



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE ATHLETIC

NHL farm system rankings: No. 4 Carolina Hurricanes

By Corey Pronman

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

The top of the Carolina system is headlined by two fantastic talents in Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas. After them a talented AHL club leads to an organization with high-end talent and very good depth to plug holes down the lineup. All their AHL players and upcoming good junior players help, but Svechnikov/Necas are the types of guys Carolina needs now, game-breaking forwards.

Team's 2017 ranking*: No. 15

Prospect Rankings

ELITE NHL PROSPECT

1. Andrei Svechnikov, LW, Barrie-OHL

Svechnikov is an offensive dynamo on the wing, showing an ability to create scoring chances in many ways with one NHL scout coining him a "five-tool prospect" — a term borrowed from baseball to describe that he's very good at everything with no glaring weakness. He's a good skater and very quick for a player with a pro frame. He often surprises opposing players with how quickly he can close, forcing a ton of turnovers. He's a very powerful player due to his speed and size and he gets to the net as well as anyone from his draft year. He can make high-skilled plays off the rush and is a very creative playmaker. He's one of the better passers in this draft class who can make tough dishes with consistency and looks for his teammates. Svechnikov has also been one of the more dangerous goal scorers in major junior and can finish chances from afar.

HIGH-END NHL PROSPECT

2. Martin Necas, C, Brno-Czech Extraliga

Necas had a simply fantastic season. He was very good in the top Czech league, led the World Juniors in scoring, and was a valuable part of the Czech team at the World Championships. Just about everything about his skill set is dynamic. He's a high-end if not an elite skater who can push the pace as well as anyone. Necas is highly-skilled, and a great passer who can beat a defender wide, pull up and make a bullet feed on the tape. He projects to one day carry a line down the middle at the NHL level and will arrive next season.

LEGIT NHL PROSPECT

3. Janne Kuokkanen, C, Charlotte-AHL

Kuokkanen made the Hurricanes out of camp and while he didn't have a great World Juniors, he was quite good for a

teenager at the AHL level. He's a very smart all-around player. He seems to be always be around the play due to how smart he is. He plays at a pro pace and has excellent vision. While he skates and handles the puck fine I don't see him as a highlight-reel kind of player, rather I think he'll be a solid two-way forward with the vision to play on a NHL power play.

4. Adam Fox, D, Harvard-ECAC

Fox had another great season between college and the World Juniors. He was traded to Carolina from Calgary after his signability became an issue. Fox is a very smart and skilled puck-mover who makes difficult offensive plays seem routine and can control a shift with his vision and offensive instincts. He's not a big guy and is an average skater, but he defends fine due to his intelligence. The big question with Fox isn't if he'll play in the NHL, it's with whom.

5. Nicolas Roy, C, Charlotte-AHL

I'm a Nicolas Roy fan and think he's going to be a very solid two-way NHL player. He has a lot of desirable attributes. Roy is 6-foot-4, has good puck skills, and impressive hockey sense at both ends of the rink. He's the kind of player who can win a battle, then make a nice offensive deke or pass, and get back on defense and make a stop. He's not the best skater, but for his size he skates OK. He was good as a rookie pro on a deep Charlotte team, and I think next season he'll take a big step forward as he's done for years.

6. Julien Gauthier, RW, Charlotte-AHL

Gauthier had a so-so first pro season. I know some NHL scouts who are pessimistic about him, and I'm 50/50 on whether he's a top prospect still, but there's too much ability with his game I'm willing to give him another year. He's 6-foot-4, with very impressive speed and puck skills, and the ability to score, and that's a hell of a package. Gauthier's issue is his hockey sense isn't that impressive and he doesn't make as many plays as his skill set suggests he should.

7. Jake Bean, D, Tri-City-WHL

Bean is a very good puck-moving defenseman, but whenever I saw him this past season he left a bit of a sour taste in my mouth. There's no doubting his intelligence with the puck. He has a low panic threshold and can make some very good plays due to his vision. Bean is also mobile and skilled enough to evade pressure. I don't see that next level with him though in terms of truly impacting a game. His defensive game is about average currently with the odd blunder. He has potential still but will need time in the AHL.

HAVE A CHANCE

8. Lucas Wallmark, C, Charlotte-AHL

Wallmark was one of the best players in the AHL, and the leader on a dangerous Charlotte offense. He's a fantastic



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playmaker whose hockey IQ drives a lot of his value. He can QB a power play with the best of them. The issue for Wallmark has always been his skating. He's improved to being an OK skater, but not great and for a guy with average size, that aspect has held him back from making an impact in the NHL.

9. Morgan Geekie, C Tri-City-WHL

Geekie had his second straight strong season in the WHL, including a fantastic postseason where he was the leading goal-scorer. Geekie is appealing due to the fact he's a 6-foot-2 center who can make plays and score. For Tri-City he was a playmaker on their power play and a guy with the big shot to score from a distance. His skills aren't high-end but he can handle the puck well. Geekie is not a fantastic defensive player, but he works hard and could be a center as a pro. His main issue is his below-average skating.

10. Warren Foegele, LW, Charlotte-AHL

Foegele was one of if not arguably the best two-way forward in the AHL last season. He was a nightmare for opponents to face when he was killing penalties, and seemingly got a shorthanded scoring chance a game. His combination of size and high-end speed makes it difficult to contain him when he comes barreling down the wing. You add in how hard he works and he's a pain in the ass to play against. The question with Foegele is how high his offensive upside is. He's not a playmaker and his hands are average, but he scored 28 goals and 46 points without power play time last season, so give credit where credit's due.

