His stock began to drop in the regular season, with 40 points in 66 games and a significant drop in ice time (14:54 per game) under new head coach Alain Vigneault. His stock hasn't rallied at all in the restart, with no points in six appearances, a healthy scratch and playing just over 12 minutes on average against Montreal. He has three more years at \$7 million against the cap on his contract.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Stock up: Yanni Gourde, RW

His stock took a tumble in the regular season after his shooting percentage plummeted to 9.1%, but the spark-plug winger has two goals and two assists in nine playoff games, all at even strength. Gourde has brought good energy against two tough defensive opponents.

Stock down: Mikhail Sergachev, D

Defensively, he's a minus-3 in penalties, tied for worst on the team. Offensively, he has gotten some bad puck luck but also has only one even-strength assist in his first nine playoff games. That's while running the point on an immensely talented power play that is clicking at just 11.1% through nine games, and was 0-for-3 in Game 1 against the Bruins.

Vancouver Canucks

Stock up: Jacob Markstrom, G

Offensive fireworks aside, where would the Canucks be without Markstrom's .922 save percentage on 384 shots through 11 games? Granted, Game 1 against Vegas wasn't the finest moment for him or the team. But he was the difference in the Canucks' previous series wins over Minnesota and St. Louis. Not a bad bit of business before becoming an unrestricted free agent.

Stock down: Antoine Roussel, LW

Truth be told, Roussel hasn't been bad in this postseason, with a 51.49% expected goals percentage and average possession numbers. But when your primary job is to agitate the opponent, and that opponent not only cites your tomfoolery as inspiration for its rout but literally laughs at said agitator while he sits in the penalty box ... well, that's market correction, friends.

Vegas Golden Knights

Stock up: Reilly Smith, LW

At best, he was known as a great complementary player on the Knights' tremendous top line since arriving in their inaugural season from Florida. But with 10 points in nine games and playing all-around tremendous hockey, his star is starting to shine on its own this postseason, as the Knights look as dominant as anyone.

Stock down: Marc-Andre Fleury, G

This isn't about his play, as Fleury had a solid 26-save win over Chicago. This isn't about his agent tweeting an image



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with the Vegas coach's sword in Fleury's back, although that dust-up -- and Fleury's evasive comments about it -- didn't do him any favors. This is about the fact that if you're a starting goalie who loses the crease for any reason -- or whatever justification Peter DeBoer isn't sharing publicly -- then your stock has dropped. And Fleury's has, for the moment.

Round 1 and done

Arizona Coyotes

Stock up: Darcy Kuemper, G

Forget the 10 goals he surrendered in the final two games against Colorado, which were a product of exhaustion and a team waving the white flag against a superior opponent. The Coyotes' only win in that series came when he made 49 saves, which was the same number he made in their elimination game against the Predators. Arizona's goaltending has been praised for the past couple of seasons. Kuemper's postseason makes him a name brand beyond that general praise.

Stock down: Phil Kessel, RW

There was hope that the months-long break would give Phil The Thrill time to recover physically and try to atone for his underwhelming first season in Arizona. Instead, he mustered only one even-strength goal, along with four assists, in nine games. Kessel went scoreless in the Coyotes' five-game series against Colorado and didn't register a shot on goal in their 7-1 embarrassment of an elimination game.

Calgary Flames

Stock up: Cam Talbot, G

He didn't come through in the most important game of the playoffs, getting yanked from Game 6 against Dallas after the Stars rallied before returning for the third period. That's a shame, because the rest of his run for the Flames was stellar: a .924 save percentage and two shutouts, frequently being the Flames' best player. It might not have been enough to earn him a new contract with Calgary, but his stock should be up in that crowded free-agent goalie market.

Stock down: Johnny Gaudreau, LW

Hopes were high that the winger would build on a strong second half to his season, but that didn't happen in the postseason. Gaudreau had one even-strength point in 10 games, to go with three goals and three assists on the power play. His line with Sean Monahan and Elias Lindholm cratered in the playoffs, with a 37.6% expected goals percentage at 5-on-5. The trade whispers are growing louder.

Carolina Hurricanes

Stock up: Andrei Svechnikov, RW

One of the breakout stars of the season, the winger had four goals and three assists in six games before a tumble to the ice courtesy of Zdeno Chara put him on the shelf in Game 3 of the quarterfinals. His stock continued to climb in his absence, as Carolina certainly felt his absence.

Stock down: Nino Niederreiter, RW

The winger had a woefully underwhelming regular season -- 0.43 points per game, his lowest average since he was patrolling the fourth line for the 2011-12 Islanders -- and generated one primary assist in seven postseason games. (His power-play goal was a gift-wrapped turnover from Jaroslav Halak.) He was a team worst minus-6, was a healthy scratch against Boston, and his ice time dropped like a boulder through the end of that series. The Canes needed more offense this postseason, and not having players like Niederreiter hitting their marks was an issue.

Chicago Blackhawks

Stock up: Kirby Dach, C

The 19-year-old rookie got a trial by fire in the postseason, and passed the test. Dach had a goal and five assists in the playoffs, with four of those helpers coming in Chicago's qualification-round upset of Edmonton. "In the live games I've watched of other teams, I thought that he's a kid that used the four months and came back and really looks like a different player," said Vegas coach Pete DeBoer.

Stock down: Alexander Nylander, LW

Once upon a time, Nylander saw time with Patrick Kane on the Blackhawks' top scoring line. But he skated only around total 16 minutes with Kane in the playoffs. He ended up with zero points in eight games played with a minus-4, becoming a spare part that skated 10:12 or less in his last five games of the playoffs before being a healthy scratch in the finale.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Stock up: Pierre-Luc Dubois, C

The answer here for many would have been "Seth Jones," and there's no doubt that an outstanding defenseman who averaged 32:40 per game -- thanks, five-overtime game! -- opened some eyes. But Jones was fourth in voting for the Norris Trophy in 2018. We knew he was this good. Dubois, on the other hand, had 10 points in 10 games and dominated offensively for stretches. He played pretty nasty, too. The impression he left on Toronto media after the qualification round was that he was the mutant hybrid of John Tavares and Doug Gilmour. So yes, his stock is up even higher than that of Jones.

Stock down: Elvis Merzlikins, G

The Latvian rookie sensation didn't play poorly, with a 21-save shutout and a 49-save performance in an overtime loss against the Maple Leafs. But after a regular season where his play elevated the Jackets in playoff contention, Elvis had left the crease in the bubble, with Joonas Korpisalo retaking the starter's job and having a star-making postseason. They're both signed for the next two seasons. We'll see if Elvis can have a comeback special to be the Jackets' primary starter in 2020-21.

Montreal Canadiens

Stock up: Nick Suzuki, C

What a star-making performance from the rookie center. He had seven points in 10 games, tied for the team lead in goals. He was clutch, he played hard and he even got into the nasty side of playoff hockey during Head-Pat Gate. That September



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2018 trade that brought Suzuki and Tomas Tatar to Montreal from Vegas for Max Pacioretty gets more interesting every season.

Stock down: Max Domi, C

Domi isn't exactly known for being the quiet type, but he certainly was on the stat sheet. He had three assists in 10 games, all of them coming in the Canadiens' Game 2 blowout over Philly and one of them coming at even strength. He had one shot on goal or none in six games. An invisible performance on the eve of his restricted free agent talks. In fairness to Domi: He was asked to participate in a restarted season despite being in a high-risk group for complications from COVID-19. That's not an excuse. But bubble stress is a reality for these athletes.

St. Louis Blues

Stock up: Ryan O'Reilly, C

The legend of Ryan O'Reilly continued to grow, even after the Conn Smythe Trophy and the Selke Trophy last season. During the Blues' best -- well, only -- stretch of good hockey in the bubble, O'Reilly had five points in Games 3 and 4 en route to four goals and seven assists overall in the postseason. It's not every player who can shut down opponents defensively while having the opposing coach answer questions about how they're going to stop that player offensively. But that was O'Reilly for a good portion of that series.

Stock down: Jordan Binnington, G

From last postseason's sensation to this postseason's disaster. Binnington went 0-5 in the bubble, with a .851 save percentage and a 4.72 goals-against average. He dropped the first two games of the Blues' series against Vancouver and watched Jake Allen go 2-1 in the next three. As he had so many times during the Blues' Stanley Cup-winning run in 2019, coach Craig Berube turned to Binnington with his team's backs against the wall ... but this time, the goalie gave up four goals on 18 shots and was pulled 8:06 into the second period of the Blues' Game 6 elimination. This, friends, is why you give suddenly spectacular goalies bridge contracts, as Binnington is signed only through next season.

Washington Capitals

Stock up: Ilya Samsonov, G

Things were so bad for the Capitals in the bubble that they immediately fired coach Todd Reirden upon returning to D.C. Samsonov never entered the bubble due to injuries during the pause. We're left with memories of a pristine rookie season (16-6-2, .913 save percentage) and a crease that the 22-year-old is expected to inherit once free agent Braden Holtby leaves in the offseason. The Capitals haven't closed the door on Holtby, but he seemed resigned to the fact that he had played his last games in Washington.

Stock down: Brian MacLellan, general manager

Barry Trotz won a Stanley Cup for the Capitals. He wanted a five-year extension, despite have a clause in his contract that triggered a two-year extension if he won the Cup. The Capitals wouldn't commit to that, so he left for the Islanders ... and then eliminated Washington two years later in the conference quarterfinals. That's bad. What's worse is that MacLellan had

to acknowledge his mistake in elevating assistant coach Reirden to the big job, and watching the standards for the franchise slip in two seasons. "We need an experienced coach. We have an experienced group. We need someone to come in and push some buttons on some good players," he said. Had that been the mindset in 2018, the Capitals might not have wasted two seasons of Alex Ovechkin's remaining years.

Qualification-round casualties

Edmonton Oilers

Stock up: Connor McDavid, C

What else can be said about McDavid's offensive prowess? He had nine points in four games against Chicago, with a point in every game. That included his hat trick in the Oilers' only win of the series. It's a shame our lasting memory of McDavid in these playoffs is how distracting he found the hats being tossed in an empty arena.

Stock down: Andreas Athanasiou, LW

GM Ken Holland's big trade deadline swing went scoreless in four games, skating under 10 minutes in the first two contests. He was a minus-2 in the elimination game against the Blackhawks. This followed a regular season in which he had just a goal and an assist in nine games for Edmonton.

Florida Panthers

Stock up: Sergei Bobrovsky, G

A little perspective here: Consider how low Bobrovsky's stock was coming into this postseason, after the weight of his massive free-agent contract crushed him to the tune of a .900 save percentage in the regular season. Against the Islanders, he had two strong games -- including a 20-save performance that gave the Panthers their only win of the series -- and two not-very-good games. So a slight uptick after a market crash. Baby steps.

Stock down: Mike Matheson, D

One of the worst individual performances out of anyone who entered the bubble. He lasted two games against the Islanders before coach Joel Quenneville made him a healthy scratch for the last two games. General manager Dale Tallon gave Matheson an eight-year deal in 2017, with partial trade protection beginning after the 2020-21 season. Perhaps that's one reason he's now former general manager Dale Tallon.

Minnesota Wild

Stock up: Matt Dumba, D

Dumba skated 25:03 per game on average, was second on the team with 14 shots on goal, had an assist and was a plus-1 in the Wild's four games. But this postseason will always be remembered for something he did on the ice but not in uniform: His remarkable speech before the start of the conference postseason as a member of the Hockey Diversity Alliance. "For those unaffected by systematic racism or are unaware, I'm sure some of you believe that this topic has garnered too much attention these last couple of months. But let me assure you that it has not. Racism is a man-made creation. All it does is deteriorate from our collective prosperity. Racism is everywhere and we need to fight against



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it," Dumba said. He also took a knee during the U.S. anthem prior to that game, and raised a fist during both anthems while playing for the Wild.

Stock down: Alex Stalock and Devan Dubnyk, G

Stalock started all four games in the bubble, posting an .897 save percentage against a high-octane Canucks offense. But both goalies were put on notice by general manager Bill Guerin, who said neither was guaranteed a spot next season even though they're both under contract. "I was disappointed in the goaltending this year," Guerin said. "It needs to be better, that's just the way it is. If I told you anything different I'd be lying to you. It was not a strong point for us."

Nashville Predators

Stock up: The "JoFA" line

Filip Forsberg, Ryan Johansen and Viktor Arvidsson were reunited, and it felt so good. They outscored Arizona 4-1 at 5-on-5 and had an 81.04% expected goals percentage (!) for the series. Injuries and ineffectiveness kept them apart during the season. It was brilliant to watch that trio operate at full capacity again.

Stock down: Matt Duchene, C

He was signed as a big-name free agent to be an offensive difference-maker, and managed a secondary power-play assist in Game 1 before scoring his lone goal of the postseason in Game 4. His line with Kyle Turris and Mikael Granlund was also a defensive liability for the Predators, who had an .895 team save percentage when those three were on the ice.

New York Rangers

Stock up: New York Lottery

Look, the Rangers were dominated and swept out of the postseason by Carolina. We could give a player like rookie Adam Fox a pat on the helmet for playing well in that brief stretch. But let's not kid ourselves: The biggest win for the Rangers was losing, entering the draft lottery and using that 12.5% chance to secure the first overall pick and (likely) winger Alexis Lafreniere. That is going to be the tale they tell of the Rangers' 2020 postseason years from now -- potentially under a shower of ticker tape.

Stock down: Tony DeAngelo, D

One power-play assist in three games with a team-worst minus-6 and a team-high 16 penalty minutes for the Rangers. He was also used as highlight-reel enhancement talent by Sebastian Aho. Not the best showing ahead of a restricted free agent negotiation.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Stock up: Jason Zucker, LW

The best forward the Penguins had in their first-round loss to Montreal. Granted, this accolade is almost by default, but the

former Minnesota Wild winger had two goals in four games and played with a spirit lacking in many of his new teammates.

Stock down: Matt Murray, G

He was extremely outplayed in the regular season by Tristan Jarry, but his previous playoff experience for the Penguins -- and, apparently, coach Mike Sullivan's gratitude for past accomplishments -- led to him starting three of four games against the Canadiens. He wasn't terrible -- a .914 save percentage, minus-0.8 expected goals against -- but he wasn't a difference-maker. Jarry was finally given the crease in Game 4, stopping 20 of 21 shots, but it was too late. Both goalies are restricted free agents. It might have been Murray's last season in Pittsburgh.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Stock up: Auston Matthews, C

Matthews had two goals and four assists in the Leafs' qualification-round loss to Columbus. A disastrous 2018 playoff performance -- two points in seven games -- gave him a "postseason underachiever" label. He now has 12 points in his past 12 playoff games, and led the Leafs with 27 shots on goal in five games against the Blue Jackets. That's after a 47-goal regular season in just 70 games. He is not the problem.

Stock down: Mitch Marner, RW

Once the Canadian golden boy for Maple Leafs fans, his contentious contract negotiation with the team last summer both shifted perceptions and raised expectations for the 23-year-old winger. They were not met in the postseason loss to Columbus, with four assists in five games; three of those assists came in Game 4, none at even strength. Marner didn't help himself by saying that in Game 1 he didn't feel he "was engaged with physical-ness at all." It's never a good thing when Leafs GM Kyle Dubas feels compelled to speak up and call criticism of Marner "among the most idiotic things that I see done here."

Winnipeg Jets

Stock up: Mark Scheifele, C

Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and no absence was felt harder than Winnipeg getting just 2:59 in ice time from Scheifele before his season-ending injury. The Jets surprised many in winning Game 2 without him, but by the end of the series it was clear that losing Scheifele meant losing any shot at advancing.

Stock down: Neal Pionk, D

Overall, his stock price remains high after a strong regular season (45 points) following his trade from the Rangers as part of the Jacob Trouba swap last summer. But his four games for the Jets against the Flames should be deleted from the memory banks: He was on the ice for more goals against in all situations than any other player, and had a team-high 10 giveaways in the series loss to Calgary.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Don Waddell on preparing for next season with on and off-ice decisions

The Carolina Hurricanes' general manager and team president spoke to the media via Zoom on contract discussions, injury updates, finances and more.

By Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes 2019-20 season came to a close with the 4-1 first-round series loss to the Boston Bruins.

With the end of play, the organization now shifts its focus to the NHL draft and preparing for the 2020-21 season.

General manager and team president, Don Waddell, joined head coach Rod Brind'Amour to speak with the media over Zoom on Monday morning.

Contracts

On the decisions to make regarding who will be on the blueline next year regarding upcoming UFAs: We're just starting to talk about our plans for next year as we've just finished out meetings for this year. We think our defense is one of the better in the league and we want to keep the group together as much as we can. Right now, I couldn't give you a definite answer on any of those guys other than we feel that it is the strength of our hockey club and we need to continue that moving forward.

On discussions with Andrei Svechnikov, Dougie Hamilton and Rod Brind'Amour on extensions: As far as the players, I've never been one to say publicly how negotiations are going to go. Certainly they're important players for this organization and it makes more sense to get to it sooner than later. You're looking at two different kinds of contracts. Dougie Hamilton will be an unrestricted free agent come the next upcoming year. Andrei will be coming off his entry-level deal, so it's two different kinds of negotiations you're looking at. I think there's no timetable or deadlines really. They both have another year left so I'm confident. We have a good relationship with both players and I fully expect both players to want to stay here. As far as Rod, we haven't gotten into that yet. We got done on Thursday and we just got back so we'll talk about it internally and if we ever have something to tell you guys, we'll make sure you're the second to know.