11. Cliff Pu, C, London-OHL

Pu wrapped up a solid junior career with his second straight productive season. He's a great skater who doesn't blow you away with his skills but he can make above-average plays. On top of that at the junior level he's shown he can be a reliable defensive player and a shorthanded threat. There are questions on his upside and role as he projects to the pro game, but I've seen him do enough good things over the years that I have more optimism than pessimism.

12. Valentin Zykov, RW, Charlotte-AHL

Zykov was one of the better forwards in the AHL this past season, and was quite solid in his 10-game call-up for the Hurricanes. He scored 33 goals in the AHL, and I'd be shocked if more than three were outside the paint. He's a strong, bulky winger who drives the net and has an edge to his game. Zykov isn't all grit though as he possesses good puck skills and hockey sense and can make plays in tight or off the rush. His main weakness is skating and it remains to be seen whether he can skate at an NHL pace.

13. Jack Drury, C, Waterloo-USHL

Drury is a smart and hard-working, two-way forward. His best offensive attribute is his vision, as he's able to make plays to teammates and do so at a quick pace. Drury will get to the net, play hard and, despite his size, win pucks and kill penalties. I question his offensive upside, though. His skating and his hands are average.

14. Stelio Mattheos, RW, Brandon-WHL

Mattheos had a great season in the WHL, being one of the leaders in goals and points. His skills aren't high-end, but he does a lot well. He's strong, physical and has enough skill to make above-average plays. He plays the game hard, and with pace and has the offensive instincts to know how to create scoring chances. Mattheos could be a very solid two-way forward as a pro.

15. Aleksi Saarela, LW, Charlotte-AHL

I've always like Saarela, and while I don't think he's a top-end prospect anymore, he's still a name to know. He scored 25 goals in the AHL last season which is nothing to sneeze at. He does a lot at a fine-to-above-average level. He's quick, has skill and makes smart plays with the puck. His best tool is his shot, as he's shown a real sniper attribute to his game. Saarela is small though and the physical/defensive parts of his game still needs to develop.

16. Saku Maenalanen, LW, Karpat-Liiga

A former draft pick by the Preds signed this spring by Carolina, Maenalanen has an intriguing toolkit. He's a big winger who skates quite well, especially for a guy with size. He's got some offensive touch, it's not great, but he can make the odd skilled play and he can score when he gets his chances. I don't view his upside as sky-high, and he's already 24 years old, but I think he could be a bottom-six guy in the NHL with his attributes.

17. Luke Henman, C, Blainville-Boisbriand-QMJHL

Henman has good hands, shows coordination handling the puck and can make a quick move to evade pressure. His IQ is his best trait. He shows great vision moving the puck and doesn't make many poor decisions. With Henman, the major thing holding him back is his body. He's a small and very physically immature player. He's also not a great skater, although you do wonder if that aspect will improve if he bulks up.

DEPTH NOTES

18. Andrew Poturalski, C, Charlotte-AHL: He's a very good playmaker who has the skill to run a power play. Poturalski is small though and an average skater at best.

19. Trevor Carrick, D, Charlotte-AHL: Carrick is a solid puck-mover who can make plays at both ends. He doesn't skate that well and isn't dynamic with the puck, but he could play useful minutes if called up.

20. Lenni Killinen, RW, Blues-Jr. A Liiga: Killinen is a very good skater particularly for a guy who is 6-foot-2. His skills aren't as good but he can make skilled plays off the rush. He's more north-south than east-west, as he doesn't make a ton of plays. Despite having good size he's not an edgy kind of player and could go to the net better.

21. Roland McKeown, D, Charlotte-AHL: Good skater, good defender, but the offensive part of his game never developed from his teenage years.

22. Eetu Luostarinen, C, Karpat-Liiga: Luostarinen was a bit rich for me at 42nd overall last summer. He's big, and has decent speed and skills, but he doesn't stand out to me as a guy who can make an impact one day in the NHL.



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23. Alex Nedeljkovic, G, Charlotte-AHL: I believe in his athleticism but he's not the biggest guy and his pro career has been so-so to date.

2018-19 Impact

Svechnikov and Necas will be on the team, Day One and likely play notable roles from the get-go. Wallmark and Zykov are close. There's more of a roster opening for Zykov if he can take it during camp. Kuokkanen and Foegele I think should have interesting camps as well but likely will be better off back in the AHL. As well there are only so many roster spots to go around, with those two as midseason call ups being more likely. Carrick isn't likely much of an NHLer, but he could be an emergency option.

Organizational Top 10 23 and Under

1. Andrei Svechnikov, LW
2. Sebastian Aho, LW

3. Martin Necas, C
4. Janne Kuokkanen, C
5. Adam Fox, D
6. Brett Pesce, D
7. Nicolas Roy, C
8. Julien Gauthier, RW
9. Jake Bean, D
10. Lucas Wallmark, C

Some days I like to call myself the 'President of the Sebastian Aho Fan Club' (which one is your guess). He's a dynamic player who is tracking so well that he could potentially be an impact guy. Pesce is never going to 'wow' anybody, but he's a steady defender who is mobile and smart enough to get the puck out of his zone.



Top 100 NHL players of 2018–19: 100–51

Sportsnet Staff

Welcome to Sportsnet's top 100 NHL players of the 2018–19 season.

We didn't arrive at this list overnight. In fact, we started work as soon as Alex Ovechkin and Co. lifted the Stanley Cup in June. First, we asked 16 of our NHL insiders to rank the top 100 players in the league at this exact moment, and then we combined their individual lists to create a definitive master ranking.

The exact formula for what makes an NHLer great — or, more importantly, greater than another — is subjective, and everyone's top-100 list looks different. (At the end of the week, we will invite you to create your own top 10 to show us how you think it should really be done.)

But let's make one key criteria clear: This list is about the 2018–19 season — not last season or the next five years. It's about who's the best right now.

Today, we give you the first 50 names on the list. On Tuesday we'll offer up No. 50 to No. 31, and Wednesday will bring No. 30 to No. 11. Finally, on Thursday we will give you the top 10 players for the 2018–19 season.

But without further adieu, here are Nos. 100 to 51:

100. Alexander Radulov, RW, Dallas Stars

What a difference a few years can make. Radulov's second stint in North America has been more fruitful than his first, and his debut season in Dallas was his best output yet as he found his place in the Stars' high-powered offence.

99. Max Pacioretty, LW, Montreal Canadiens

Someday, Pacioretty will be remembered as the Canadiens' captain during one of the storied franchise's most desultory

periods (six playoff games spread across three springs). He's a first-line left winger who has regularly scored 35 goals per season without the benefit of playing beside a first-line centre. At some point, that is bound to come to pass — not in Montreal anytime soon, but maybe as early this season somewhere else.

98. Viktor Arvidsson, RW, Nashville Predators

The young Swede matched his breakout 2016–17 campaign with near-identical numbers last season, proving he's the real deal for a promising Predators squad. Heading into the second season of a recently inked seven-year deal, Arvidsson has all the tools needed to potentially turn that \$4.25-million cap hit into one of the league's best bargains.

97. Corey Crawford, G, Chicago Blackhawks

Although he's never finished higher than fifth in Vezina Trophy voting, Crawford has been a model of consistency throughout his career. Since 2010–11 only four goalies have more regular-season wins, and his 48 post-season victories are the most in the league this decade.

96. Charlie McAvoy, D, Boston Bruins

Thanks in part to a star-studded 2017–18 rookie class, it wouldn't quite be fair to say McAvoy was snubbed in Calder Trophy voting. But earning 32 points and playing more than 22 minutes a night — second most on a strong Bruins team — should warrant more than a fifth-place spot, no?

95. Colton Parayko, D, St. Louis Blues

You'd think a player of Parayko's size—six-foot-six and 230 pounds—would be a bruiser, but the reality is his hockey sense and puck movement are perhaps his greatest strengths. The right-handed defenceman also possesses an absolute cannon of a shot from the blue line.



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94. Jonathan Huberdeau, LW, Florida Panthers

An exciting package of size and skill made Jonathan Huberdeau the third-overall pick of the 2011 NHL Draft, and the Saint-Jerome, Que., native has steadily delivered on his potential. The 25-year-old had a career-high 27 goals and 42 assists last season and completes a dangerous first line with Aleksander Barkov and Evgenii Dadonov.

93. Jeff Carter, C, Los Angeles Kings

The Kings transitioned to a more offence-focused squad under coach John Stevens last year, but Carter missed most of the season due to a fluke injury. From the time he returned on Feb. 24 through the end of the season, though, only five players put up more goals than Carter's 13. The big centre is a great bet to better 30 tallies once again.

92. Zdeno Chara, D, Boston Bruins

The biggest and strongest man to ever skate in the league, owner of likely the hardest shot to pour in from the point — even today, 1,423 regular-season games into his career. Yes, at 41, the 2009 Norris Trophy winner has lost a step or two, but his game has rarely come down to footraces, and he remained the first option shut-down blue-liner for a 100-point team in 2017–18, going plus-24. Don't bet on this being his last season.

91. Ivan Provorov, D, Philadelphia Flyers

If Provorov has another season like he did in 2017–18, he is going to get paid. The sophomore blue-liner recorded 17 goals and 41 points and skated 24:09 per game, the most of any Flyer. Don't be surprised if he starts getting Norris votes.

90. Hampus Lindholm, D, Anaheim Ducks

He's the type of quietly effective blue-liner every club needs in order to thrive — strong offensively, solid in his own zone, and an all-around balanced presence for a fair chunk of minutes each night. Injuries limited him to 69 games in 2017–18, but Lindholm still managed his third 30-point effort (and a career-high points-per-game pace) while playing a key role for a Ducks penalty kill that ranked among the league's top five.

89. Eric Staal, C, Minnesota Wild

Set to be one of the most intriguing regression candidates in 2019, the veteran sniper's future potential is tough to pin down. The elder Staal put up the second-best goal-scoring effort of his career at age 33, a 42-tally gem, topping his total from the two previous seasons combined. But a strong 65-point showing one year prior suggests the fit might simply be right in Minnesota. A contract year in 2018–19 should clear up the debate.

88. Henrik Lundqvist, G, New York Rangers

The most stylish man in hockey did all he could behind an atrocious Rangers team last season en route to posting a 2.98 goals against average — the worst in his stellar career — and a middle-of-the-pack .914 save percentage. He certainly has some great goaltending left in him, but it's only a matter of time before King Henrik relinquishes his Manhattan throne.