On signing the two restricted free agents, Warren Foegele and Haydn Fleury: We'll get them done. There are not too many negotiations that I ever say are not too much trouble because they hire representation to get as much money as they can and we're trying to pay them what their value is to our hockey club, but I fully expect both to get done. It might take a little longer on one of them, but in time we'll get them both done.

Injury Statuses

On Andrei Svechnikov: He'll be ready, 100%. He's actually feeling very good. He's doing treatment right now. It's basically

a sprain that he had. We did both x-rays and an MRI and they both showed nothing more than a sprain. Those high-ankle sprains can be one week to five weeks, but he's in treatment right now. He's walking good. I saw him the other day or so and he said he's feeling good. No reason to think he won't be ready [for next season].

On Brett Pesce: He's right on target. Basically they say it was a six-month injury which is about next week. He's been skating now. Everything that we've been involved with and getting reports about from his medical team back home where he is, have been very positive. There's no reason to think he won't be ready. He would have been ready for not the next round, but possibly the third round or Finals had we gotten that far and needed him. We believe he will be ready to roll.

On any other injury concerns coming out of the bubble: Nope. Guys were banged up a little, but I can't think of anybody that had anything else. We were fortunate. Credit to our training staff and our strength and conditioning coach, Bill Burniston. How our guys prepared for the bubble, not only in Phase 2, Phase 3 but throughout the season. I think we have one of the best if not the best staff here in the league and that proves every year as we're one of the teams with the least amount of games missed due to injury and that's a credit to our staff.

On-Ice

On the most important issue to address for next season: Well Rod and I have talked about it. We made a few changes last year and the one thing you want to be careful of is always chasing something that might not be there. We've got a good group of guys here. They went through it last year and took another step this year, so you want to be careful. If we can upgrade our team at any position, we certainly will look at it, but we aren't out here saying we have to make wholesale changes with our lineup. Certainly, there are things we have to be aware of. We're a team that's going to be close to the cap again, so we've got to be mindful of that. We'll look at everything, but, again, I want to make it clear that the players that we have here have done a good job for us. You see it with all NHL teams that go through this process of getting to the next level, and we think we've made big strides here. Our young players have taken a big step this year and we want to be careful that we don't get caught up and think we need to make a bunch of changes other than changes that you feel are really going to help your hockey club.

On the challenge of building to end a playoff drought versus building to win a cup: Always when you're growing and trying to make that next step, every step is a difficult path. This franchise, for a long time, hadn't been in the playoffs and now we're in back-to-back. But Rod's speech at the beginning of the year wasn't about making the playoffs, it was about winning a championship. We're not talking about this team just making the playoffs anymore, we're talking about how we're



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going to build a team that will go deep into the playoffs and eventually will win a Stanley Cup. Every step is difficult. There's no easy step and you can see how these good teams, like Boston, you watch them play and they're a very, very experienced team. You look at the years before they won the cup there, they went through some building processes and now they've got a very veteran team that's been through it multiple times and knows how to win. We're in that process now and the good thing is, and this isn't anything against our older players, but players like Aho and Svechnikov, they are the young players on this team that are going to be with this franchise for a long time. These experiences that we've gone through in this past year are experiences that they will keep as they grow.

On his own timetable for winning a cup: I think when you start the season, your goal has to be to win the Stanley Cup. I've never heard anybody come in and say, 'Okay. I want to make it to the Conference Finals this year and not win the cup.' We all want to win. That's the bottom line. I know the guy sitting next to me here has been with this organization and franchise for a long time and has hoisted the Stanley Cup at center ice here. There's nobody here in this organization that doesn't want to win the Stanley Cup from ownership right down. Our goal here is to not only compete, but try to win it.

On preparing for this year's draft: The season shutdown sometime in the middle of March and most of your college games are done by that time and junior hockey is getting ready for the playoffs. We had enough viewings on all the players. What we did is we took the time through the pause and we had NHL meetings certain days and draft meetings other days to go through all players and make sure if we're unsure about some guys or wanted to see some more, Darren Yorke who leads up that department just had guys watch more videos on those players. We think we're fully prepared. We're anxious to get a good player with our pick.

Financial and Business

On getting 82-games in next season: I do think the plan right now is to play all 82 games. Whenever we start, we all know it's going to be a condensed schedule and it might run into the summer again next year before we get back on track. I don't think the bubble idea is something that will work for a regular season. The economics just don't work if you're not playing with at least some fans, let alone all fans. What we went through was fine for trying to get this year in, but I don't think

it's something you can do next year. As far as the outdoor game, we're still planning on it. The date is obviously going to be in flex depending on where we're at and with how many people you can have in the building, whether inside or outside. A lot of that is driven by the state, but I think we're still on the agenda for an outdoor game. It could get pushed back for a year depending on what happens with the schedule. Right now, we've actually, in the last few days, have ordered our jerseys for it. We're proceeding as if it's going to happen, we just can't say for sure that it's happening in February. It will be more indicative once the schedule gets set and once the NHL decides when we're going to open up.

On the financial ramifications of the pause and if the bubble was profitable at all: We got a little bit of money for TV. We had our deal with Fox which we owed them three games, so the qualifying round with the Rangers qualified that, so there was no additional money there. We'll get a little money from the league from the TV deal after they take their expenses out. I'm not expecting a great amount. As far as the season, you know, we lost eight home games. Forget playoff revenue. Players got paid their full salaries per the CBA and it's a big number from last year that we're still working on. As far as next year goes, we've done all kinds of models. At 30% fans, 50%, 75%. If you can't have 100%, you know you're going to be losing a lot of money. You figure your local revenues, forget league revenues, is \$70-75 million a year. Every time you take away say 25% of the home games, you know your revenue has dropped 25%. Either way, if we don't play at full capacity, the losses are going to be big and that's around the league. Our TV contract is what it is. It's in place, so that's not going to change. We know those numbers. These are tough times for everybody and we've been fortunate here to keep most of our people on our benefits. Tom Dundon has been excellent as far as dealing with our employees. We're just hoping that come December or January, whatever that time frame is, not only from a hockey standpoint, but a building standpoint we know that next year could be a record breaking year for our building if we can get to that point. So that's what we're working towards right now.

On the AHL affiliate decision: We're getting real close to making an announcement. I don't have any signed documents yet to make an announcement, but we've looked into hopefully getting that wrapped up in a very short time. Once we do, we'll be able to talk about what we're doing.



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Brind'Amour discusses end of season, what lies ahead

Carolina Hurricanes' head coach Rod Brind'Amour met with the media via Zoom Monday to discuss the end of the team's season, Justin Williams, what lies ahead and more.

By Alec_Sawyer

Following the Carolina Hurricanes' exit from the 2020 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs this past week, Canes' head coach Rod Brind'Amour and general manager Don Waddell met with the media via Zoom to discuss the past season and what lies ahead.

Here is what Brind'Amour had to say in that meeting:

Rod Brind'Amour

On what he takes away from this year's series with the Bruins, and if there were steps forward from last year's series: I mean, there's no question about that. I felt like this year we were in every game, which obviously we were, even though I don't even know that we played our best in every game. There were times where I was like 'I don't really like what we are doing, but we're still in the game.' Obviously, our best game was the last game and unfortunately we didn't get it. We did close the gap there. It certainly felt different this year playing them than last year. The result is the same at the end of the day, but I feel like our guys especially took a big step this year, our younger players. Like I said after, as long as we learn from that the experience will be valuable moving forward.

On what strides he wants to see from Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov in 2020-21: Obviously the talent is there with those two guys, but what excites me, and you've heard me say this all the time, is their will to get better. These guys are not satisfied with where they are individually, and certainly not team wise. I think, especially seeing Sebastian after we were done, it's the look on his face of pure devastation really. This guy wants to win. When you have that will to win and that desire to work at it. Everybody wants to win, but not everybody wants to do what it takes. You obviously know with Svechnikov that's the same way. When you have those two guys as our superstar players, and they are our young guys, that's what makes you excited with where we are at and where we are headed.

On the difficulties of being in the bubble, and on how nice it was to get back and see family: You have to give credit to everybody involved. To be honest with you, it couldn't have run any smoother. Our point of view when we first came back here to train, how our staff handled everything, and then when the league took over and we got into the bubble, how smoothly everything ran. They did everything they needed to do. You have to give them full marks for that. Having said that, it's

obviously not the ideal situation. We're no different than anybody else. Family always comes first, and I think that was the big sacrifice as far as the players; that you have to leave your families for this whole time. There's a willingness to do it and they put the effort in.

On what Justin Williams has meant to the franchise, particularly in the last three years: To me, he epitomizes what we are all about. He's class. He's team first. It's just coming to do your job every day. This guy does everything right. He came here and took on a leadership role, especially when I took over. He helped put this place on the map and helped get us back on track to where we all want to be, which is to strive to be one of the best teams every year. He helped right the ship, I think. He was a key part of that for sure. If he doesn't play anymore, he left everything out there. That's not something many guys can say, that they can go out on those kinds of terms where they had absolutely nothing left in the tank. He gave it all.

On if he had a chance to talk to Williams, and on if he has any indication as to what his plans are: I've talked to him... I can't tell you one way or another. It was pretty emotional after the game talking with him. He certainly didn't let on to what he was thinking.

On if there's anything he's experienced with coaching during a pandemic that may help him moving forward: The more I did this and the more we got into it, I would say it was normal. Everything else in your life I'd say yes, but when we actually got to come in the door, aside from the masks and the awareness to social distance, everything felt normal. Everything felt the same. I can't say doing anything hockey wise I took and said 'oh, this is going to be a better way to do things.' This was the one time, when we were here for a couple hours, that everything felt normal.

On if there's anything he saw from other teams that may lead to implementing something new in the system moving forward: You're always looking for things. Everyone takes stuff from every team. At the end of the day, you'd be surprised how closely everyone does the exact same thing. We definitely talked about a couple areas that we'd like to adjust, but we do that through the year. We're just finding ways to be better. But what I do know is that you've got to know what you do well, and you've got to keep trying to get better at that. If you get away from your identity as a team, that's when you get in trouble. I know what we have to do to be successful. We have to get better in all areas for sure. Tweaking our game a little, but you certainly don't want to blow up something that you know will be successful.

TODAY'S LINKS

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<https://theathletic.com/2019151/2020/08/24/how-the-nhl-offseason-will-be-impacted-by-the-wreckage-of-the-first-round/>
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<https://www.canescountry.com/2020/8/24/21399527/brindamour-discusses-end-of-season-what-lies-ahead>



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SportScan

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

1192109 Carolina Hurricanes

It's never too early for the Hurricanes to look to next season. Especially this year.

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

AUGUST 24, 2020 02:28 PM

The Carolina Hurricanes have never conducted their end-of-season interviews in August but times, as they say, have changed with a novel coronavirus that has been relentless in 2020.

On Monday, president and general manager Don Waddell and Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour took to Zoom — another sign of the times — to assess the disjointed 2019-20 season and its end last week in the playoffs in Toronto while looking to a new season and what might come.

Some quick news items:

- That awful looking injury to forward Andrei Svechnikov proved to be a high ankle sprain and he should be ready for preseason training camp.
- No one can say what veteran winger Justin Williams' plans are for next season.
- No decisions have been made on re-signing other unrestricted free agents: defensemen Joel Edmundson, Trevor van Riemsdyk and Sami Vatanen.
- There are still plans to play the Stadium Series outdoor game next season and the jerseys have been ordered but the game also could be pushed back a year.

Brind'Amour said he did not know if Williams will decide to retire or look to play a 20th NHL season. A member of the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup champions, Williams returned to Carolina in July 2017 with the stated goal of again making the Canes a playoff team, one that made others in the league take notice.

Williams has done that. But the winger will be 39 when the 2020-21 season begins. He's still physically fit but he'd be facing an 82-game grind, plus the playoffs, if he signed for a full season.

Brind'Amour said the Canes' final game, the series-ending playoff defeat to the Boston Bruins, was an emotional one given it might have been Williams' last.

"To me, he epitomizes what we're all about. Class, team first, then coming and doing your job every day," Brind'Amour said. "He did everything right, being here, taking on a leadership role. And, I think, helped put this place back on the map and get us back on track to where we all want to be. He helped right the ship.

"If he doesn't play anymore he left everything out there and that's something not many guys can say, or leave on those terms. He has absolutely nothing left in the tank. He gave it all."

WILL THE NHL PLAY AN 82-GAME SEASON?

Waddell said with or without Williams the Canes probably will not be making "wholesale changes" to a team that was 38-25-5 when the NHL season was paused in March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We think we've taken big strides here and our young players have taken another big step this year," Waddell said.

Sebastian Aho took that step, as did Svechnikov. The Russian forward took a nasty spill in the Boston series as he battled with defenseman Zdeno Chara in front of the Boston net, but Waddell said X-rays and an MRI revealed only a sprain.

The defensive group will continue to be a strength, Waddell said. That includes defenseman Brett Pesce, who had shoulder surgery in early March, is skating again and should be good to go at training camp, Waddell said.

"We want to keep our group together as best as we can.," Waddell said, referring to the pending UFAs.

No one can say or predict how the 2020-21 NHL season will unfold. Can the league get in 82 regular-season games and the playoffs? And what about fans in the stands?

Brind'Amour said Monday there was a degree of normalcy, in terms of hockey, being in the Toronto bubble the past month. That won't be the case when the new season begins and teams travel from city to city.

"Whenever we start we know it will be a condensed schedule and it might run into the summer again next year before we all get back on track," Waddell said. "I don't think the bubble idea is something that would work for the regular season. The economics just doesn't work if you not playing with some fans, let alone all the fans.

"What we went through was fine for trying to get this season in but I don't think it's something you can look at next year."

HURRICANES' REVENUE LOSS DUE TO CORONAVIRUS

Waddell said the Canes took a financial hit last season — a "big number," he said — in having the last eight regular-season home games canceled by the NHL. Waddell said the TV contract with Fox Sports Carolinas was fulfilled when the regional network carried the Canes' qualifying round games in Toronto but the lost home revenue was substantial.

Waddell said the Canes' local revenues alone have been about \$70 million to \$75 million a year. Carolina was 22nd in the NHL in average home attendance at 16,906 before the pause.

"If we don't play at full capacity the losses are going to be big," Waddell said. "These are tough times for everybody."

At the same time, Waddell said the team plans to spend close to the NHL salary cap, which will remain flat at \$81.5 million in 2020-21.

"We are not talking about this team just making the playoffs anymore," Waddell said. "We're talking about how we're going to build a team to go deeper in the playoffs and eventually get to where all our goals are, and that's winning the Stanley Cup."

News Observer LOADED: 08.25.2020



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The Athletic / How the NHL offseason will be impacted by the wreckage of the first round

By Scott Burnside Aug 24, 2020

Just like that the NHL transitioned from Round 1 to Round 2 of its summer bubble odyssey.

While this gives little time for post-mortems and the obligatory heaping of dirt on the eight losing teams who were unceremoniously ushered from the playoffs, fear not. We are here, shovel in hand, to sift through the potential fallout for first-round losers, which includes the past two Stanley Cup champions and with one coach already losing his job.

To freak out or not to freak out, that is the question

The dilemma for many GMs (and over-involved owners) of losing teams after the first round will be determining just how much the dynamics of bubble life and the experience of playing in August in the midst of a global pandemic weighed on the outcome. In short, did the desultory losses of teams with high expectations like Calgary, Carolina, St. Louis and Washington reflect the team's true identity? Or, to put it more bluntly, did the fact that eight teams took the high dive without any one team forcing a Game 7 – frankly a shocking turn of events given the parity that marks the NHL during a normal season – reveal a hitherto unknown of a lack of character? Or can those losses be chalked up simply to circumstance? How an organization chooses to answer that question will say a lot about what happens in the coming days and who ends up paying the price for these failures. The bottom line is likely going to be the arbiter of change versus status quo, and there will be a price paid for those teams that failed to meet expectations, whether it's in terms of management change, coaching change or uprooting established veterans. One longtime NHL coach expects the next three or four weeks to be pretty crazy.

A window closing, and a door opening in Washington

Always hate the explanation that pops up after a particularly disappointing playoff series loss that a team quit on a coach. Just seems too pat. Maybe it happens but it strikes me that the relationship between a coach and the players is a lot more complex than players collectively deciding 'we don't believe in you.' Still, there did seem to be some of that in the Capitals' lethargic five-game loss to former coach Barry Trotz and the Islanders. On Sunday, the team announced they had dismissed Todd Reirden after just two seasons as head coach. A lot to unpack there as Reirden was facing his former mentor and boss, and the man for whom he took over for in Washington after the Cup fun. The firing wasn't necessarily a surprise. As one longtime coach and NHL executive said: "Goes to show you, follow a Hall of Famer and you have to figure out how to do it your way." GM Brian MacLellan indicated he was looking for experience in filling the vacant coaching spot and one source close to the team suggested a Peter Laviolette type would be a good fit. Not a hard-liner but one who will make players accountable. But this certainly isn't all on Reirden, who is one of the brightest defensive minds in the game. Clearly some of the personnel gambits didn't particularly work. Deadline acquisition Ilya Kovalchuk never hit any kind of groove with one assist in eight games. The depth scoring was non-existent with Carl Hagelin registering just one assist in eight games. Richard Panik had zero points in the first-round series loss. With an aging core, the belief that a next wave of talent is on the horizon was blunted in the embarrassing loss to the Isles. Jakub Vrana, whose play during the 2018 Stanley Cup run made it easier to say goodbye to Andre Burakovsky, who has blossomed in Colorado, had no points in eight postseason games and was denied on an overtime breakaway in Game 3 seconds before the Isles won to go up 3-0 in the series. Another forward who didn't fit the Caps plans, Chandler Stephenson, is flourishing in Vegas after being dealt there in

December. On Monday, The Athletic's Corey Pronman began rolling out his team-by-team ranking of young talent in NHL organizations and the Caps were No. 31. Whatever happens next, you can dial up the urgency in D.C., with Alex Ovechkin about to head into the final year of his contract.