87. Ryan Ellis, D, Nashville Predators

Long considered a quality, understated blue-liner, Ellis went to another level during Nashville's run to the 2017 Cup Final. He missed the 2017 portion of last season with a knee injury, but the 0.73 points-per-game he posted upon his return represent a 60-point campaign over a full 82. This is a cerebral player who is only now realizing his full potential. And has a shiny new contract to reflect that.

86. Devan Dubnyk, G, Minnesota Wild

The Wild's franchise record-holder for wins in a single season (40 in 2016–17), Dubnyk has arguably and quietly been the league's most consistent goaltender over the past four years, posting a minimum of five shutouts and a .918 save percentage each season since arriving in Minnesota. While questions surrounding the Wild's offence remain and a full rebuild may be the best option, Dubnyk's steadiness alone should keep this perennial playoff team in the mix.

85. Morgan Rielly, D, Toronto Maple Leafs

He has been a consistent strength on a blue line that has needed it throughout the Maple Leafs' forward-thinking rebuild. Now the young veteran — hard to believe he's only 24 — is coming off the most productive season of his career and is still barreling toward his prime at the best possible time.

84. Nikolaj Ehlers, LW, Winnipeg Jets

Ehlers is one of several building blocks who could make the Jets look like a stalwart Cup contender for years to come. The 22-year-old Dane already has lethal chemistry with his flashy 20-year-old linemate, Patrik Laine. Ehlers scored 29 goals and 60 points in his third NHL season in Winnipeg. And the Jets are just taking off.

83. Shea Weber, D, Montreal Canadiens

Destined for a greater microscope given his high-profile 2016 jersey swap, the veteran rearguard hasn't helped his cause since coming north. Year 1 saw his numbers dip slightly, Year 2 brought an injury-shortened season of just 26 appearances, and Year 3 won't begin until mid-December. With eight years at just under \$8 million per left on the books, a strong redemption campaign is in need for the 32-year-old before the pressure ramps up significantly from the Canadiens faithful.

82. Vincent Trocheck, C, Florida Panthers

Hot off a breakout campaign in which he piled up 31 goals and 75 points and was invited to his first all-star game, the Pittsburgh native will be key to Florida's effort to return to the playoffs. Trocheck's production has improved with every season, and he's that rare Panthers top-six forward who has managed to stay healthy. Knock on wood.

81. Kris Letang, D, Pittsburgh Penguins

A three-time Stanley Cup champion and two-time second-team all star, Letang's reputation as the Penguins' essential No. 1 defenceman took a small hit in '17 when they went the distance despite Letang being sidelined for the entire tournament with a neck injury. A healthy Letang returned in 2017–18 to play his most games (79) in six years and racked up 11 points in 12 playoff contests. He's still the engine from



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the back and point man on arguably the league's best power-play unit.

80. Tuukka Rask, G, Boston Bruins

After a five-year stretch at the start of the decade in which he racked up a cumulative .926 save percentage, Rask is coming off seasons of .915, .915 and .917, and his performances in the playoffs last spring were a decidedly mixed bag. Rask hit his nadir in Game 5 against the Leafs in the opening round: In a potential series-clinching contest, he allowed four dubious goals on 13 shots before getting pulled. Some image resuscitation is needed this season for him to jump back onto the short list of franchise netminders.

79. John Gibson, G, Anaheim Ducks

The 25-year-old has battled injuries during his relatively short career, but he's about as good as they come when healthy. Gibson's .923 career save percentage is the highest of any active goalie who's appeared in at least 150 games. The six-foot-three American may be the most important player on the Ducks as the club transitions into a more modern outfit.

78. Mark Giordano, D, Calgary Flames

Though he continues to anchor the Flames' blue line and received a handful of Norris Trophy votes, Giordano's offensive output dropped for the second consecutive season in 2017–18. (Granted, last year's fall wasn't as precipitous — he went to 38 points from 39.) Giordano will reportedly reunite with T.J. Brodie to start the season, so that may help the 34-year-old.

77. Matt Murray, G, Pittsburgh Penguins

It bears repeating: By the end of his rookie season, Murray already had two Stanley Cups to his name. The start to his NHL career has been rather remarkable, although early indications would suggest he's somewhat injury prone. He relies on his athleticism more than he should, but that's a common trait among young goalies and it's correctable. He's still only 24.

76. Rickard Rakell, C, Anaheim Ducks

After another 30-plus-goal season, there's no denying Rakell is the forward to watch on the Ducks. With Corey Perry's scoring touch waning and the team's core getting older, Rakell, 25, has to continue to improve if Anaheim is going to reach the playoffs for the seventh straight season.

75. Ryan O'Reilly, C, St. Louis Blues

A bright spot in Buffalo over his three seasons there, O'Reilly's future just got a whole lot brighter after being dealt to the Blues. He's one of the top two-way centres in the game right now, and he might just be the missing piece to get the Blues back into contention.

74. Mark Stone, RW, Ottawa Senators

Only 13 players posted a better points-per-game mark than Stone's 1.07 last year, and all but one, Connor McDavid, played on squads that — unlike Stone's awful Ottawa club — qualified for the playoffs. The 26-year-old has gone from being a sixth-round pick in 2010 to earning a reputation as one of the smartest all-around forwards in the game. Don't

be shocked if he becomes the rare winger to get a Selke nomination in coming years.

73. Dougie Hamilton, D, Carolina Hurricanes

A change of scenery could be just what Hamilton needs — he was clearly unhappy in Calgary, and the feeling seemed mutual. The big, smooth-skating defenceman was T-1 among all blue-liners with 17 goals last season and will have another chance to prove himself, this time with a Hurricanes team that has struggled with goaltending.

72. Brayden Point, C, Tampa Bay Lightning

Sometimes overshadowed on a talented Lightning forward corps, Point is a crafty 22-year-old centre who earned quite a bit of spotlight in a breakout 2017–18 campaign. He had 32 goals and 66 points as a sophomore, giving Lightning opponents a dynamic threat to worry about when the big-name superstars were on the bench. If you don't know much about him yet, you will very soon.

71. Ryan Suter, D, Minnesota Wild

It may be the back nine of his illustrious career, but Suter is still able to carry a big load on a deep Wild blue line. The 33-year-old is best known for his defensive prowess, but was still able to tie a career high in points with 51 in 2017–18. You'll constantly see him near the top of the NHL's ice-time leaders, consistently averaging over 27 minutes a game.

70. Shayne Gostisbehere, D, Philadelphia Flyers

Gostisbehere is 25 and part of a young and talented group in Philadelphia. This puck-moving defenceman is key on the power play and coming off a career offensive year in which he put up 65 points in 78 games. His best is still to come — presumably, so is his team's.

69. Sean Monahan, C, Calgary Flames

With Monahan playing alongside waterbug Johnny Gaudreau, the Flames should have a fun future ahead of them. He's scored 138 goals through five seasons and he's still only 23. Monahan missed the final eight games of 2017–18, but he's fully healthy to start the campaign and fans can expect him to keep padding that goal total.

68. Jonathan Marchessault, LW, Vegas Golden Knights

Marchessault is a perfect example of what an undersized player can accomplish when he's got an oversized chip on his shoulder. After showing plenty of promise in Florida, the undrafted centreman looked right at home in Vegas as the team's second-best scorer in both the regular season and playoffs.

67. Frederik Andersen, G, Toronto Maple Leafs

Andersen has transitioned nicely from a 1A/1B situation in Anaheim to a 66-game workhorse in Toronto, posting a .918 save percentage in each season as a Leaf. The 28-year-old will again be required to mask the mistakes of a young run-and-gun outfit with legitimate Cup dreams. His .896 showing in Round 1's exit to Boston, however, proves there's another level he must reach.

66. Zach Werenski, D, Columbus Blue Jackets



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Helping the Blue Jackets to back-to-back playoff appearances for the first time in franchise history, Werenski has splashed onto the NHL scene in a big way. The 21-year-old is a bona fide top-pairing defenceman, and has the vision and speed to contend for the Norris Trophy in the near future, if not already.

65. Aaron Ekblad, D, Florida Panthers

The 2014 first-overall pick has become your all-around solid pointman, capable of running the power play, ripping one home from the point, and moving the puck out of his own zone. Ekblad is just 22 and his best years are ahead.

64. Connor Hellebuyck, G, Winnipeg Jets

It's hard to believe the goaltender who finished second in Vezina Trophy voting and signed a six-year, \$37-million deal in July wasn't even an opening-night starter last season. With Steve Mason out of the picture, suffice it to say the Jets won't make that mistake again. Add in backstopping the Jets to the Western Conference final and Hellebuyck, 25, is the unquestioned No. 1 goalie in Winnipeg.

63. Duncan Keith, D, Chicago Blackhawks

A goal against St Louis in the last week of the 2017–18 campaign spared Keith an historic if humbling stat: a shooting percentage of <1.0 for the season. That goal, Keith's second, raised his success rate to 1.1. The two-time Norris Trophy winner, 35, vowed to step up his training in the off-season in an effort to get Chicago back into the playoffs, but you have to wonder about the toll that his team's run to championships took on their minutes-eating franchise blue-liner.

62. Mikko Rantanen, RW, Colorado Avalanche

Just 21 years old and entering his third year, and already has an 84-point season under his belt. Yowza. Rantanen is big, he's fast, he can finish and he can pass. The kid is chock full of upside.

61. Joe Pavelski, C, San Jose Sharks

While San Jose's other elite centremen, Logan Couture and Joe Thornton, have battled the injury bug, "Captain America" has missed all of one game over the past seven seasons and threatens 70 points in an off year. A crafty playmaker, driven leader and accurate shooter, Pavelski sets a high bar for a room that will welcome the return of Evander Kane and should, as always, contend for the Pacific crown.

60. Oliver Ekman-Larsson, D, Arizona Coyotes

Ekman-Larsson's decision to sign an eight-year extension with Arizona this off-season represents the best news for the club in a long while. And as the young Coyotes improve, it will only serve to showcase the Swede's skills. His subtle game doesn't smack you in the face; it'll just steal the puck off your stick and send it up ice before you know what happened.

59. Marc-Edouard Vlasic, D, San Jose Sharks

Little flash but plenty of substance. The 2014 Olympic gold medalist is about as reliable as it gets, logging roughly 22 minutes a night usually against opposing teams' top forward units. He doesn't play a physical game, but doesn't need to.