One thing to consider: Reirden was at one point courted by Calgary before he signed an extension with the Caps before the 2017-18 season. "He should be one of the top assistants pursued this summer," one source familiar with the NHL coaching world. And if Geoff Ward isn't back in Calgary, Reirden might be a fit there, the source added.

The Market for Holtby

Pierre Lebrun wrote about the UFA goaltending market and it's certainly going to be both crowded and fascinating, starting with Robin Lehner, Jakob Markstrom and two-time Stanley Cup champion Corey Crawford all pending UFAs. There's also Cam Talbot, Anton Khudobin, Mike Smith, Thomas Griess and Craig Anderson. But among the most fascinating subjects will be Braden Holtby, who appears to have played his final game as a Capital. At age 30, Holtby should still be considered in his prime and he was probably the Caps' best player in their five-game series loss to the Islanders after a disappointing opening game. He's a Vezina Trophy winner and, of course, led the Caps to the Stanley Cup in 2018, winning all 16 games after starting the postseason as backup to Philipp Grubauer. But Holtby's numbers have been in decline since he won the Vezina Trophy in 2016 and then shared in the William Jennings Trophy the following year as the Caps allowed the fewest goals in the NHL. Would he be an upgrade in Calgary? You can make that case. Would he be an upgrade in Edmonton? For sure. How about Buffalo? Definitely. But the issue for GMs will be how to balance a decline in Holtby's level of play with his experience in critical moments in coming up with a dollar and term that don't send a team down the rabbit hole.

Uncertainty for the Blues

Speaking of Stanley Cup winners facing uncertainty, the St. Louis Blues threw a lot into the storyline hopper in their six-game loss to up-and-coming Vancouver. When they bounced back from an early 2-0 series deficit to tie things up, it looked like experience and the will that saw them overcome myriad obstacles last season in winning the Cup would be brought to bear against the Canucks. But injuries whittled down the roster and the goaltending sprung a leak as Jordan Binnington, benched for wins in Games 3 and 4 and then pressed back into service for Game 6, couldn't find the magic. Now the pressure will be on next season to prove that he's not a one-and-done kind of goaltender. Speaking of which, GM Doug Armstrong's decision to go short-term with Binnington, who has one year left on his bridge deal at \$4.4 million, appears to be an astute move. The critical question of the offseason is what will become of captain Alex Pietrangelo, who may have played his last game as a Blue. Hard to see how he and the team can find a way to make it work unless Pietrangelo, headed to unrestricted free agency after playing his entire career in St. Louis, is willing to take an enormous hometown discount. Earlier this season it looked like Pietrangelo might be a nice fit in Vegas, but with Alec Martinez coming over from Los Angeles with another year left on his deal, not sure that's a fit. Toronto is often mentioned as a landing spot for the right-hand shot Pietrangelo, but the Leafs have cap headaches aplenty. So maybe the Blues do find a way, although the seven-year contract extended to Justin Faulk at the start of the season as a kind of insurance policy against Pietrangelo's possible departure seems like an enormous anchor with its \$6.5 million cap hit and no-trade clause given Faulk's disappointing season as a Blue. "Don't think his series against Vancouver is going to help," said one former NHLer and analyst. "He seems to thrive on lesser teams where he can play a bigger role."

Cam Talbot allows a goal against the Stars. (Perry Nelson / USA Today Sports)

Flames on the hot seat after icy finish vs. Dallas

Certainly lots of hard questions being asked in Calgary where for the second straight year the Flames were undone by a lack of production



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from their top players and lost a series they had in their grasp. Was it the goaltending or the coaching that undid the Flames? Interim head coach Geoff Ward yanked starter Cam Talbot after Talbot allowed three goals on eight shots to erase a 3-0 Flames lead in the deciding game. Overall Talbot was excellent for the Flames and was especially solid in their qualifying round win over injury-ravaged Winnipeg. But Talbot is an unrestricted free agent and with a glut of experienced goaltenders on the market, including Dallas netminder Khudobin, it's hard to imagine the Flames don't take a good hard look there before inking Talbot to a new deal. The bigger questions remain as to what to make of a cadre of stars led by the top line of Sean Monahan, Elias Lindholm and Johnny Gaudreau, who made zero impact at even strength against the Stars as in zero combined 5-on-5 points. GM Brad Treliving pooh-poohed rumors that Gaudreau was on the market before the season, but it seems clear this core isn't up to the task of winning when it matters given it faded out in two straight playoff seasons. In St. Louis, Armstrong made hard decisions on key personnel like T.J. Oshie, David Backes and Kevin Shattenkirk before finding a lineup that brought home a Stanley Cup. Treliving may be looking at a similar dynamic if this talented team is to ever achieve liftoff.

Another coaching question in Calgary

As for interim head coach Ward, does the failure to keep pace with Dallas cost him a chance at the full-time coaching gig? Hard to believe it won't with coaches like Bruce Boudreau, Gerard Gallant, Peter Laviolette and Mike Babcock on the market. Also his handling of the goaltending was not the stuff that inspires confidence. "Colossal game/goalie mismanagement," one longtime netminder and analyst said. "Pulling Talbot was a panic move and it had the opposite effect desired; 3-3 tie, half of an elimination game left, and they put in (Dave) Rittich, who was brutal the second half of the season and colder than Antarctica." Why not call a timeout, the source asked? Fair enough. Still, another veteran NHL coach said he thinks Ward deserves another chance and, given the carousel of coaches that has been the Calgary coaching job during Treliving's tenure, maybe patience is a virtue. "He knows the room. He's been there and he can change lines with anybody," the coach said. "I know it's always the perception but my guess is he stays. He's a good man."

Disaster in the desert

Yes, technically the Coyotes won their first playoff round since a surprise run to the 2012 Western Conference final when they dumped hapless Nashville in four games in the preliminary round. But was there a more embarrassing turn by a team in the first round of the playoffs than the Coyotes who not only lost in five games to Colorado but managed to close out the series with twin 7-1 shellackings? Asked and answered. Hey, Colorado should have won this series. They're a better team, but for ownership of the Coyotes, this has to be a humbling experience and an illustration of just how far away this team is from being anything. As one western-based scout asked: What is their identity? They're not particularly fast, not particularly physical, not particularly anything. It reinforces what I wrote on the eve of the playoffs when GM John Chayka shockingly quit the team, leaving assistant GM Steve Sullivan in charge, as there remains a veritable mountain of work to be done and ownership needs to make sure they have the right people in place to do that work. They don't have a lot of time to make those decisions with the compacted time leading up to a planned start of the 2020-21 season in early December. They are set in goal with Darcy Kuemper under contract at a manageable number for the next two years (\$4.5 million), but have looming holes on the blue line and are not nearly good or deep enough down the middle. A number of sources indicated they didn't think that Sullivan was ready for a full-time GM role, but the clock is ticking on ownership to start making decisions that will keep this team from sliding back into the abyss.

Whither Taylor Hall?

So, what about the elephant in the Arizona room, the articulate and thoughtful but ultimately underwhelming Taylor Hall? Several sources said they think former Hart Trophy-winner Taylor Hall and the Coyotes

are close to a deal to keep him in Arizona. But Hall's two-point, nine-shot performance against Colorado – both points came in Game 3 – should reinforce what has been obvious since the potential unrestricted free agent was acquired from New Jersey and what scouts have been saying for a long time: Hall does not drive play and is not a cornerstone player. So, how do you determine what the appropriate dollar and term is for Hall? More specifically, how do you come to that decision without waking up with a Jeff Skinner-like albatross on your hands that cripples your team for years? One interesting thought a longtime NHL executive and talent evaluator raised: Watch Nashville. The Predators were embarrassed by Arizona in the qualifying round and need to change the pieces – again – to try and keep their Stanley Cup window open. They'd have to move some money (i.e. trading or buying out Kyle Turris and more) but Hall's best moments were under Nashville coach John Hynes when both were in New Jersey. Just saying.

Caniac collapse

The simple way to unpack Carolina's disappointing five-game loss to Boston is to make excuses. Andrei Svechnikov was injured. So was Brett Pesce. Dougie Hamilton was coming back after a long layoff due to injury. But coach Rod Brind'Amour is not an excuses guy, so it's not likely he's buying that. The plain fact is this was a significant setback. It's also a formal changing of the guard as former captain, Mr. Game 7, Justin Williams will be retiring for good, assuming he maintains the plan he set out to us earlier in the season that this would be it for him. That means that this is now Sebastian Aho's team, and it means that Aho, who was very good against the New York Rangers but not so great against Boston, needs to learn from having been schooled by Zdeno Chara, Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand. If Aho and the rest of that young core – including Svechnikov, Aho's off-times linemate Teuvo Teravainen, Vincent Trocheck and Martin Necas – can absorb the lessons from this beat-down and begin to understand that it's not just how good people say you are but how much will you have that dictates playoff success, then this will be an important moment for a team many like to be a perennial contender given its skill set and coaching.

A question of goaltending in Raleigh

How close are the Canes? Some would have you believe that if this team is healthy they are just a top-end starter in goal away from being a contender. Maybe. Petr Mrazek's laissez-faire play at the end of the first period in Game 5 that allowed Boston to score what would be the game-winner, not to mention the rotating of Mrazek and James Reimer throughout the postseason, does suggest that the Canes aren't quite good enough in goal. Not good enough to be taken seriously as a Cup contender. We know that the Hurricanes had shown interest in Robin Lehner before Lehner went to Chicago last offseason and maybe he's the answer. Both Mrazek and Reimer are under contract for next season at a total of \$6.525 million against the cap, so something would have to happen there but that doesn't seem like a Herculean task.

Future so bright you'll need sunglasses

When is a first-round loss not really a loss but a kind of win? True, coaches and players rarely speak in terms of moral victories when their teams are bounced from the playoffs, but quietly there has to be real enthusiasm in Montreal, Columbus and Chicago as all three teams won hard-fought qualifying rounds against teams that on paper were superior in Pittsburgh, Toronto and Edmonton, respectively. And all three teams gave as good as they got in squaring off against Philadelphia, Tampa and Vegas in the first round. Montreal, Columbus and Chicago all entered the return to play with significant questions and answered most, if not all, affirmatively, especially when it came to the surprising play of young guys like Kirby Dach or Dominik Kubalik in Chicago, or Pierre-Luc Dubois or Liam Foudy in Columbus, or Nick Suzuki or Jesperi Kotkaniemi in Montreal. It's still an uphill battle for all three teams to be considered sure-fire playoff teams next offseason, but all three seem to have seen their organizational evolution accelerated through this most strange of off-seasons.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.25.2020



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The Athletic / Game of Chirps: Why Vegas is the meanest team on the ice

By Thomas Drance and Daniel Nugent-Bowman Aug 24, 2020

Editor's note: The following article contains language that some may find offensive.

EDMONTON — Chirping is like a ladder. The higher you climb in the Game of Chirps, the harder you fall.

While we said goodbye to a Game of Chirps favourite in the Calgary Flames this week, it's now abundantly clear that no team in the Western Bubble is as schoolyard mean on the ice as the Vegas Golden Knights. They're the Vegas Boulevard Bullies, except most of their cruelty is verbal. Currently, the Golden Knights undisputedly wear the Game of Chirps crown.

The Golden Knight's chirp game has reached the point where, in multiple games this past week, a player on the Vegas bench literally chicken baw'd at their opponents. As a group the Golden Knights are meaner than anybody, they're like Regina George, Tywin Lannister and Crabbe and Goyle all wrapped up into one unrepentant jerk of a hockey team. It helps that they're an actual buzz saw in terms of the quality of their play too.

Chirping of course is a double-edged sword, or an Iron Throne if you will. And the risk with chirping like the Golden Knights do is that while fans (and naughty word transcribing media members) love it and it makes for good great explicit copy, it probably doesn't matter as much as we all might like to think in shaping the outcomes of these games. These are professional hockey players, after all, they've heard it all anyway.

In fact, the louder and more aggressively you chirp, the more opportunities you provide for your opponents to rub your face in it when and if they beat you. So as we enter the second round of the Western Bracket, the big question is: Will the great wheel turn and give a team out West the opportunity to rub Vegas' face in it? Or will Vegas chirp their way to another Stanley Cup Final?

As always here are some choice cuts of chirps, on-ice chatter and complaining about officiating that we overheard in the Western Bubble this week.

"That's not control." — The linesman to Avalanche forward Tyson Jost, who put himself offside by backing over the blue line — apparently without possession.

"Oh yeah. Fall down." — Coyotes bench to Nazem Kadri, who was knocked to the ice by Oliver Ekman-Larsson.

"You got that cross check?" — Avalanche goaltender Philipp Grubauer to the referee, on his way to the box to call a penalty.

"Call the fucking dive!" — Canucks bench to the officials after a Blues player fell down in the corner.

"That's a fucking dive. It's the playoffs! Fuck!" — Stars bench reacts to a holding call against Jamie Oleksiak drawn by Johnny Gaudreau.

"Come on Rads, well done, that's fucking right!" — Flames bench sarcastically applauding Alexander Radulov after Radulov took a penalty.

"That was a fucking slew foot! What the fuck was that!" — Flames bench colourfully appeals for a penalty.

"Fucking rights, nice block Kube!" — Chicago Blackhawks bench applauds Dominik Kubalik for a lovely defensive play.

"Skate, skate, skate" — Vegas bench to Blackhawks Brandon Saad as he struggled, hopping to get off the ice with a broken skate blade.

"Too many! Too many!" — Vegas bench appealing for a too many men on the ice penalty against Chicago, as Patrick Kane streaks down the wing.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" — Vegas bench reacts when Kane scores as a direct result of a missed too many men on the ice penalty.

"All right, all right, stop this, nobody wants this!" — On-ice official to Vegas and Blackhawks players after a hit by Alex Tuch on John Quenneville results in a scrum.

"Over over!" — Vegas centre Paul Stastny tries to trick Corey Crawford into a puck handling error by pretending to be a Blackhawks defender calling for the puck.

"Fuck off!" — Crawford to Stastny as he plays the puck correctly, to his teammate.

"Bawk! Bawk! Bawk!" — Someone on the Vegas bench mimed chicken noises to the Blackhawks midway through the third period of Game 5. We now suspect, based on Game 1 between the Golden Knights and Vancouver, that the player was most likely Ryan Reaves.

"That was icing, what the fuck!" — A Blackhawks assistant coach reacts to the officials not calling a borderline icing in Chicago's favour as they tried to claw their way back into Game 5.

"Fuck!" — Jeremy Colliton echoing his assistant coach's complaint.

"FUCK!" — A Stars player reacts audibly and forcefully, before the goal horn can even sound after Andrew Mangiapane opened the scoring.

"They're on the ropes!" — Flames bench shortly after the Flames took a 2-0 lead in Game 6, as the Flames dumped it in and went forechecking. Calgary would make it 3-0 moments later.

"Wooo! Let's fucking go!" — Dallas bench after Denis Gurianov scores early in the second period to reduce Calgary's lead to 3-2.

"If I'm a Calgary fan, there's still hope... But I'm not!" — Kevin Bieksa trolling Flames fans while Calgary is down 6-3 after two periods in Game 6.

LEGENDARY WORK FROM KEVIN BIEKSA ON THE PANEL THIS EVENING. WOW. PIC.TWITTER.COM/A1M1HF2EOD

— THOMAS DRANCE (@THOMASDRANCE) AUGUST 21, 2020

"THAT WAS A FUCKING ICING!" — Canucks player to the linesman in Game 6 against St. Louis.

"Wake the fuck up!" — Blues player trying to get the team to get going, shortly after the Canucks took a 2-0 lead in Game 6.

"That a boy, go fucking get it!" — Canucks bench urges Jake Virtanen on as the Vancouver forward chases down a Blues defender on the forecheck.

"High stick, high stick!" — Official blows down a lengthy Blues offensive possession because the puck was struck by an offensive player's high stick.

"Oh coooome on!" — Blues react to the play being blown dead.

"Come on! Come on! GO THROUGH HIM!" — An increasingly annoyed voice from the Blues bench urges on 6-foot-6 Colton Parayko as he battles the 5-foot-10 Tyler Motte along the wall. Motte came out with the puck.

"Fuck off, he's standing right there!" — Blues bench protests a call against Alex Pietrangolo early in the third period.



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"Come on boys, we need this, we need this!" – Blues bench to their penalty killers, with the score at 4-0 in Game 6.

"Are you fucking kidding me right there Motter, great fucking play!" – J.T. Miller reacts to Tyler Motte's Game 6 goal that restored a three-goal lead for the Canucks.

"Fucking rights Fants!" – The Canucks bench stick-taps their teammate after an Oscar Fantenberg shot block.

"You want to take out your fucking whistle?!" – Blues forward David Perron furious over a non-call.

"Watch the middle, watch the fucking middle!" – Canucks bench encouraging their penalty killers early in Game 1 versus Vegas.

"Atta boy, fucking rights Loui!" – Loui Eriksson, having watched the middle, intercepts a Vegas pass attempt into the slot and clears the puck.

"Fucking right Eagle!" – Canucks bench after an Alex Edler dump in. Edler had made the play under significant pressure from Vegas forward Jonathan Marchessault.