His hockey IQ, positioning and skating prowess make him a difficult out for any forward entering the offensive zone.

58. Brock Boeser, RW, Vancouver Canucks

With the hair of Prince Charming from Shrek and a shot that would make Canucks great Pavel Bure jealous, Boeser is a superstar in the making. He had 29 goals in 62 games before a nasty back injury abruptly ended his stellar rookie campaign. He showed off his laser-quick release by winning the accuracy shooting competition at the 2018 NHL All-Star Game by hitting all five targets in 11.136 seconds. A future 50-goal scorer.

57. Logan Couture, C, San Jose Sharks

Yes, the Sharks signed 39-year-old Joe Thornton to a one-year deal when they missed out on John Tavares. And, yes, Joe Pavelski, 34, wears the C in San Jose. But the team's forward of the moment and the future is emphatically Couture. He led the Sharks in nearly every category, including goals with 34. For GM Doug Wilson, continuity is king so locking up Couture with an eight-year extension running through to the 2026–27 season was no big surprise.

56. Jonathan Quick, G, Los Angeles Kings

Not many goaltenders can match Quick's resumé, which includes two Stanley Cups and a Conn Smythe Trophy. The 32-year-old's athleticism results in spectacular saves and frustrated opponents on the regular. He rebounded from an injury-plagued 2016–17 to post an impressive .921 save percentage this past season.

55. Pekka Rinne, G, Nashville Predators

After his disappointing post-season, it's easy to forget that Rinne put up a .927 save percentage in 2017–18 en route to the Vezina. Turning 36 in November, Rinne is in the final year of his contract, and this summer his team signed young netminder Juuse Saros to a three-year deal. Rinne will be his solid self in the regular season, but the real test will come in the playoffs.

54. Mitch Marner, RW, Toronto Maple Leafs

When John Tavares announced that he was signing with the Maple Leafs, Marner responded by tweeting a pair of excited eyes. It was fitting commentary from Marner, who has some of the best eyes in the league and led the Leafs with 47 assists as an NHL sophomore. Expect that tally to rise when Marner lines up alongside Tavares this fall.

53. Marc-Andre Fleury, G, Vegas Golden Knights

He could've packed up his three Stanley Cup rings and ridden off into the sunset of his career when he was selected by the Golden Knights in the expansion draft, but instead Fleury posted the best numbers of his career in 46 regular-season starts. His playoff performance was even better. Now with the ink drying on a new deal in the desert, the (always-smiling) face of the NHL's newest franchise looks ready for another run.

52. John Klingberg, D, Dallas Stars

He played in the All Star Game for the first time in 2017–18, led all NHL defencemen with 59 assists — and was tied for



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second among rearguards in total points, just one behind John Carlson's 68. Expect the Swede to be an offensive juggernaut from the blue line for years to come.

51. Leon Draisaitl, C, Edmonton Oilers

What a difference a year makes — that's all the time it took for the young German to go from breakout star to overpaid

headache in the eyes of non-Oilers fans. Draisaitl has all the talent required to live up to the massive expectations surrounding him, but it's how he handles the growing weight of that eight-year, \$68-million deal that will determine how he fares.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://theathletic.com/484809/2018/08/28/nhl-farm-system-rankings-no-4-carolina-hurricanes/>
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/top-100-nhl-players-2018-19-100-51/>

SportScan

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

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The Athletic / NHL Season Previews Preview: Measuring Uncertainty

By Dom Luszczyszyn Aug 27, 2018

Another year, another season of unpredictable chaos.

That's the name of the game in a sport as dynamically erratic as hockey and it means things will never go as expected. Just think back to the last season and you may recall a number of things that very few predicted could've happened.

Vegas wasn't the worst team in the league despite being an expansion team, and somehow made the playoffs. And then made it to the second round. And then the third round. And then the Stanley Cup final. Seriously, how the hell?

Despite gifting the above team two of its best players at the expansion draft, Florida still managed to earn 96 points, though still missing the playoffs by a single point.

The last place team in the West (Colorado) and the East (New Jersey) from the previous season both stunningly made the playoffs.

Two division winners (Chicago and Montreal) both missed the playoffs in spectacular fashion.

Edmonton, a trendy dark horse Stanley Cup pick, collapsed under the weight of its own expectations back into the league's basement, despite an Art Ross-winning season from Connor McDavid.

After years of disappointment, Winnipeg finally flourished and finished second in the league.

Washington finally did the damn thing, with a team that looked much worse than previous editions of the team that couldn't do the damn thing.

Vancouver finished outside the bottom five.

Say that any one of those things would happen a year ago and you'd get some concerned looks. All eight and you'd get laughed out of the building.

That's the NHL, though. It's what makes each season so exciting and what makes pre-season predictions so difficult. No matter what you're going to be wrong thanks to the parity of the league and the randomness of the sport. That's not a cop-out, it's just a reality that more fans need to become comfortable with: luck plays a big role in the way every season is shaped.

It all leads to increased variability for each team's future and accepting that is half the battle when it comes to making predictions — the other half is illustrating that uncertainty. That's something that will be a big focus in this year's season previews (which start Wednesday and will run every day until Sept. 28) and it starts with understanding the process behind the projections.

Our projections begin at the game level where each team is given a probability of winning any and every given game throughout the season (based on a model that's explained a bit here). Then we simulate the season by randomly picking a winner for each game using the assigned probability for each game (if a team has a 55 per cent chance and the random number is lower, than that team "wins") and then add up the totals.