"Don't be soft there bud, that wasn't even a hit!" – Vegas bench chirps Elias Pettersson after Pettersson was knocked off his skates on a neutral zone rush attempt in the first period of Game 1.

"All fucking night, baby!" – Vegas' Reaves after hitting Canucks forward Motte mid-way through the first period of Game 1. If you listen toward the end of this clip, you can hear the Vegas bench carrying on during the line change.

"Two minutes because he wouldn't stay on his fucking feet?" – Vegas bench complains to the officials after forward Nick Cousins is assessed a two-minute penalty for tripping J.T. Miller.

"Bawk, bawk, bawk!" – Definitely Reaves bawking at Roussel. Reaves bawked at various Canucks skaters multiple times, with one being picked up by television microphones:

IF YOU TURN THE AUDIO UP YOU CAN HEAR THE BROADCAST MICS PICKING UP RYAN REAVES MAKING CHICKEN NOISES FROM THE BENCH PIC.TWITTER.COM/IVTV0FFHNR

— DIMITRI FILIPOVIC (@DIMFILIPOVIC) AUGUST 24, 2020

"There you go you little squirt!" – Vegas bench mockingly encourages Pettersson as he skates through the neutral zone.

"Hey water boy, pull your visor down." – Vegas bench chirps Quinn Hughes. All night through Game 1, Vegas seemed to refer to the Canucks super rookie as "the water boy."

"Oooh through the middle, eh? I would've decked you 40, I would've decked you." – Vegas bench reacts to Pettersson carrying the puck through the slot.

"He's spearing him in the nuts!" "Can you believe that?" – Two players on the Canucks bench react to Vegas forward Tuch spearing Canucks defender Troy Stecher in the nether region away from the play.

"Stop whining and try to do something here!" – Vegas bench reacts to Vancouver appealing for a penalty on Tuch.

"Quit cheating, Bo!" – With the score 3-0, the Vegas bench reacts to Canucks captain Bo Horvat attempting to blow the zone when possession seemed to change. In fact, the Vegas forward managed to take the puck back before the Canucks defender could make a play.

"Hey why'd you do that? You're not even playing next game. Yeah! Yeah you heard me! You're coming out." – Vegas bench reacts to a Virtanen slash on Brayden McNabb late in Game 1

"Holy fuck are we good!" – An unidentified player from the Vegas bench, rubbing it in late in the third period of a 5-0 game.

"Vrrooomm!" – A player on the Vegas bench making a sound effect like he's playing with a toy airplane as Tuch zoomed in on Thatcher Demko for a scoring chance late in Game 1.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.25.2020

1192209 Websites

The Athletic / The legend of Nathan MacKinnon at the 2011 Canada Games

Ryan S. Clark Aug 24, 2020

Being the development director for Hockey Nova Scotia means Darren Sutherland hears things. One of those things he heard back in 2011 was that Nova Scotia thinks it has some sort of wunderkind. That they thought he had a chance to be the next great NHL phenom and that he was from the same hamlet as Sidney Crosby. How he might be good for Nova Scotia, but he might be great when compared to other players his age in Canada.

The Canada Games were set to occur and the small province of Nova Scotia had the honor of hosting the nation's premier youth sporting event that comes around once every four years.

Nathan MacKinnon is the word throughout the NHL right now. The Hart Trophy finalist is one of the biggest stars remaining in the Stanley Cup playoffs, as the Colorado Avalanche attempt to win it all. Each goal he scores generates excitement. Every one of his highlights is trademarked by repeated bursts of speed that have recently witnessed his brute strength garner acclaim. Avs fans and MacKinnon die-hards claim this man as if they raised him from infancy. Those new to MacKinnon and the Avs are gaining a greater understanding of why so many people are losing their minds every time he simultaneously shreds an ice surface and an opposing team's confidence in one or two strides.

But in 2011, he was a 15-year-old with a buzzcut flying around the ice terrorizing other players his age to no end who needed to show that the hype was well deserved.

"Sitting there and watching Nathan go through it, I was really nervous because I wanted him to do really well," Sutherland recalled. "I wanted it for him. Just to prove it. He could have still had a bad tournament and Nathan still would have found his way. ... Especially a kid like Nathan that you know wants it so bad. Whether or not he had a good week, he was going to find his way. It's just a good week might make it easier."

And in proving himself, MacKinnon made everyone understand that Nova Scotia shouldn't just be happy to play against larger provinces like Ontario and Quebec. For MacKinnon, it was about getting his teammates and the province as a whole to believe that Nova Scotia – despite its humility and small stature – bows down to no one.

Not now. Not ever.

"We were overmatched when you look at the rosters of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia," said Chris Donnelly, who coached Nova Scotia at the Canada Games. "We were able to keep it close. We had Quebec and were up 3-1 and we lost in overtime, and we lost 5-4 to Ontario with a late goal by (Max) Domi. By being that close, our team got recognition for playing that well and Nathan did a lot of the scoring. It led to people going, 'Wow. He's keeping this team in this tournament and in the competition with what he is doing in those games.' He was a major reason for that and it helped his stock going forward.

"When I see him on TV now, I just see the tremendous things he does and he was doing those things at the Canada Games as well."



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For Nova Scotia, being the host province meant there was an expectation. Having MacKinnon only amplified those demands. Crosby was already establishing the fact he was the best player in the world, or at least in the discussion. The Pittsburgh Penguins superstar had already claimed the first of three Stanley Cups, scored the game-winning goal for Canada at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver while winning all sorts of individual accolades. Players like Crosby do not come around often. That meant there was no possible way Nova Scotia could strike it rich by producing another future, all-world talent from Cole Harbour.

Right?

"He was on our radar," said Detroit Red Wings defenseman Madison Bowey, who played for Team Manitoba. "Everyone in Western Canada and all of Canada knew what he was about. You heard how good he was with the puck and how strong he was and the explosiveness. We did not know what to expect but we saw some clips. We knew that he was a guy who could carry that team and someone that we had marked on our radar and in Game No. 1, he showed why he was so special."

Stories were being shared about another Cole Harbour youth who was producing gaudy statistics. He was leaving everyone in his wake. The decision was made to have him play against older competition with the idea that he may have found his match. But even then MacKinnon was displaying a level of dominance that eventually led to a question that has followed him to this day.

Is this kid about to be the next Sidney Crosby? Those comparisons along with the fact they are both from Cole Harbour is what unites them. But as Donnelly noted, there were so many differences between the two.

"Defensemen could not skate backwards fast enough to keep up with him and he was blowing right by them," Donnelly said of MacKinnon. "The numbers went through the roof and the things most people would say was that he was going to be a star. It happens with a lot of guys when they are young and you see them put up big numbers but the game does catch up with them. Nathan and Sid were able to do those things that made them different."

Certain items were evident with MacKinnon. He possessed a level of speed that allowed him to accelerate all over the ice while applying that same quickness to fire off shots with a release just as dangerous as his skating. MacKinnon also had a relentless drive to get better and be the best. Really, the only concern anyone had was if he had the size to compete against larger, more physical skaters who could knock him off the puck.

But after two years away at the famed Shattuck-St. Mary's program in Faribault, Minn., MacKinnon grew into a longer and leaner body. Having that size meant he was equipped to compete with larger players. Now add skill and speed to that package. Yeah, it was clear Nova Scotia had something here when it came to whether or not MacKinnon could operate as one of this team's best players.

Playing in the Canada Games is a massive deal for a number of reasons. There is the association that comes with representing your province. But for hockey players, it is a platform to gain more exposure against some of the best U16 talent in the nation – if not, the world. Scouts from all levels of the game traveled to Halifax to see if they could find the next star or a future diamond that needed mining.

"That was the first real tournament that everyone is watching," said Florida Panthers prospect goaltender Philippe Desrosiers, who played for Team Quebec. "There are scouts there and it is on TV and it is a big deal for all of us."

At that time, Nova Scotia used a cattle call approach by hosting a tryout with the province's U16 players. Hockey Nova Scotia used that identification camp to narrow its list to 40 players before determining who made the cut.

"First of all, what stood out was his first step or two and after that, he was in full flight," Donnelly said of MacKinnon. "It was (as) consistent then as it is now. I coached Major Junior for 11 years and I had a lot of talented

guys come through. But to have that acceleration is hard to find in a player and he possessed that (at) a very young age. He's also extremely competitive, too. The combination of his tenacity and speed would make him a nightmare to defend against. His practices were intense. Every drill, he would attack them. The game you see him play was similar to the practice level he would compete at. I was quite taken back by how intense he was.

"His emotional control was going to be a question in terms of him trying to master and harness that control. Nobody likes to be on the other side of someone getting the best of them but certainly almost nobody is incapable of having that happen to them at some point."

Everything regarding Donnelly's assessment of MacKinnon's competitive drive was reinforced by what the teenager wrote on his player bio form for the Canada Games.

MacKinnon wrote that "I will bring intensity, leadership, and passion in all of my games," while stating his personal role model was his father for coaching and motivating him to play hockey from the start. He even added that his mother participated in the 1977 Canada Games.

Perhaps the response that said it all was when MacKinnon was asked about his goal for the Canada Games.

"I want to come 1st."

Know this about the Canada Games. Timing is everything for a province trying to field its strongest crop of U16 talent. Especially for a province like Nova Scotia. They have around 17,000 youth players. Larger provinces such as Ontario possessed more than 240,000 youth players, which would be enough to be the second-largest city in Nova Scotia.

Alberta's roster was led by Winnipeg Jets duo Eric Comrie and Josh Morrissey, along with Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Dillon Heatherington. British Columbia had Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry, Buffalo Sabres forward Curtis Lazar, Buffalo Sabres center Sam Reinhart and Vegas Golden Knights defenseman Shea Theodore. Ontario's group consisted of Montreal Canadiens center Max Domi, Vancouver Canucks center Bo Horvat, Edmonton Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse and Boston Bruins winger Nick Ritchie. Quebec brought a team that featured Canadiens winger Jonathan Drouin, Ottawa Senators winger Anthony Duclair and Toronto Maple Leafs center Frederik Gauthier.

"It was never this, 'Holy Shit!' moment at all," MacKinnon's teammate and friend to this day Ryan Falkenham said of playing other teams. "Those were the top guys and some of the top guys in the world for our age and that never really dawned on me. Not even back then I was like, 'Oh. They have Darnell Nurse or Max Domi.' A big reason for that was we had Nate. We had our firepower. That was a big reason, too. With those other superstars, everyone knew about them. They were this and they were that. I don't think we really thought much of it.

"We had the best player in the tournament sitting beside us in our dressing room."

Nova Scotia was more than just MacKinnon in terms of players who reached the NHL. Avalanche defenseman Ryan Graves was there. As was Chicago Blackhawks forward Matthew Highmore, who made the team as an undrafted player.

That said, Nova Scotia was not granted any favors in pool play where they shared a group with British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. Nova Scotia endured a difficult start to the tournament. Ontario grabbed a 5-0 victory, while British Columbia catapulted to an 8-3 win. MacKinnon scored against British Columbia but Nova Scotia was still 0-2 ahead of its third game against Quebec. Facing Quebec, however, was closer in terms of the final scoreline but it also saw this 5-foot-9 teenager donning a dark blue and white No. 22 sweater from Nova Scotia announce his presence to the nation in a rather memorable fashion.

"I think the gameplay for us was just to play our game and we'll see what will happen," Desrosiers said. "(MacKinnon) was a key player for sure.



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You can notice him on the ice because he was the best player in the world at that time. Our team did a pretty good job, I think.”

Drouin, who was MacKinnon's future teammate with the Halifax Mooseheads, scored the opening goal to give Quebec the edge. That lead lasted less than 30 seconds thanks to MacKinnon. Nova Scotia was in Quebec's zone when a teammate played a pass to MacKinnon that led to him skating and ripping off a wrist shot from the upper portion of the faceoff circle to beat Desrosiers for a 1-1 tie. MacKinnon skated behind the net and celebrated with his teammates until he took off and made a beeline toward the Nova Scotia bench where he hopped over the boards and was immediately mobbed by everyone.

It would eventually become a 2-2 tie late in the second period when MacKinnon grabbed his second goal of the game.

Quebec had dumped the puck into the Nova Scotia zone when goaltender Jacob Fancy corralled possession behind the net and cleared it out of the zone. MacKinnon went from being in the slot to quickly hugging the boards down the left wing. He sped through the neutral zone and was in a one-on-one with a defenseman that soon turned into a 2-on-1 opportunity.

MacKinnon turned his head just enough to make the defenseman commit to playing the pass. By this point, MacKinnon had the defender on figurative and literal skates when he rushed the net. The defenseman lunged at MacKinnon but it was too late. He was already at Desrosiers' doorstep and quickly flicked his wrists to lift the puck over Desrosiers' glove to give Nova Scotia a 3-2 lead over one of the tournament favorites.

The reaction was slightly delayed until the crowd inside the Halifax Metro Centre, now the Scotiabank Centre, rose to their feet and screamed in celebration. MacKinnon used his right glove to touch the ice before jumping into the boards right as the rest of his team came over to hug him.

Nova Scotia scored again for a 4-2 lead, but Quebec tied it with 57 seconds left in regulation. The game went to overtime before going to a shootout. Desrosiers stopped the first shot with Drouin converting his opportunity to give La Belle Province the advantage. MacKinnon was next. He started deep in his own zone in an attempt to gain extra momentum en route to approaching the net.

“I think he did a leg kick, a fake and he shot it right into my glove. I was really nervous,” Desrosiers said. “That is the best player. I thought, ‘We make a save here. We have a chance to win.’”

MacKinnon played it straight and fired a wrist shot while lifting his right leg. Desrosiers snagged the puck and his majestic follow-through indicated he had possession and that MacKinnon was not going to score again. Duclair was denied in the shootout while Falkenham, who was Nova Scotia's flag bearer for the opening ceremonies, was also stopped by Desrosiers.

That's it. Game over. Quebec wins 5-4 in a shootout with Nova Scotia falling to 0-3 in Group A.

What happened after the loss became is Sutherland's favorite memory of MacKinnon. TSN and other media wanted to hear from Nova Scotia's star. Sutherland walked MacKinnon to the press conference. MacKinnon told him that he was “so bitter we lost.” Sutherland said he felt the same way. That is when the teenager asked Sutherland what he should say to the media.

Sutherland told MacKinnon to be honest, to say what was on his mind. That Nova Scotia should have never lost the game.

“That was a turning point, I think, in terms of how we perceived ourselves and having a bit higher expectations,” Sutherland said of the mentality for Nova Scotia's young hockey players. “That it was not good enough anymore to hang around with bigger provinces. That is my memory of Nathan. ... I think looking back, that is what I will always remember about him. That is a staple for him and he wants to win so much.”

Nova Scotia went to the qualifying round where it faced Newfoundland and Labrador. MacKinnon scored a hat trick and chipped in with two assists in a 7-2 thrashing. That setup another date with Ontario in the quarterfinal round. MacKinnon scored again but Ontario was too much in a 5-3 win that sent Nova Scotia to the fifth-through-eighth-place bracket where they met Bowey and Manitoba.

One of the focal points for Manitoba was to overload Nova Scotia. Another was to do its best to at least slowdown MacKinnon. It worked. Manitoba grabbed a 4-1 win and kept MacKinnon off the scoresheet. Bowey might have had the most memorable performance of that afternoon as he not only scored a goal but he succeeded in shutting down MacKinnon.

“For me going in, my job was to be the lockdown defenseman,” Bowey said. “You're starting off that part of the tournament and you're getting matched up against the best player in the tournament. His explosiveness was something even at that young age. You see him now and for me, he is my MVP choice. Back then, he always had his head on a swivel and he knew where he was going to be moving the puck and to do that at such a high level with that speed combined with everything else he had, is special. That was the biggest thing I noticed was his hockey IQ mixed with his raw talent and it was special.”

MacKinnon and Nova Scotia moved on to the seventh-place game where they faced New Brunswick. His final game of the tournament resulted in him finishing with a goal and an assist in a 5-3 victory. Nova Scotia finished with a 2-4-1 record. British Columbia took gold, Quebec finished second and Alberta claimed third place. Lazar was the leading scorer of the Canada Games with 12 goals and 17 points, while MacKinnon was tied with Reinhart for fourth place with eight goals and 11 points.

All of MacKinnon's on-ice exploits carry a certain amount of gravity for those who were there when it happened. But that tournament also provided a bit of foreshadowing for what was awaiting him down the road.

MacKinnon received more exposure than Nova Scotia initially believed. Pretty soon, it became a mini-battle between local media who had covered MacKinnon from the jump versus national media who wanted to provide a spotlight into the nation's latest teenage sensation.

And throughout the experience, it was MacKinnon's leadership, even as a 15-year-old, that provided a calming effect for the rest of his teammates.

“He was like, ‘Guys, this is no big deal. Just go about and play hockey,’” Donnelly said. “Having him rise to the occasion certainly made our group settle in pretty good.”

MacKinnon's main focus was winning, Falkenham added. The best way for him to lead was not to make some impassioned speech or some other verbal gesture. For MacKinnon, it was about pushing and pulling other guys along during those private moments in practices or in games when nobody was looking.

And remember. MacKinnon was doing all of this while also having to answer questions about being the next Nova Scotian superstar.

“There are the people who felt he was the next Sidney Crosby and there were doubters for sure. ... It was always different for him than other superstars and guys who were supposed to be that good. He stood out by far and nobody could even really be compared to him,” Falkenham said. “Guys ahead of him who were supposed to be great players and they weren't when they were compared to him.”

“Lot of people knew that but doubted it because of his age. ... In my opinion, you saw him play and he was light years ahead of everyone else around him.”