Here's what one version of the 2018-19 season looks like.

Like any season of NHL hockey, the results are both expected and unexpected. Even though the Sabres and Islanders were both lowly-regarded teams (spoiler alert), they still managed to make the playoffs thanks entirely to random variation. Same thing goes for highly-regarded teams like the Penguins, Capitals and Jets. A season that looks like this would be wild, but it's perfectly possible given what we know about each team right now.

The spread between the best and worst is so thin that a majority of games fall into 60/40 affairs or closer. Only 25 per cent of games are more lopsided, with the biggest mismatches hovering around a 70/30 split. Over an 82-game season, a team slated to win 45 per cent of the time can easily win more than that and make the playoffs if the stars align the right way.

Which is why we simulate the season again.



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And again.

And again.

And again.

And 100,000 more times after that, finding the average output for each team as well as how many times they made the playoffs and won the Stanley Cup. Finding the average output for each team is why you'll see the spread in projections much lower than an average season. We know there'll probably be a team that gets 110 points or more, or 70 points or less, what we're not sure about is which one and the model reflects that uncertainty.

Basically, we're creating a multitude of alternate NHL timelines to measure where teams generally fall and how often they fall in that direction in order to figure out what to expect from each club. This is what that looks like (and a new chart that'll be updated daily within this season's projections and probabilities page).

As you can see, there's a wide range of outcomes and it's why pre-season predictions will always be wrong – sometimes wildly – no matter where they come from. The task at hand is to be less wrong than everyone else. In a 31 team league it shouldn't be at all surprising to see something that should only happen maybe five per cent (or less) of the time, actually happen. For a team projected for 80 points, that's roughly equal to their chances of hitting 95 points or more.

That's why surprising success stories like Vegas, Colorado and New Jersey can and will happen every season. Overlay the distributions from the best and worst teams and there's some very small overlap, meaning there is a very strange alternate universe where the projected worst team in the league finishes higher than the projected best and I look like an absolute idiot come April.

The actual odds of that happening is roughly 275-to-1, so it's a long-shot, but still very possible. Put another way, based on each team's strength, my model is 97 per cent sure that the best team will be better than the worst team. That's an especially important thing to keep in mind when it comes to where each team "ranks." Considering the massive amount of uncertainty that goes into every season, a couple points of difference won't be worth getting worked up about too much.

Last season the average output is all we showed, but the distribution of results is a vital piece of the puzzle, especially considering it peaks at five per cent (ie. a team projected for 95 points has a roughly five per cent chance of getting exactly 95 points). Knowing and seeing that should be a lot more helpful in understanding what's likely to happen for each team next season.

In the NHL, anything is possible (Exhibit A: Vegas) and while I tried my best to convey that in last season's previews, it wasn't enough to get the point across at times (hence the focus of this season's previews).

Take the projected last-place team, the New Jersey Devils, for example. There was a lot made from Devils fans about a team projected for last that obviously didn't finish last. Rightfully so, but being ranked last is very different from being projected for last. Unfortunately for my Twitter mentions, that was not a difference I made clear enough last year.

The Devils ranked 31st which meant they had the highest chance of finishing 31st – not that they necessarily would. Their combined chances of finishing anywhere else were significantly higher too. Based on 100,000 simulations of the season, the Devils finished dead last in one-in-five simulations – roughly the same probability of the team finishing in the top 20.

I have no regrets about the Devils last-place ranking last season – it was probably wrong, though they were a consensus bottom five team and 78-to-79 points was in the same ballpark as other forecasts – but the framing of that projection (and others) could've been handled much better. Probability is a difficult thing for the human mind to comprehend organically and it doesn't help if the forecaster doesn't properly explain or visualize the uncertainty of their predictions.

The bottom line is that you should expect the unexpected. Good teams might falter. Bad teams might surprise. Anything can happen and our season previews should do a much better job this season of conveying that message so readers can truly understand how good or bad their team's upcoming season will likely be — and why.

Let the unpredictability begin.

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The Athletic / State of the Franchise: Penguins energized to continue building a dynasty

By Josh Yohe Aug 27, 2018

It was a peculiar scene on PPG Paints Arena ice on May 7 at precisely 10 p.m., as the Capitals celebrated while the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Penguins quietly waited for a handshake that must have felt foreign.

The Penguins ruled the NHL for two seasons and ruled the Capitals for much of their existence. With one Evgeny Kuznetsov goal, it was over.

Or was it?

These Penguins face two undeniable options moving forward. With another Cup, giving them four in a decade during the salary cap era, the Penguins will have authored one of the great scripts in hockey history and will be remembered as an all-time great team.

Or, perhaps the championship years could be over and, while their place in history is safe, the Sidney Crosby-Evgeni Malkin era Penguins may have peaked during the 2016 and 2017 postseasons.

The sentiment among the players and front office universally suggests that the 2017-18 Penguins simply ran out of gas, the physical grind of 49 postseason games during the previous two springs — along with a league-high 19 back-to-back sets — taking a seismic toll on Mike Sullivan's gifted but physically unimposing squad.

However, it will be a relatively rested group of Penguins that arrives in Cranberry Township for training camp in less than three weeks. They'll also be plenty motivated and maintain one of the NHL's most feared rosters.