Falkenham said he and the rest of the team did not realize the example they were setting for children throughout the province. They more or less viewed it as just a group of teenagers playing hockey. It did not dawn on



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them that their team changed the perception of how Nova Scotian players viewed themselves.

But that realization came in 2015. MacKinnon was already in the NHL with the Avalanche. He was selected first in the 2013 NHL Draft and captured the Calder Memorial Trophy. Hockey Nova Scotia had Falkenham, who is now a coach, and MacKinnon speak to the team that ended up beating British Columbia for fifth place that year. It just so happens that year's roster featured another future Avalanche player in prospect forward Shane Bowers.

Plus, if that is not enough, there is always that reminder Nova Scotia is still the same place that gave the world Crosby, MacKinnon and Brad Marchand.

"Nova Scotians are nice and friendly but I think a lot of us Nova Scotians have that edge," Falkenham said. "When it comes down to something like a sport or just winning and losing and competing, we have that reputation of being nice and soft. There is more to it than that. A lot of us have that edge and that comes with the way we were all brought up. Contrary to the belief of being polite, quiet, friendly and talkative, and being from Nova Scotia, Nate really is all those things.

"But when it is time to compete and time to win, he is not different from a lot of Nova Scotians in that sense."

The Athletic LOADED: 08.25.2020

1192210 Websites

The Athletic / Pronman: 2020-21 NHL organizational rankings

Corey Pronman Aug 24, 2020

Welcome to The Athletic's look at the top young players in hockey and our 2020 ranking of the NHL organizations' young talent.

This year's organizational ranking will be different than previous years. First, it is occurring before the NHL Draft and not after, although I will make an updated version following the draft.

Second, this year's version will have full evaluations with tool grades of all players in an organization who are 22 years old or younger as of Sept. 15, 2020

, regardless of how many NHL games they've played, to go along with the rest of the players in the pipeline.

It will not include skaters older than 22 as of Sept. 15, 2020

, who have played 25 NHL games in a season or 50 career games; goalies with 10 games in a season or 25 in a career; nor any player age 26 or older as of Sept. 15, 2020

Thus, all players from the 2016 to 2019 NHL drafts who were first-year eligible at their draft are incorporated into this year's organizational rankings.

There were pros and cons to this decision. The pros were the ability to incorporate a lot of great young players who were on the fringe of graduating based on my old definition, those who were barely regular NHLers or had been sent back to the minors but were cut out because they were "graduates." The cons are the inevitable complaints when people see where Toronto is ranked, largely on the back of Auston Matthews. There is no perfect way to define the players for this purpose; ultimately someone is going to be upset by the way I set this up, but I try to make this feature better every year by getting closer to an ideal definition.

Another change this year is a stricter standard of grading. I felt last year's version was too lenient and too complicated, with too many categories of players and too many players included who, practically speaking, weren't NHL prospects.

The Athletic LOADED: 08.25.2020

1192211 Websites

The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: In a copycat NHL, 8 lessons to learn from the 8 remaining teams

By Sean McIndoe Aug 24, 2020

The NHL is a copycat league.

We know that, because we hear it all the time. That's especially true around playoff time, as the list of eliminations grows and those teams try to figure out what went wrong. Inevitably, as we narrow down the field and eventually crown a champion, everyone comes up with the same plan: Point at whoever won and say "do what they did".

Of course, those lessons keep changing. If a big team wins the Cup, everyone wants size. If it's a smaller team, we pivot to speed and skill. You need a stud blueliner, unless you don't. Never spend big on goaltending, unless you should. Build around veteran depth, but stay young. Make trades, but don't disrupt chemistry, and sign lots of free agents, but don't mess up your cap.

What lessons will we learn from 2020? Nobody knows yet. But based on the teams that are left, there are some lessons that fans can hope the league will learn. After all, some ideas and concepts just make the NHL more fun, and all else being equal we should hope that teams decide to copy those. So today, let's take a look at the eight teams left, and take a fan's perspective on the copycat lesson we'd like to see everyone learn from them.

(Will it all be wishful thinking when GMs inevitably conclude that the answer is "more grit"? Yes, but shut up, let us have hope.)

The team: Vegas Golden Knights

The lesson: You can still trade your way to a championship.

Remember trading? Trading was fun. For you kids out there, teams used to occasionally exchange assets, often in large transactions that we used to call blockbuster. This was back before the salary cap made every GM's job too hard. Ask your grandparents, they'll tell you.

OK, I'm getting dramatic here, and this is a topic I may have already mentioned once or twice or roughly a million times. Trading is still part of the NHL, even if we don't see the sort of wide-ranging moves that we used to. But for many teams, it doesn't seem to be a priority. Build through the draft, the thinking goes, and then supplement with a few well-timed moves only when the moment's right.

The Knights didn't do that. Granted, they kind of couldn't; being an expansion team has a way of limiting your options. I doubt many teams are going to bother with trying to copy a team that's only existed for three years. But it's still worth pointing out how aggressive the Knights have been when it comes to making trades, not just around their expansion draft but in the seasons since. They went big for Max Pacioretty. They won the Mark Stone sweepstakes. And this year they went out and got Robin Lehner even though they already had a goalie. That seems to be paying off. Guess they had to take a stab at it.

Again, nobody can point at the Knights and say "copy everything they did," because expansion drafts aren't an option for anyone outside Seattle. But if they win it all in Year 3, it's at least going to get tougher for



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GMs to tell us about how they just can't be expected to make important trades anymore. (Especially at the deadline, but we'll hit that point again in a little bit.)

The team: Vancouver Canucks

The lesson: Offense isn't the enemy.

This one's not complicated. Defense might win championships, but goals are fun, and if you watch the Canucks you're going to see more goals in a typical game than you will for any other contender.

The Canucks scored 228 goals in the regular season, good for second in the West behind Colorado. But they also gave up 217, more than any other team that's still standing. At nearly 6.5 combined goals per game, the Canucks lead the remaining teams by a decent margin.

I'm not naive enough to think that a Canucks Cup win would change the defense-first mentality that permeates the league – that ship sailed decades ago. There are no offense-friendly NHL coaches. There are only defensive coaches who can't get their teams to lock it down as much as they want.

Still, we can hold out hope that an unexpected Canucks run might at least remind a few coaches – or the GMs that hire them – that the idea is to put the puck into the other team's net more often than it goes in yours, and that a 5-4 win still counts as a win. Wishful thinking? Probably, but we need all the help we can get.

The team: Philadelphia Flyers

The lesson: You can trust your young goalie (maybe).

Goalies are weird. That's not exactly breaking news to longtime fans, but try explaining the position to a newbie. The goalie can be the most important player in any given matchup, with the ability to single-handedly win or lose a game or even a series. But we're never completely sure who's good and who isn't, and sometimes guys we've never heard of become superstars, at least temporarily.

And oh yeah: goalie prospects take forever to develop. Your team drafts a guy, you get excited hearing about how good they'll be someday, and then they just ... disappear. Not completely, of course. But while your team's best forward and blue line prospects start making their NHL debuts within a season or two, if not immediately, that goalie just lingers off in the distance. For years.

Look around the league. Thatcher Demko just finished his first year as a full-time NHLer, six years after he was drafted. Ilya Samsonov took five. The KHL means Ilya Sorokin still hasn't arrived, and he's already 25. Your favorite team's best goalie is probably in a similar boat.

It didn't used to be this way. Top goaltending prospects used to show up fairly quickly, just like other positions. Tom Barrasso had a Vezina-winning season at 18. Patrick Roy's big breakout came when he was 20. Martin Brodeur's Calder season came at 21. Grant Fuhr was the Vezina runner-up at 19.

Enter Carter Hart, the Flyers goalie who debuted at 20 and has established himself as a star despite just turning 22 this month. That's old school, and it's been fun to watch a team make a run with a baby-faced goalie. And hey, it's not like the Flyers haven't watched a young rookie have some playoff success before.

Granted, not every team has a Carter Hart waiting in the wings, and nobody wants to see young goalies rushed into starting jobs before they're ready. But maybe not every goalie needs six years in the minors and three more as a backup before they're ready to handle the big job. Watching Hart dominate might help nudge us back to trusting the kids.

(Just please get him to stop talking about how he grew up watching Carey Price, it's making me feel very old.)

The team: New York Islanders

The lesson: The right coach and GM can change everything.

This one's a little tricky, because nobody roots for people to get fired. But changes behind the bench and in the front office are a part of pro sports, and when your team has an opening, a typical fan might start hoping they can land the biggest names possible.

It doesn't always lead to success – see Mike Babcock in Toronto or Peter Chiarelli in Edmonton. Often, those big names are big names based on what they did in the past, and that might not line up with what a team needs going forward. But it's undeniably fun to watch a team go all-in on a big hire.

The Islanders seemed like they were headed to the basement in 2018, with John Tavares on his way out from a team that had won one playoff round in a quarter century. But Lou Lamoriello brought stability and a little swagger, and Barry Trotz turned around the team's fortunes. With almost 50 years of NHL experience and four Cup rings between them, it was clear what the Islanders were going for.

Going after big-time veteran minds won't always lead to success, and more than a few of us doubted it would for the Islanders. And in a league that can already seem like way too much of an old boys club, there has to be room for fresh eyes instead of the same old recycled voices. But every now and then, it's fun to just sit back and go "Wow, they hired that guy?" Sometimes, it even works.

The team: Boston Bruins

The lesson: Load up that top line.

Confession: When I was a kid playing hockey video games, I'd often go into the options menu and turn off line changes. It wasn't that I didn't appreciate the depth guys, or the strategy involved in mixing and matching to get the right combinations. But there was a primal sort of fun to just taking a team's three best forwards, putting them all on the same line, and watching them wreak havoc.

NHL coaches used to operate pretty much the same way. But over time, strategies shifted. Some teams started pairing two stars together with a rotating cast of third wheels. Others broke up their stars altogether, ensuring that they could roll three or four lines with scoring potential. That makes a lot of sense. But as a fan, there's always a part of me that just wants to see a team's best guys all out there together, as often as possible.

The Bruins certainly aren't the only team that often puts its best three forwards on the same line; both teams in the Stars/Avalanche series have been doing it, and most teams will at least try it when things get desperate. But the Bruins' Bergeron-Marchand-Pastrnak line might be the very best in hockey, and they've been together for so long that it feels weird to see any of them take an occasional shift with anyone else. Most teams don't have elite-level guys at center and both wings, of course, but some of the better ones do. Here's hoping they occasionally copy the Bruins and hit up that options menu.

The team: Dallas Stars

The lesson: There's still room for big-name veterans.

My love of a good Old Guy Without a Cup story is well documented, and the Stars are loaded with them this year. Ben Bishop is hurt, but they've got Blake Comeau, Andrej Sekera, Anton Khudobin, Andrew Cogliano and oh yeah, the best remaining OGWAC in the league, 36-year-old Joe Pavelski. And that's in addition to Corey Perry, trying to revive his career at 35.

Look, today's NHL is a young man's league. We all get that. Players peak in their mid-20s, and the days of the typical star playing at a high level well into their 30s are largely gone. Everyone knows this. OK, fine, everyone except NHL GMs on UFA day knows this.

But while adding a recognizable name whose best days are probably behind him might be a shaky strategy, it still makes for a great story. Whether it's a guy chasing a Cup, or trying to rebuild a reputation, or just finding a new home and a fresh start, seeing one team go out and collect well-known names is always interesting. It doesn't always work, and it



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might not for the Stars, who are one of the older teams left but far from ancient. But if they win it all, here's hoping that a few more GMs decide to copy the Pavelski/Perry model. (Just, uh, maybe not your favorite team's GM.)

The team: Colorado Avalanche

The lesson: It's possible to go from really bad to really good, really quickly.

The Avalanche are rolling, and might look like the favorite right now. They're so good that it's easy to forget how awful they were just three years ago. But that 2016-17 team was historically bad – maybe the worst team of the entire cap era – and after whiffing on the trade deadline, they didn't even get a top-three pick for their troubles.

Yet here we are, just three years later, and the Avs might be the best team in the league. That's kind of cool, especially if you cheer for a team that just finished near the bottom of the standings. There is hope. It can be done.

Sure, it helps to have Nathan MacKinnon, not to mention a young Mikko Rantanen and other pieces in place. But as fans, we're often lectured about patience when it comes to rebuilds, usually from GMs who don't seem to want to have their work judged until they've had at least five years of pressure-free tinkering.

Sometimes they're right, and nobody's suggesting that everyone can be the Avalanche. But if you're a fan of a team like the Red Wings or Sabres where there isn't much hope right now, it can be nice to at least pretend. And if you're tired of hearing your favorite team's GM preach patience while he lets another offseason go by without actually doing anything, an Avalanche championship might turn up the heat just a little bit.

The team: Tampa Bay Lightning

The lesson: Contenders can go hard at the trade deadline.

The Lightning have built a powerhouse over the last decade or so, and not all of the lessons we can learn from them are especially helpful. Draft superstars with top-two picks? Thanks. Get your star players to sign below-market deals? Great insight. Draft a guy 58th overall who turns into an MVP? Good to know, can't believe we didn't think of that.

But while the core of this team was largely in place years ago, the Lightning have been aggressive about adding pieces and getting better at every opportunity. For a while, that meant trading with the Rangers every few months. But this year, they went old school by loading up at the deadline, dealing not one but two first-round picks plus a top prospect to add forward depth in the form of Barclay Goodrow and Blake Coleman.

Were those good deals? Maybe! Not everyone agreed, with the Coleman deal especially raising a few eyebrows. So far, the postseason results have been mixed; Goodrow has been pointless in every game except one, while Coleman has three points in nine games. With both guys playing third-line minutes, it seems unlikely that either will be clogging up Conn Smythe ballots.

But even with that said, it was refreshing to see a contender load up at the deadline. That used to happen a lot, and it was a huge part of what made the day so fun. One team would trade away a chunk of their future for an immediate upgrade, which put pressure on the next team to do the same, and soon you had bidding wars and a bunch of surprising deals. But over the years, conventional wisdom has shifted away from those sort of moves, and teams have become more protective of draft picks. That's probably smart, especially as we enter a flat-cap world. But as a fan, it's way more fun when the deadline is filled with big swings. Goodrow and Coleman may or may not qualify, but if the Lightning win the Cup this year, it will make it just a little harder for GMs to sit on their hands at the 2021 deadline.

(As long as we all agree to ignore some of the other teams that tried to load up in February.)

The Athletic LOADED: 08.25.2020

1192212 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Khudobin steals the show as Stars take two-game lead over Avalanche

Ken Wiebe | August 25, 2020

Special teams were critical in this impressive comeback, though all of that would have been a moot point were it not for the dynamite goaltending of Anton Khudobin.

Yes, a pair of power-play goals during a two-man advantage absolutely helped the Dallas Stars turn the tables during the second period of a game that could have gone sideways in a hurry.

But it was Khudobin that made the important saves that prevented the Colorado Avalanche from extending the lead and possibly putting this game on ice.

Despite another explosive effort from the scoring leader of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Stars interrupted the latest edition of the Nathan MacKinnon Show with a 5-2 triumph over the Avalanche on Monday night to take a 2-0 lead in this best-of-seven series.

"(Khudobin) was a big part of that," said Stars forward Joe Pavelski, who scored his seventh goal of the playoffs to cue the comeback. "He made some big saves and we knew that was going to be one of the better pushes they were going to have. When they push, sometimes you've got to hold on at times. We had to get our game going. We had to get emotionally involved, physically involved.

"It was up to us to kind of catch up and (Khudobin) did a good job of finding us some extra time to not let this game get out of hand."

The Stars made life a bit more difficult for themselves with a flat opening period that saw MacKinnon record more shots on goal (seven) than the entire Dallas hockey club (six, compared to the 20 the Avalanche produced).

The ice was tilted significantly, as MacKinnon and linemate Mikko Rantanen each delivered a goal and an assist as Colorado scored twice with the man advantage.

MacKinnon is up to five points in the series, 16 in the post-season and has put together a 10-game playoff point streak, which ties a franchise record shared previously by Marian Stastny and Joe Sakic (who is currently the Avalanche general manager).

But after minor penalties to Avalanche blue-liners Samuel Girard and Ian Cole, the Stars were able to chip away at the two-goal deficit.

Thanks to goals from Pavelski (on the two-man advantage) and Radek Faksa (during the minor to Cole), Dallas tied the contest and stole the momentum.

Alexander Radulov had a pass from Jamie Benn carom off the stick of Girard, then off Radulov's body and over Avalanche goalie Pavel Francouz for a goal that gave the Stars a lead they would not relinquish.

Radulov has caught fire in this series and now has recorded the game-winning goal in consecutive games. With two points on Monday, he's up to five goals and eight points in 11 games.

Since the Stars realize it's going to be nearly impossible to contain MacKinnon, there was pressure on the top unit of Tyler Seguin, Benn and Radulov to counter – and so far, they've delivered.



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The game was not without at least some mild controversy, as the Stars' fourth goal required an official review to confirm the puck fully crossed the line.

The goal was the result of a diligent individual effort from Stars defenceman Esa Lindell, an important member of the penalty killing unit that extinguished a two-man disadvantage when the game was tied 2-2.

After the Stars were able to kill off another minor penalty, Lindell won a race against Joonas Donskoi and drove hard to the net with possession, banging away at the loose puck Francouz could not cover.

Lindell's second effort at it was enough for him to raise his arms in celebration and the play was ruled a goal on the ice.

"The second whack was already in and I gave it one more to be sure," Lindell said.

Lindell was a force throughout the contest and the insurance marker was a just reward according to his head coach.

"Effort. Just pure passion and effort. He just was not going to be denied," Stars bench boss Rick Bowness said. "It would have been easy for him to just chip the puck in and change, but he saw an opening and he took advantage of it. That was pure determination on that goal."

While camera angles of Lindell's face shown during the review suggested he wasn't entirely sure the goal was going to hold up, Bowness did his best to keep an even keel before the decision was delivered.

"Those reviews are totally out of your control, so you can't get wrapped up in the highs and lows of it — no matter what happens," Bowness said. "As we talk about with the players, just get ready for your next shift. If we get it, fine. And if we don't, fine. We stayed in the moment and we got the call."

That's a great approach to take, but there was no doubt the Stars got a massive boost in taking the two-goal lead, while the Avalanche sagged and had trouble snapping out of it.

There was no camera angle that provided indisputable evidence that the puck didn't fully cross the line, so the call on the ice stood.

Instead of a one-goal deficit, the Avalanche had given up a fourth consecutive goal in the final minute of the second period.

Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar had a chat with the men in stripes after the final decision was made and he considered a coach's challenge but chose to abstain.

With his team already reeling a bit, the prospect of incurring a delay-of-game minor had the challenge not been successful would have been a risky proposition.

"I don't know that it crossed the line, I don't," Bednar said. "I wish they had blown it dead if they were unsure, if they hadn't seen it cross. Just blow it dead and then they can go to Toronto and look at it to see if it did cross. They call it a goal, I don't know if it was based on the celebration or if they saw something that I didn't. If it crosses the line, great. Award them the goal. I don't like getting a goal against our team that I still don't know if it crossed."

"But to me, it's maybe a mistake, maybe it's not. I have no idea. Our resolve just wasn't where it needs to be after a bad break or a bad penalty. The game is not over. As a team, at this time of the year, we have to expect more from each other. We've got to be stronger mentally. We got a little disappointed and felt sorry for ourselves a little bit. There was still half a game to play and it cost us. We can handle it better and we're going to have to moving forward."

Avalanche goalie Pavel Francouz made it clear he doesn't agree with the call.

"Honestly, I think (the puck) was underneath my pad and it was in front of the goal line all the time," Francouz said. "I don't really know what the ref saw. That's a tough goal."

The most revealing angle was one that showed the stick of Lindell's past the blade of Girard, which was fully over the goal line.

One of the obvious storylines going into the contest surrounded Francouz, who has been forced into action after Philipp Grubauer suffered a lower-body injury in Game 1 of this series and is out indefinitely.

The Avalanche were also without defenceman Erik Johnson and feisty forward Matt Calvert, both of whom are dealing with injuries.

Francouz wasn't tested much in the opening period, nor did he allow any softies as the Stars took control of the contest. But the fact remains he turned aside only 22 of the 26 shots he faced and was the second-best goalie on the ice.

The larger issue for the Avalanche was that they've had limited offensive contributions from players not named MacKinnon or Rantanen and that's a trend that must stop immediately if Colorado is to make this a series.

"For us, it's a seven-game series for a reason," Avalanche captain Gabriel Landeskog said. "We feel like, more than anything, we're in this thing. We've been up 2-0 before and we know how quick it can turn — and all of a sudden, it's a tied series."

"There's no quit in this group."

It's easy to forget the Stars have played most of these first two rounds without starting goalie Ben Bishop, who has been limited to two starts and hasn't played since Game 2 against the Calgary Flames due to an injury.

Stars general manager Jim Nill made a commitment to supplying his team with one of the best backups in the NHL when he signed Khudobin to a two-year deal worth \$5 million on July 1 of 2018.

With an AAV of \$2.5 million, Khudobin has supplied plenty of value already and he's sure to earn a raise if he hits the free agent market at the end of the season.

Limited to 11 minutes of action in mop-up duty during the playoffs last spring, Khudobin has provided the type of goaltending a team needs to go on a run.

"When I play more, I feel better," Khudobin said. "It's a different scenario right now, but it's the playoffs and you can't think about it. Just go (out) and play. I feel better than the first couple of games."

For the time being, Khudobin's latest heroics have helped the Stars pull within two wins of reaching the Western Conference final.

The Stars haven't forgotten the pain and heartache they endured after taking the eventual Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues to double overtime of Game 7 in the second round last spring.

Motivation comes in many forms and this battle-tested group learned another valuable lesson in perseverance on Monday.

As a result, the Stars took another important step closer to reaching their collective goal.

But it's just one step. Nothing more, nothing less.

"Until you put a team away, you just can't feel comfortable," Pavelski said. "We've done our job so far, but there's a ways to go. We'll catch our breath, we'll see where we can improve and we'll come back at them."

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Sportsnet.ca / Hughes, Canucks need bounce-back game against Golden Knights



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 25, 2020

Mark Spector | August 24, 2020

EDMONTON — There are so many lessons for the Vancouver Canucks these days, and so many folks out there eager to point the Canucks players in the direction of their next tutorial.

Ryan Reaves. Zone exits. Quinn Hughes. Antoine Roussel.

You want advice? Hop on Twitter, or sports talk radio. We've got advice.

The lineup of those who seem to know where the Canucks should start their recovery from a 5-0 Game 1 obliteration by Vegas is a long one. The acceptance of this friendly advice by Canucks coach Travis Green and his players, however, is much shorter.

Livestream the Canucks in the Stanley Cup Qualifiers, plus every game of the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs on Sportsnet NOW.

"Win a game and move on as fast as possible, lose a game and move on as fast as possible," said Tanner Pearson, winner of the 2014 Stanley Cup as a Los Angeles King. "We've reiterated that after every game. Next game's a new game, and the last one doesn't really matter."

That lesson is of particular value when you get thrashed as mightily as the Canucks did in Game 1. Truly, as Green said after the game, "This was probably our worst game (of the playoffs) tonight."

So, where do they go, these Vancouver Canucks, against a supremely confident Vegas team that has lost but once in nine starts since arriving in the Edmonton bubble?

Well, it starts in their own end, where the Canucks' brightest young stars — Quinn Hughes, Elias Pettersson, Brock Boeser — all spent far too much time on Sunday night. So much, in fact, that none of the trio even registered a shot on net in the game.

Hughes in particular was, and will be, a focus of the Golden Knights. A rookie in his first NHL post-season, it is fair to say that the 20-year-old has never met an opponent as big, fast and deep as Vegas.

"They try to pressure everyone, not just Quinn," Green said Monday afternoon. "Obviously he's a big part of our team and they are hoping to get the puck out of your best players' hands. I did talk to Quinn briefly last night, I will again today. I think good players adapt ... especially a young guy who hasn't been in this situation before. The one thing about a good, young, great player, they adjust to different situations."

There is absolute trust that Hughes, like the Canucks did in previous series against Minnesota and St. Louis, will bounce back against Vegas in Game 2.

"Quinn is probably the most skilled and confident player I've ever played with," defence partner Chris Tanev said. "I have no doubt in my mind: next game he'll be fine and he'll be flying out there."

There will be no special wisdom imparted, no Knute Rockne speeches. Just the usual talks that Tanev and the young prodigy have had since the season began nearly a year ago.

"We always talk. We hang out together quite a bit," said Tanev, giving some examples. "What can we do? What can we do better? What do we like about our game? We're always trying to make little things better, and last night we weren't good enough."

Green, meanwhile, shifted the focus off his young core and on to, as hockey people like to say these days, the group.

"Not just our younger players; it's our team in general," Green said. "I don't think their team did a lot of things that surprised us. We just weren't sharp. We weren't on top of our game. We didn't pass the puck as well as we can. We didn't receive passes ... And give their team credit. They're a good team."

Too good a team for Vancouver? That remains to be seen.

But the team that will skate out with a 1-0 series lead on Tuesday evening at Rogers Place in Edmonton is supremely confident, with absolutely no doubt about whether they will get past the Canucks and into Round 3.

"I don't know where (Game 1) ranks," Vegas head coach Peter DeBoer said. "Definitely it's on that list of complete efforts from us. Especially considering the circumstances — there were a lot of distractions, a lot of stuff flying around. I loved how we blocked out the noise and just went to work."

How about a team whose former No. 1 goalie, "face of the franchise" Marc-Andre Fleury, is on the bench, while controversy swirls over a tweet sent out by his agent? And while the hockey world whips the story into a frenzy — could you imagine the media storm if that were a Canucks goalie? — the other guy, Robin Lehner, calmly goes out and pitches a shutout.

"That's just outside noise to us," DeBoer said. "We're inside the bubble, and in our own bubble inside the bubble, where we're not going to let any of that outside noise get in the way of what we're trying to do. That's advancing all the way to the Stanley Cup."

It is pretty clear that the Canucks are facing an opponent that is focused, experienced, and is laser-focused on getting further than last season's disappointing Round 1 ouster to San Jose.

The Canucks, meanwhile, fell behind Minnesota 1-0, and lost Games 3 and 4 to St. Louis, to which the hockey world responded by counting Vancouver out.

Well, here they are: Game 2, Round 2.

What do these Canucks have?

It is time, once again, to find out.

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Sportsnet.ca / Islanders frustrate Flyers with mistake-free performance in Game 1

Luke Fox | August 24, 2020

TORONTO — If the adage is true and defence does win championships, beware the New York Islanders.

While the other Eastern Conference semifinal bristles with future Hall of Famers, fierce grudges and combustible offences, the first playoff showdown between the Isles and Philadelphia Flyers in 33 years brings such must-see elements as discipline, organization and consistency.

There is a path for a seasoned coach to run the distance without the bracket of super-high-end playmaking that commands anything above a \$7-million cap hit. And Flyers GM Chuck Fletcher saw it firsthand every time he'd strap on a mask, enter the Scotiabank Arena and take in one of the nine Islanders games he has scouted this month.

From the Stanley Cup Qualifiers to the Stanley Cup Final, livestream every game of the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs, blackout-free, on Sportsnet NOW.

"They played as well as any team in our bubble here in Toronto," Fletcher said. "They play with purpose and structure and identity."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 25, 2020

No, it's certainly not all flash, dash and creativity. But when every skater yanks the same rope, and the starting goaltender stands on his head, a defence-first, -second and -third formula can yield results.

Just ask Islanders GM Lou Lamoriello, architect of some of the most clogging and claustrophobic, patient and persistent rosters to ever hoist Lord Stanley's Mug.

The Islanders' relatively easy ouster of high-event, top-six-heavy squads the Florida Panthers and Washington Capitals felt methodical. Precision-like.

So, too, did their 4-0 Game 1 victory over Philly Monday in the series opener, in which Semyon Varlamov withstood a second-period push to set a new franchise mark for consecutive shutouts and defenceman Nick Leddy got hemmed in for a 3:10 shift without a minus (or a collapse from exhaustion).

"If you can establish your game and get results from it, what it does is reinforce what you are preaching," Isles coach Barry Trotz said.

"What you're trying to establish and the commitment level and the understanding of it goes up, and it gets galvanized. When you are able to do that and get results, then you don't have anybody going, 'Oh, well, let's try, this let's try that, because it's not working.' They see the results. They get the results. And they buy in."

Captain Anders Lee provides the players' perspective.

"We have a phenomenal room with good people, and I think it goes a long way," Lee says. "Guys playing for each other and checking themselves at the door and not worrying about the things that can pull you away from the ultimate goal.

"That has to start at the top, but you also have to live it and feel it."

Scarce have been New York's feelings of playoff panic, and that calmness has given Trotz's squad steely confidence in its even-strength play and strategic dump-and-chase attack as technical underdogs to the No. 1 seeded Flyers.

The Islanders (8-2) are now outscoring their opposition 21-6 at 5-on-5.

Protecting the house and coming out on the bright side of tight — if frequently boring — hockey games is becoming embedded in the group's DNA, the coach explains.

"We just trust it. We know what works for us," Trotz said. "We understand how you win in the playoffs."

What this best-of-seven lacks in breathtaking Nathan MacKinnon rushes, Ryan Reaves chicken clucks, and controversial medieval portrait tweets, it makes up for in smart, safe tactical play.

The Islanders (1.67 goals against per game) and Flyers (1.78) entered Round 2 with the two stingiest defences and sharpest starting goalies still alive in the tournament.

Makes sense, then, that the more structured of the two sides drew first blood, getting its jump from the blueline.

An Andy Greene slapshot from the point and through a crowd opened the scoring in Period 1, but it was the rental acquisition's blind leg-kick block on Travis Konecny that made for a superior highlight:

Andy Greene has scored a goal in the 1st and also prevented one. #NHLonSN pic.twitter.com/4ZmCX8oZGI

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) August 24, 2020

"The Islanders under Barry Trotz are going to be very sound defensively. They're going to play hard," said Flyers defender Matt Niskanen, who sipped from the same Cup as Trotz when they went all the way with Washington in 2018. He knows what he's in for.

"They're going to just feast on turnovers if we turn it over in the neutral zone, so that'll be a big part of the series."

In a game of mistakes, the Isles don't make a ton.

They linger around and force you to make them when opportunity strikes, then leap through those tiny windows. In Monday's case, Philly turned the puck over 15 times, often as a result of the Isles' swarming forecheck.

Rookie Philadelphia goalie Carter Hart can work wonders. But much like his hero, Carey Price, he hasn't figured out how to score goals.

So, when a frustrated Flyers group failed to execute on their mid-game burst and again let off the gas in the third, the Islanders built an indestructible lead by committee.

Goals by Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Devon Toews and Lee put Game 1 out of reach. Nine Islanders registered a point, but none more than one.

"We win as a group," Matt Martin asserted. "We don't rely on anyone, really."

Why rely on anyone when you can rely on everyone?

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Sportsnet.ca / Both Flames, Gaudreau must look in the mirror as off-season changes swirl

Eric Francis | August 24, 2020

CALGARY — Asked about the possibility of being traded, Johnny Gaudreau said all the right things about wanting to stay in Calgary.

Asked how he felt about his playoff performance, Gaudreau picked up where he left off against Dallas:

By missing the mark.

"I thought our line did well and we were happy with the way we played," said Gaudreau, with a lack of ownership sure to be scrutinized every bit as much as his play. "Unfortunately, some of the chances we had didn't go in."

Wow.

"Defensively I thought we were really good in our own zone with our line," he continued. "That was important to [head coach Geoff Ward] — being smart in the defensive zone and not being a liability on the ice. Offensively I thought we had some looks throughout the two series. I thought the power play was really good. Had some good looks in (Game 4) to win in overtime, to take a 3-1 series lead, but the goalie made some good saves."

It's a similar refrain from a year earlier when Gaudreau also said he had some "good looks" in a five-game faceplant against Colorado in which he had one assist.

This year his production was limited entirely to the power play, where the 27-year-old winger had six of his seven points.

The other came on an empty net goal.

Not enough, and he should know that — especially since his annual playoff disappearance was once again the talk of the NHL.

Yet, when asked about being in the crosshairs of off-season trade talk for a troubling trend of post-season shortcomings, Gaudreau made an impassioned case for wanting to stay.



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"Calgary has been a second home to me – I love playing there," said the Jersey native. "I love my teammates there, I love the city, the fans are awesome. It's a team I could see myself playing for for the remainder of my career, and I've always said that. I know a lot of people have speculations of me wanting to go back east. But I just feel really comfortable where I'm at with the teammates there, the coaching staff, with [GM] Brad [Treliving], the management team and the owners.

"Throughout my whole time there I've been treated really well and love the city. It's been a blast playing there the past six years. You just know how passionate the fans are about our team. That's the kind of market you want to be in."

Suffice it to say, the feeling in this marketplace isn't necessarily mutual, as frustration surrounding the former 99-point player mounts.

There are plenty of observers who see Gaudreau's struggles in the post-season as something the generously listed 5-foot-9, 165-pound winger can't adapt to.

When the intensity ratchets up and time and space are at a premium, the dynamic playmaker tends to fall far from his regular season offensive levels and effectiveness.

It's not a stretch to suggest that had Gaudreau's line with Sean Monahan and Elias Lindholm been able to score a goal or two while playing 5-on-5 in the Dallas series, it might have kept the Flames in the bubble for Round 2.

Surely, after first-round exits in each of their last three playoff appearances, the Flames need to make changes.

Gaudreau seems one of the most obvious ones for a team that just can't seem to get over the playoff hump.

"I'm sure there will be changes – hopefully you don't want to hear your own name with changes like that because it's tough to go to a different team, especially when you played with a lot of players on that team for a while now," said Gaudreau, who has two years left on a deal paying him \$6.75 million annually. "But it's part of the business.

"If I had a chance we'd bring our whole group back. But at the end of the day it doesn't happen like that sometimes."

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It never does. Nor should it in Calgary where the GM agreed the talented team fell short of expectations once again.

Typically one to stand up for his players when being criticized, Treliving tread carefully when asked if he was happy with Gaudreau's playoff performance.

"I've never really used this platform to go at players individually or air my thoughts on individual performance – I would generally say as a group we needed to do more," said Treliving, who said he'd spoken to "over a dozen" GMs in the last 72 hours, for what it's worth.

"When you're a top player, what comes with that is a lot of responsibility. This guy wants to win as badly as anybody does. He wants to win here in Calgary and I think even his game took some steps. But at the end of the day we didn't achieve what we wanted to achieve so we are open to criticism."

Treliving did reveal that in Game 2 against Winnipeg Sam Bennett tore a triceps and Rasmus Andersson broke his foot. He confirmed Matthew Tkachuk suffered from a concussion.

What he wouldn't do was shed any light on is where this organization goes from here, and who will remain with it, including coach Ward. He never does on garbage bag day.

"I understand why fans are upset sometimes – I feel like sometimes we've been in the same situation over the past few years, getting

knocked out in the first or second round," said Gaudreau. "I'm sure they're not happy and our team is not happy either.

"The only thing we can do, I guess is take an account of ourselves, look in the mirror, have a real good off-season, work out hard and come prepared and come back to Calgary and hopefully have [most of] the guys from this season there next season, because we had a really solid team this year and I think we could have went a little deeper."

A mirror is a good start.

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Sportsnet.ca / Which NHL players can improve their team's fortunes in Round 2?

Ryan Dixon | August 24, 2020

By any measure, making it to Round 2 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs is an achievement. To be one of the final eight teams in the Cup chase is nothing to sneeze at, especially when — if you're the Vancouver Canucks and New York Islanders — you've already notched two series wins just to be here.

That said, every squad's goal is going all the way and that requires three more best-of-seven victories. For whatever has gone right so far, some teams still need a few dominoes to fall the right way. That's already happening on some clubs, as a couple snipers are starting to find a groove that previously proved elusive.

With that in mind, here's a list of players who — should they take it up a notch — have the power to really improve teams' fortunes through the next phase of the post-season.

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Philadelphia's big boy scorers

The Flyers' top five goal-scorers in the regular season were Travis Konecny, Kevin Hayes, Sean Couturier, Claude Giroux and James van Riemsdyk, and they combined for a single goal (courtesy of Hayes) in Philly's six-game victory over the Montreal Canadiens. JVR even found himself healthy-scratched for a couple games.

Philly's depth is a big reason the club has high aspirations, but the Bullies are going to need their lead horses to get going against the Islanders — especially on a power play operating at 10.3 per cent in the post-season.

Tampa's new guys

Nobody is expecting third- and fourth-liners to replace the offence lost with the absence of Steven Stamkos, but it would be a huge boost to the Bolts if three guys in their first playoff with the club — Blake Coleman, Barclay Goodrow and Patrick Maroon — could pitch in some net-crashing goals.

So far, Coleman and Goodrow each have a goal, while 'Big Rig' is stuck on goose egg. The latter two players were certainly added more for muscle than touch, but Coleman is a dependable 20-goal guy who has found the net just once in 18 total outings with Tampa.

If those guys can stir up an ugly goal or two, it will go a long way toward helping the Lightning's chances against the don't-give-an-inch Bruins.



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Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Pavel Francouz

The Czech stopper was called upon in tough circumstances on Saturday night, entering Game 1 of Colorado's series with Dallas after Philipp Grubauer tweaked something in the lower half of his body very early in the second period of a 5-3 loss.

While we don't know how long Grubauer will be out, we do know he's not starting Game 2. Francouz proved to be very capable for Colorado this season, posting a .923 save percentage in 34 games. If he really wants to make a name for himself, now's the time.

Brock Boeser

As Vegas's resounding 5-0 Game 1 victory underscored, it's going to take everything the Canucks have to give the West's No. 1 seed a real series. Boeser has found the net just once in his past eight outings and has only nine shots on goal during that span, which stretches over the final contest versus Minnesota, the entire St. Louis series and the opener against Vegas.

So many important pieces have shone for Vancouver so far and it would mean the world to get this one rolling, too.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

Max Pacioretty

The Golden Knights' leading scorer in the regular season was late arriving to the bubble due to an injury, did not skate in a qualifier contest and missed Game 1 versus the Blackhawks. Pacioretty was held off the scoresheet in his first three outings, but posted one-and-one in the Game 5 victory that clinched the series win over Chicago and notched the fifth goal in Vegas's 5-0 dismantling of the Canucks in Game 1 of Round 2.

No. 67's underlying numbers were good throughout the Chicago series, so maybe we're witnessing the start of a serious breakout.

Tyler Seguin

The struggles of Dallas's top line have been an issue all season. And while top-unit wingers Alexander Radulov (two) and Jaime Benn (one) both found the net versus the Calgary Flames, Seguin failed to register a five-on-five point in six outings. The Stars basically surrendered as many high-danger scoring chances as they created against Calgary when Seguin was on the ice, and that's just not good enough for a 28-year-old who is supposed to be leading this goal-challenged club.

Game 1 versus the Avalanche, however, could not have gone better for Seguin. Not only did he find the net for his first NHL bubble tally, he drew the first assist on a marker by Radulov.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing and predicting the Stanley Cup Playoffs Round 2 series

Justin Bourne | August 24, 2020

Yes, I'm aware the second round has already begun thanks to the very cooperative first round allowing for an accelerated schedule, but that's

not going to stop me from doing Round 2...previews? Okay, fine, we'll call this "Round 2 analysis."

We can't pretend the games that have already happened haven't, so they'll be taken into consideration, but I'll still list the predictions I filed before the round began. (So for example, I'm sticking with Tampa and the Avs despite uphill climbs.)

Let's jump right in.

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EASTERN CONFERENCE

Philadelphia vs. NY Islanders

What's been such a challenge in doing analysis during this return-to-play hockey is knowing just how much weight to put on each team's showings based on when they happened. How much does the regular season matter when big chunks of it were nine months ago? How much does the round-robin tournament matter when there was no threat of elimination? How much do play-in series matter given some of the teams were 20th in the league and worse during that regular season?

At the pause in March, Philly was on one of those nice runs good teams have over the course of the season, which I think led to some misperception about them (or perhaps I just follow too many Flyers fans on Twitter). I also think their play in the round-robin was over-valued after watching a team like Boston just flip the switch when the games counted. Along the same vein, Philadelphia's struggles against the 24th overall Montreal Canadiens don't prove they're suddenly not very good, or that they can't score. There's a ton to like in that lineup.

I think we need to go big picture on the Flyers and say this: they have some great forwards (even some of the unheralded names like Nicolas Aube-Kubel are really effective), and some great young D (hat-tip to Ivan Provorov). Carter Hart is going to be a mainstay in an NHL crease for a decade-plus to come. They have quality depth. I don't have them in the top-tier of the remaining eight teams (that to me looks like Boston, Tampa Bay, Colorado and Vegas), but again, I like them.

It's no secret what the Islanders do, but that doesn't make it easy to beat. They defend the middle and keep you outside, they forecheck you, and they have some players who can score by hanging around the crease (which can be deadly effective in playoffs). In a nutshell, a battle against the Islanders is the battle for the inside and they're well built for that at both ends. They're pretty content to patiently wait, and if you open up because it's getting hard, they have just enough offence to find goals.

The Islanders only let three Washington forwards score against them over a full series. So while this matchup is more or less a coin toss in my opinion, it feels like it's going to be harder for Philly to play their preferred style, and easier for the Isles to lean into theirs. And so, I'll give them the nod here.

Prediction: Islanders in 7

Boston vs. Tampa Bay

In hockey we don't always get the matchups we deserve. In a sport like MMA, the UFC literally looks at their fighters and says "here's the fight we want to see," and they make it happen. The NHL is at the mercy of its playoff format and luck, as evidenced by the Canadiens and Maple Leafs not meeting in the post-season since the '70s.

This time, though, we got the fight we needed to see, even if it's not in the conference final.

You know what these two teams are. Boston is pedigree, defensive tenacity and structure and they can play it anyway you want to go. Tampa is speed and skill that's added grit and personality (the last part is their internal feeling according to Elliotte Friedman). Both teams have great goaltending, though it remains to be seen if Jaroslav Halak can



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continue his great form as 'The Guy' every night instead of just 'The Sometimes Guy.' All told this is two heavyweights slugging it out.

It's also worth noting Steven Stamkos' absence is felt in a big way here for Tampa. When will he come back, if at all? You need every ounce of ability to topple a giant like the Bruins.

#tblighting Jon Cooper said Steven Stamkos is not available right now, he's rehabbing. When he's ready, Cooper will let us know. No further updates. "It's pointless to keep asking about it."

— Joe Smith (@JoeSmithTB) August 22, 2020

Betting against a Presidents' Trophy-winning Boston team that showed so well against a very good Carolina team, well, it's all but foolish. Still, before Game 1 I picked Tampa Bay to win in seven, so I'll leave that up for all to see. Were I picking now, knowing Boston is up one, I know which way I'd lean. But winning four of six isn't impossible for a group like Tampa Bay even against the Bruins, so let's not write them off yet.

Prediction: Tampa Bay in 7

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Vegas vs. Vancouver

Lots of V's, lotsa vvvrooom in this series. Unfortunately, more than any other series we'll discuss, this one will be most biased by recent events given Vegas's trouncing of the Canucks in Game 1.

Here's the part where I'd love to come over the top with some brilliant analysis curveball like "despite the outcome of Game 1, I actually see some advantages for the Canucks here, and here." Alas, I cannot write that article. This is a Vancouver team that unfortunately doesn't match-up well with teams that have elite players and then follow them up with complete roster depth. Because if you threw every player from this series in a pile and started choosing them one by one in order of who you'd want for a game tomorrow, there'd be a pretty even split of Canucks and Golden Knights in the first 10, depending on who was picking. Picks 10-20, however, would be a landslide of Vegas players.

The way through for Vancouver is that magic combination of hot goaltending and brilliant special teams, which are both reasonably possible outcomes given they have good goaltending and the stars to shine when on the man advantage. It's also because of those things — and really just the Canucks having an elite core in general — that I see Vancouver finding a win or two.

But this analysis is about the Golden Knights more than it is about Vancouver. They too have great goaltending and they too have top-end skaters. Mark Stone seems built for the playoffs, and he's in his prime. Stone is actually a great example of what I see in this series. He is here now and ready, while in Vancouver I see a team that's going to go as far as Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes will take them and I'm skeptical that's "all the way" right now. They'll only be more able to shoulder that load in the years to come.

Prediction: Vegas in 6

Dallas vs. Colorado

The Stars are the exact type of team you can build in hockey where — and this isn't that unlike the St. Louis Blues of last year — they're extremely competent all over, they can hang with anyone, and if the bounces go their way, they'll be tough to eliminate. They're not some loaded firewagon, they're just solid.

When more casual hockey fans think of the Stars, they likely think of Tyler Seguin and Jamie Benn, and maybe Alexander Radulov. What makes them so tough to put away, though, is that they defend extremely well, they have good goaltending, and their depth guys like Denis Gurianov, Radek Faksa, and Roope Hintz can actually move the needle. Their D depth isn't a bunch of big names, but even beyond a fast-riser in the league like Miro Heiskanen, a guy like Esa Lindell is hugely underrated.

Again, solid.

I write all that as a qualifier of sorts, though, as the Avalanche certainly seem like the protagonist in this story. They're the group with the truly elite top line, including one of the best few players in the world today (you can argue I'm light on praise for Nathan MacKinnon there). MacKinnon is an all-caps FORCE right now. They're the group that swung an off-season deal to add a big contributor in Nazem Kadri. They're the group with a Calder candidate in Cale Makar who's part of a team set to attack, attack, attack.

This series is a huge test for the Avs. Are they ready to start knocking off top-to-bottom solid teams? Nothing's going to be given to them here, and as you know, they're already one back in the series.

We learned little about the Avs in their matchup with Arizona, but Dallas is going to ask much harder questions. Colorado is down a game with an uphill climb, and the Stars defend well, but I still think the offensive engine MacKinnon seems to stoke every night should have enough fire to push them on through.

Prediction: Avalanche in 6

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TSN.CA / Jon Cooper urges Tampa Bay Lightning to push Boston Bruins' Perfection Line to the perimeter

Mark Masters

It was a perfect start to the second round for Boston's 'Perfection Line' as Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak combined for 11 shots, seven takeaways and had a hand in all three Bruins goals in Sunday's win. Their best moment came early in the third period when Bergeron stripped Lightning defenceman Ryan McDonagh of the puck in the offensive zone and quickly found Pastrnak in the slot, who then flipped a backhand saucer pass to Marchand, who hammered it home.

"They make big-time plays at high rates of speed and if you let up for a second they're going to get you," said Lightning coach Jon Cooper. "They compete really hard and never give up on plays so clearly that's what happened there."

The sequence further illustrated why Bergeron, a four-time Selke Trophy winner, is among the top two-way players of his generation.

"His back pressure is incredible so that goal was all him," said Marchand. "Forechecking ability and a great read and that's why he's going to be a Hall of Famer ... He has a gift with the way he reads the game and his stick positioning. There's very few guys in the league that have that ability on the defensive side of things. I mean, lots of guys are good offensively and can cheat and pick pucks off, but he does it from a defensive standpoint and he creates so many opportunities out of our zone and through the neutral zone and on the forecheck."

Boston's three-headed monster is even more dangerous on the power play. Pastrnak struck on the man advantage in the second period on Sunday, one-timing a sweet pass from David Krejci after 90 seconds of sustained pressure.

"The one thing about Pasta is his release is so fast," Cooper observed of the Rocket Richard Trophy co-winner (48 goals). "Krejci makes a helluva pass to him, but that's on and off the stick and a lot of guys can't do that. It looks like you can, but they can't, especially to put it where you want to. So, you have to be in position on him and you can't fall asleep, because that's when those guys get you, especially that line."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 25, 2020

Back in 2018, Pastrnak scored five goals in a seven-game series against the Toronto Maple Leafs in the first round before mustering just one goal in a five-game loss to the Lightning. Since then the 24-year-old has evolved into a more consistent threat.

"He's put a little more responsibility on his shoulders," noted Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy, "knowing that he has to produce, knowing that he's a top-end guy now, he's paid like that, and he's respected like that throughout the league and on our team. So, he knows that there can't be many nights off if we want to be successful."

A couple years ago, the Bruins top line was also dominant in a Game 1 win against the Lightning, but then Tampa roared back to win four straight.

"You win the first game and you can't get too comfortable," Cassidy warned. "Maybe two years ago we were a little overconfident going into that second game and I don't believe that will be a problem this year."

So, it's up to the Lightning to raise their level. Cooper says they have a "recipe" to control Boston's best players if not entirely shut them down.

"You give them an inch and they'll take a mile," Cooper stressed. "We have to be a little harder on them. We have to be a little more positionally sound and try and keep those guys to the perimeter as much as possible."

From @markhmasters: Perfect start for Perfection Line as Bergeron shows off his Hall-of-Fame credentials - <https://t.co/goBc8fkouZ#TSNHockey> pic.twitter.com/roarHeKX8k

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) August 24, 2020

Tampa's challenge will be all the more difficult if McDonagh misses any time. The shutdown defenceman left Game 1 in the third period with an undisclosed injury and did not return.

"He's not going on the ice today and, as for the game, we'll just wait for tomorrow (Tuesday) to see," said Cooper.

McDonagh leads the Lightning in ice time since the restart, logging more than 26 minutes a game.

"He's our calming factor on the back end," said fellow blueliner Kevin Shattenkirk. "Has to play top lines every night and gets put out in defensive-zone situations, penalty kill, maybe not the areas that are the flashiest, but his commitment to doing all those little things well, blocking shots and being responsible defensively, that shows us ... that we all have to step up and do [that]."

The next two games in the series will be played on consecutive days (Tuesday and Wednesday).

The Bruins shutdown duo is feeling pretty good these days. Zdeno Chara, 43, and Charlie McAvoy, 22, addressed the media side-by-side on Monday. McAvoy was asked about the role Chara has played in his growth as a hockey player.

"It's something I have absolutely not taken for granted at all," McAvoy said. "I consider myself extremely lucky to be able to learn under this guy. He's as good as anyone in the entire league to learn under. I've learned so many lessons on the ice and off the ice. I'm blessed and fortunate to have him as a friend and a teammate."

Chara then peered over to McAvoy and said something, inaudible on the Zoom call, to his young teammate. McAvoy responded by blowing him a kiss.

"You guys done?" asked the next reporter in the queue.

Not quite. Eventually, it was Chara's turn to wax poetic.

"Charlie made an impact right away when he got called up for the playoffs in Ottawa," the Bruins captain said, referencing the 2017 postseason. "His abilities to see plays on the ice, his abilities to skate with the puck, defend, contribute offensively, he just keeps getting better and better. You can see he's getting more and more ice time and [in] the key, crucial situations during games."

McAvoy leads the Bruins in ice time in the playoffs (26:41) while Chara has seen his average workload dip below 21 minutes.

"You're seeing a bit of a passing of a torch now," said Cassidy. "Charlie's playing more minutes, in all situations, things that Z did years ago in his prime. So, that's an interesting dynamic as well. Maybe like a big brother, little brother thing. We saw it a little bit with [Brandon] Carlo, but not for an extended period of time. Z enjoys doing it. It's been a good situation for us to give him young partners, because there's no better teacher than an on-ice teacher. We can show him video, we can talk to him, we all played the game years and years ago, but these guys are living it in the moment and I think it's worked out well for both guys."

One area where Chara still leads the way is on the penalty kill. He's averaging more than three minutes of shorthanded ice time per game since the season resumed. The Bruins have killed off 87.5 per cent of power plays in the bubble putting them behind only the Colorado Avalanche among remaining teams.

The Lightning failed to convert on three power-play opportunities in Game 1 and Tampa Bay is only clicking on 11.1 per cent of their chances in the bubble.

"It was hard to get going in that Columbus series because we were getting maybe one a game," Shattenkirk explained, "so when you're not feeling the puck as much and getting your reps in it's hard to get into a rhythm."

With a condensed series schedule, practice time is also limited. The absence of Steven Stamkos, who led the team with 10 power-play goals in the regular season, certainly doesn't help either.

The Lightning went 0/10 on then man advantage in the five-game series against the Jackets, but there are signs of progress.

"Our unit, especially, we keep things simple and just try to get pucks to the net," said Shattenkirk of Tampa's second group. "We have Pat [Maroon] at the net front who's a huge asset there and someone who gets a lot of sticks on pucks and creates a lot of havoc. We're a very simple power play and at the very least we want to make sure we're generating momentum."

Mikhail Sergachev is currently the quarterback on the top unit and Cooper was asked if he'd consider moving Norris Trophy nominee Victor Hedman, who scored twice in Game 1, to that spot.

"We'll see what happens," the coach said. "They both can play it ... before the pause, Hedman was hurt and Sergy had to step in there and he's done well ... unfortunately it didn't go in last night, but we're seeing improvements."

— FOX Sports Bolts (@FOXSportsBolts) August 24, 2020

The Islanders are the lowest seed remaining in the Eastern Conference bracket and have been able to exceed expectations in part thanks to the culture created by general manager Lou Lamoriello.

"The biggest thing with Lou is he doesn't let emotions get in the way," said head coach Barry Trotz. "He doesn't let anything get in the way, it's all about focus, it's all about winning and [he's] very supportive all the time."

Trotz pointed out that because Lamoriello himself coached in the NHL he understands how to better manage staff during pressure-packed times.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Islanders winger Matt Martin also played for Lamoriello in Toronto and appreciates the straight-talk approach employed by the 77-year-old executive.

"He's as straight to the point as you're going to get," Martin said. "There's no sugarcoating. You know exactly what he wants from you and as long as you're doing your job and at least putting the work ethic and effort in, he has his players' backs 100 per cent. He's been around a long time and seen it all and he puts us in the best position to have success and there's nothing else you can really ask for as a player."

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TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs Vegas (Game 1)

Jeff Paterson

Canucks Markstrom vs Vegas

Sure, there was a wide gap between the Vegas Golden Knights and Vancouver Canucks in Sunday's series opener. It was evident in almost every area of the ice. The beauty of the playoffs is that it's just one loss whether it's 5-0 or 2-1 in overtime. It's also important to note the Canucks can play much better than they did in Game 1 and they'll have to in order to make a series of this. When Quinn Hughes is flipping pucks out of the zone because he has no other options, it's evident the 20-year-old game changer isn't at his most effective. When Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser play an entire game without a shot on goal, that's clearly not their A-game. When the shots at even strength are 16-4 in favour the opponent when JT Miller is on the ice, that's not something the Canucks saw very often during the regular season. All of that occurred in Sunday's series opener and you have to give Vegas an ample amount of credit for forcing the top Canucks players out of their comfort zone. The Canucks need more from their best players – that much is clear. In this corner, they've earned the benefit of the doubt that they will respond in Tuesday's second game. Sure, it's a distinct possibility that the Canucks will be better in Game 2 and it may still not be enough to beat Vegas. But the Canucks top end talent needs to show up Tuesday or this series may be over sooner than anyone in Vancouver wanted to consider.

With Hughes flipping pucks out of the zone on Sunday, it underscored the need for the Canucks to do a better job of supporting the puck. The Knights are tenacious on the forecheck and, as such, the Canucks have to do a better job of giving their defensemen options to move the puck. The Knights are quick, but the puck moves faster than any player on the ice. So the Canucks can't hesitate when in possession of the puck. They have to make quick reads and quicker passes. Forwards need to make more of an effort to get back to provide support for their teammates. If the Knights flood the zone on the forecheck, it's on the Canucks to find open ice behind the forecheck which, in theory, should allow Vancouver players to attack the Vegas zone with speed something that rarely happened on Sunday night. It would be great to see Quinn Hughes find ways to elude the Vegas pressure on his own, but if the Golden Knights take his preferred options away, Hughes – and all of the Canucks blueliners – have to do a better job of getting pucks up ice in a hurry to get the team moving in the other direction.

Vegas is a handful. That much was abundantly clear in Game 1. And really, it's been on full display since the minute the Golden Knights touched down in Edmonton. This is a business trip for Vegas and so far in the bubble they have been all business. The Golden Knights are fully capable of winning hockey games without help from opponents. So the Canucks can't gift them scoring chances and opportunities. Travis Green spent time at the podium post-game on Sunday lamenting the way his team protected the puck. The second Vegas goal – an important goal

that doubled their lead – was somewhat self-inflicted by the Canucks penalty killers. Both Jay Beagle and Alex Edler had the puck on their sticks with a chance to clear the zone. You get those opportunities, you have to make that play. Both times, the Knights kept the puck in the Vancouver zone and eventually Reilly Smith banged home a rebound that started a three-goal second period outburst. The Golden Knights don't need help to score. The Canucks can't shoot themselves in the foot the way they did on Sunday night.

The Canucks need to draw penalties. That, of course, is easy to say. The Knights are a disciplined bunch and were never under much pressure in Game 1. The Canucks power play has been a difference-maker all season and certainly was early in the St. Louis series. Based on territorial play, it's hard to argue that the Canucks deserved more chances to operate with the man-advantage. The Canucks need to go back to the game plan they successfully employed early in both Games 5 & 6 against the Blues. The Canucks attacked the St. Louis zone. They were able to produce sustained pressure and ultimately it forced the Blues into taking unwanted penalties. On Sunday, the only Vegas penalty was to forward Nick Cousins for a second period trip on JT Miller. While the Canucks didn't score, they did generate four shots on goal on the power play. The Canucks have scored 34 goals in the playoffs and 11 of them have come while up a man. A potent power play is a huge part of this team's identity. It's been won them hockey games all season and can again in this series with the Golden Knights. But it has to start with the Canucks doing enough good things to draw calls that will let their game-changers get to work.

Who knows how well Robin Lehner played on Sunday? Not to diminish the Golden Knights netminder's performance – he stopped everything sent his way in Game 1 – but the Canucks had to test him. Perhaps it was an early indication of the way the night was going to go when Brock Boeser got a step on a Vegas defender early in the hockey game and whipped a shot wide of the target. Now, Boeser is likely looking to pick a corner in that situation and just missed the mark. But early in a scoreless game, the Canucks needed to do a better job of putting pucks on net and forcing Lehner to make some stops. The Canucks benefitted from subpar netminding on the part of the St. Louis Blues and that was one of the major storylines to emerge from the opening round. The Knights are a better team than the Blues in many areas – including in goal. The Canucks can't bank on leaky goaltending from Lehner. As such, they need more of an offensive thrust. Canucks forwards – you know, the guys paid to put pucks in the net – accounted for just 16 of the team's 26 goals on the night. According to Natural Stat Trick, the Canucks generated just six high-danger chances in 53 minutes of even-strength play and none over the final period.

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TSN.CA / Yost: Vegas Golden Knights went hunting for Quinn Hughes in Game 1

Travis Yost

Hit the reset button.

That's surely what Vancouver Canucks head coach Travis Green is thinking after a 5-0 drubbing at the hands of the Vegas Golden Knights. The beauty of the Stanley Cup Playoffs – particularly with this year's relentless scheduling – is that one bad game can be washed away quickly by a strong bounce-back performance. If Vancouver has taught us anything this season, it's that they

have the capability to do just that.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 25, 2020

That's the good news. The bad news is that the Golden Knights appear to be multiple steps up in difficulty from the St. Louis Blues team Vancouver dispatched in the first round. They are certainly faster and more physical. And their core strength – a sheer depth of talent that allows Peter DeBoer to seamlessly roll four lines – is a team competency that gave the Canucks trouble all season.

One of the most interesting takeaways from Game 1 concerned the way Vegas attacked star defenceman Quinn Hughes. It was the ultimate sign of respect – the type of respect teams showed Erik Karlsson in his prime with the Ottawa Senators.

Hughes, like most great puck handlers and distributors, thrives off space and time. He was afforded very little of either in Game 1.

But unlike St. Louis, Vegas doesn't have to shuffle their lineup to get one advantageous matchup. The Golden Knights were comfortable rolling their top-nine forwards against the Hughes pairing (and by extension, one of Vancouver's top two lines) because they can all forecheck and apply rapid puck pressure.

All of those Vegas forwards had a decisive scoring chance and expected goal advantage against the Hughes and partner Chris Tanev:

The big negative expected goal differentials are, by and large, driven by shot volume – the Hughes and Tanev pairing played a lot of minutes in their own zone, and were outshot 29 to 20 at even strength despite score effects creeping into the game about halfway through.

But some of those 29 shots against were really in dangerous scoring areas of the ice, and a number of them came off of turnovers from one of the two Vancouver blueliners.

The strategy against the pairing was simple – take away Hughes' space and force him to let a weaker puck carrier, like Tanev or a forward, assume the breakout role.

What it accomplished was two-fold: the non-stop pressure forced Hughes to make decisions in tight spaces that led to dangerous defensive zone-area turnovers, and the funneling of forwards allowed for Vegas to work their forecheck deep on the more defensive-minded Tanev (via NST):

Some of this is an unsolvable personnel mismatch, but some of this is opportunity for Green. Vegas was almost comically aggressive on the forecheck – so much so that Vancouver was able to generate a number of dangerous counterattacking chances off the rush.

But those opportunities won't matter if the Canucks forward group isn't providing ample breakout support for their top pairing, and quite frankly, Tanev is going to need to be materially better if the Golden Knights continue hunting for Hughes when they are pressing the attack.

Whatever the case, the Canucks need a quick solution. Chalking this up as a lousy outlier game feels risky, considering the Hughes pairing has been outscored 9-2 over the three games these two teams have played this season.

It's also a doubly neutralizing tactic, since Green opted to play his most dangerous forwards – Game 1 featured Elias Pettersson, J.T. Miller, and Brock Boeser – in front of the Hughes and Tanev pairing. If Vegas is winning the matchup decisively with all five of those skaters on the ice, it's a big problem for Vancouver.

It will be interesting to see if the Canucks make any personnel changes to minimize the damage, or if they will focus purely on structural play – emphasizing clean breakouts from the defence, puck support from the forward group on the wings and the centre working deep into the low-slot areas as needed.

Vancouver has shown they are more than capable of playing this style of game, but the level of difficulty has ramped up dramatically in the second round. They'll need to respond quickly on Tuesday evening, or risk falling down two games to a team that's not taking their foot off the gas pedal.

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TSN.CA / Toronto Maple Leafs trying to provide prospects some sense of stability

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — Moving on from a play-in round loss has proven to be a drawn-out process this summer for Maple Leafs GM Kyle Dubas, who has no choice but to wait for the NHL's Toronto playoff bubble to clear out of his team's facilities before fully transitioning into off-season mode.

That would normally start with the Leafs bringing prospects to the city for their annual week-long development camp. But the COVID-19 pandemic has left players everywhere in a lurch, discouraged from gathering with others and waiting for news about if and when their leagues will restart.

The Leafs pivoted last week to a virtual development camp instead, hoping it would provide prospects with some sense of stability in the most uncertain of times.

"We've tried to maintain as much impact as we can on the player's development while also knowing that this is a challenging time for them," Dubas told TSN. "They're at a pivotal time in their career and progression, and there really is nothing to do. They can't come to Toronto for the camp, they have no games to play, no practices. But once the [NHL] bubble clears out from Toronto we will get our practice rink back and we'll be able to open that up for off-ice training and workouts. We've already got a lot of the players that have had their seasons done for a while now [wanting to train], so that accessibility will be a key."

One player eager to join the Leafs ranks is Alexander Barabanov. The KHL standout signed a one-year, entry-level contract with Toronto on April 7, and Dubas said he'll be coming to Toronto with his wife in a few weeks to begin the mandatory 14-day quarantine period before the 26-year-old winger gets to work with his first NHL team.

But handling each player's next step has been a distinctly individual process for Dubas, one that will remain ongoing as the NHL has yet to finalize a start date for its 2020-21 regular season.

While Barabanov has chosen to settle in early with the Leafs, another of the team's recent signees, defenceman Mikko Lehtonen, is taking a different path.

He inked a one-year, entry-level deal with Toronto on May 4, but has returned to his former KHL squad, Jokerit Helsinki, until NHL training camps begin. In July, the league released a tentative start date for 2020-21 camps as Nov. 17.

"We've been able to work out an arrangement with Jokerit to have Mikko loaned there and play there for the first couple months of their season, which we're very thankful for," Dubas said. "They wanted to bring him back and he wanted to get up and playing. Barabanov wanted to get in and get to work with our staff here, and we support both players' decisions. Jokerit has been great dealing with our people and making sure that Lehtonen is following our program there with them, and we're very fortunate that they were open to having him start the season there before he comes over in November before camp."

Like most things in the COVID-19 era, there is "no set-in-stone way" for Dubas to conduct business now, especially when it comes to prospects. Much of the decision making is based on player preferences, at least for those fortunate enough to have options.

Toronto has been able to send Egor Korshkov on loan to the KHL's Lokomotiv Yaroslavl, while Filip Kral has gone to HC Prerov in the Czech



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 25, 2020

Republic and Jesper Lindgren is back with the SHL's Modo. But most players are waiting in limbo, standing by for word on what's to come.

Dubas holds particular concern for prospects in the NCAA, and those who were just on the cusp of turning pro.

"The guys in Europe who we've been able to loan, they're back and they're playing," Dubas said. "So I don't worry so much about them. I do worry about our players that are in college because it's not just an athletic decision for them. They've elected to go to college for a reason and they value their academics...but right now [their seasons are] still up in the air. And I also worry about the players that were just getting set to become pros. If they can't really go back to junior for a bit, and if they can't be loaned to Europe, they're sort of [stuck]. It was a big turning point in their lives, and now it's a big pause, so they sort of end up in no man's land."

Another unknown for Dubas is exactly how the team's current crop of prospects will fare at the next main training camp. If that comes about in the fall, the change in schedule could make for tough decisions on bringing in talented prospects as usual, or waiting to have them sign entry-level deals at a later time.

"I look at our third-round pick, [defenceman] Mikko Kokkonen, and I don't know that we would want to disrupt his season in Finland where they've got him wearing a letter now as a young player," Dubas said. "But we would have a discussion with the team [Jukurit Mikkeli] and his agent about it. And then there's [2019 fourth-round pick] Nick Abruzzese, who we're waiting on. He's 21 now and had a great season [44 points in 33 games] as a forward at Harvard. We feel with his intelligence and work ethic and skill level, he'll continue to get stronger and because of his age probably has a faster chance of contending for a roster spot."

Neither Kokkonen or Abruzzese have officially signed with the Leafs yet, but 2019 fourth-round pick Mikhail Abramov and 2018 third-round pick Semyon Der-Arguchintsev, both 19, have three-year, entry-level pacts in place.

Dubas has high hopes for both of them in a potential main camp, but Abramov (of the QMJHL's Victoriaville Tigres) and Der-Arguchintsev (from the OHL's Peterborough Petes) are eligible to play another season in junior as well. Right now, the OHL has set a tentative start date on the 2020-21 season as Dec. 1, while the QMJHL is planning to return on Oct. 1.

"Abramov has just gotten done with the Russian national team, and we're looking forward to seeing where he's at if we're able to bring him in for camp," Dubas said. "I think [Der-Arguchintsev] will need some time. He needs a lot of work with regards to his training and strength and conditioning and just the continued development of his habit base and consistency in that. So I think that's an exciting camp [opportunity] for him. I don't necessarily see him yet as a challenger for [a spot], but that will depend on the condition that he comes back in and then the work that he puts in here in the next number of months."

The Leafs annual prospect development camp would normally be a critical week for all their top prospects in getting ready for a next step in training camp.

That event is regularly scheduled for immediately after the draft each year, but the Leafs knew back in March, as the COVID-19 pandemic was picking up steam, that such a gathering likely wouldn't be as feasible.

So senior director of player development Scott Pellerin got to work crafting a different experience for Toronto's prospects, which resulted in last week's first-ever virtual development camp.

"We wanted to provide something to our prospects and our players that we felt was important, not only for their development but also during this [challenging] time," Pellerin said. "We focused on our development pillars, talking about character and well-being and then about some technical and tactical things, strength and conditioning and nutrition, all of the core elements to becoming a really good professional hockey player or a really good person."

The 26 attendees were treated to a morning session of hockey talks, where Pellerin said he and his staff shared videos and concepts. Then in the afternoon, players participated in seminars taught by other departments, like media relations.

To pull off what he hoped would be "the first and only" virtual camp of his career, Pellerin tapped into the wide range of experiences amongst his staff, including assistant director of player development Hayley Wickenheiser and skill development consultant Nik Antropov.

"We had an open panel one day with Hayley and Nik, where they were talking about some of the goals that they scored in the NHL," Pellerin said. "It went very well. Everybody had a strong contribution in all different areas, and we had some special guests that came in too."

Thanks to Antropov, there will even be an encore presentation of the camp to make sure none of Toronto's prospects are left out.

"We're actually going to do another camp with [our European and Russian prospects] for one or two days, and Antropov is going to be translating all of our seminars and going through those with them," Pellerin explained. "We don't want them to miss out on their own development and Nik has done an incredible job in helping our Eastern European players have an orientation and understand and feel comfortable with our program."

Pellerin said the biggest challenge of camp was making sure the messages were resonating with players. He said the most important goals for the franchise were the creation of relationships and engagement with players. While most of them were nervous early on, by the end Pellerin could see leaders emerging already.

And if the Leafs did their job right, those players left the camp experience feeling empowered and hopeful about better days ahead.

"A lot of it is about a player's mindset," Dubas said. "They might be at a pretty perilous point in their development, but they're still pretty positive and they're working their butt off in whatever circumstance they're in. We're trying to remain as flexible as possible and make sure even though the circumstances are not perfect that we're still doing as much as we can for them."

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