As usual, it will be championship or bust for the Penguins, with another spring showdown against the Capitals feeling inevitable in eight months. Let's take a deeper dive into the Penguins and their organizational depth chart.

Biggest on-ice question

Which Kris Letang will be on display this season?

The Penguins are pretty well set elsewhere. Their top two lines are loaded with future Hall of Famers, their bottom six is better than most, especially considering how much money is devoted to the top-six. They possess a two-time Cup winner between the pipes in Matt Murray and the rest of their blueline is quite solid with the likes of Brian Dumoulin, Justin Schultz, Olli Maatta, Jack Johnson, Jamie Oleksiak and Chad Ruhwedel.

But what about Letang? He was something of a disaster in the first half of last season when he was only a few months removed from neck surgery. Letang rebounded to show glimpses of his all-star form in the second half but never made it all the way back. He made two horrific mistakes in Game 5 against the Capitals last spring. The Penguins entered the third



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period with a 3-2 lead, but two Letang mistakes led to two Washington goals.

He is the Penguins' No. 1 defenseman and will remain in that role, even if a healthy chunk of his power play time has been assumed by Schultz. The Penguins are planning on reducing Letang's minutes slightly — Rutherford wants him playing 24 minutes per night instead of 28 — but he's still the most important man on their blueline.

If Letang stumbles again this season, the challenge of winning another Stanley Cup becomes considerably great. Trading him would also be that much more difficult, as Letang still has four years at \$7.25 million remaining on his contract. He'll be 32 in April and possesses a nasty injury track record.

Letang potentially has lost a step because of age and injury, though he remains a uniquely gifted player. His biggest problem during the 2017-18 season was a disturbing trend of making mental errors. He blew an unusual number of assignments, particularly when considering his experience.

There is little question that all eyes will be on Letang when training camp begins.

Depth chart analysis

Center: There might not be a better situation for any position in all of hockey.

Crosby is the best player of this generation and isn't showing signs of slowing. His postseason work last season was startling, as Crosby produced 21 points in only 12 games. He's playing the finest two-way hockey of his career and remains a threat to claim the scoring title in any given season.

Then there is Malkin, whose second-half tear placed him into the MVP discussion for a time. He finished with 98 points and was probably the league's best player during the final three months of the regular season. Like Crosby, he's a Hall of Famer still very close to his prime.

Derick Brassard will receive plenty of attention when the season begins and, in fact, might find himself on the left wing. Because of the Penguins' outrageous depth down the middle, they'll be flexible with Brassard. Still, he's a natural center and the Penguins acquired him from Ottawa in order to enjoy unprecedented depth down the middle. Look for him to remain there for the majority of the season. He wasn't a total bust with the Penguins and was dealing with a groin injury, compiling 12 points in 26 games including the postseason. But he was pretty ordinary. The Penguins are counting on more this season.

Riley Sheahan is among the NHL's finest fourth-line centers and, given his chemistry with Kessel, could always be bumped to the third line. He's a fine penalty killer and a player Sullivan trusts in late-game defensive situations.

Then there is Matt Cullen, the 41-year-old veteran signed on July 1 for his second stint with the Penguins. Cullen will probably start the season playing left wing on the fourth line but remains eminently capable of manning a position in the middle. He's a trusted penalty killer and history says he'll play his best hockey in the second half of the regular season and during the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Don't forget about Derek Grant. The Penguins signed him well after the free agency period began and were surprised that he was still available. He recorded 12 goals and 24 points with the Ducks last season and is a viable fourth-line option.

Left wing: If there is an area of concern with the forwards, it's on the left side. However, the best left wing on the team should be primed for yet another terrific season.

Jake Guentzel has scored 61 goals in 159 NHL games, including the postseason, where he's been nothing shy of marvelous. While Guentzel had a fairly uneven 2017-18 regular season, he's emerged as a terrific player who enjoys a particular chemistry with Crosby. A natural center,

look for Guentzel to remain on Crosby's left side for the foreseeable future.

Carl Hagelin endured a horrible three-month stretch to begin last season but became his typically effective self following Christmas. He's never going to score 20 or more goals because of his relatively unimpressive hands, but Hagelin is an important man for the Penguins. If Sullivan opts to play Malkin and Kessel on the same line, Hagelin will be the third wheel on that line. The trio works, as Hagelin's speed creates turnovers and allows him to take care of the defensive responsibilities.

This is where things get a little shaky.

Zach Aston-Reese is likely to be in the top 12 when the season starts, and he showed flashes of potential last season, scoring four goals in 16 games. There is nothing flashy about him and his ceiling isn't strikingly high, but he has the look of a solid NHL player who possesses a particular knack for scoring goals close to the net. Still, he's very much a work in progress and he isn't a great skater, something the Penguins prefer in their wingers.

Cullen could play there and so could one of the natural right wings, as there are many. If Aston-Reese finds himself on the fourth line with Cullen and Sheahan — a distinct possibility — Aston-Reese will likely play on the right side, something he's capable of.

Dominik Simon also figures to find himself on the left side. He can play either wing. He's a favorite of the coaching staff and the front office and enjoyed a few good games alongside Crosby. However, he struggled in the postseason and he doesn't appear to have the physical attributes to be a legitimate top-six answer.

Right wing: Perhaps the Penguins aren't loaded here quite like at center, but the depth here is still staggering.

It starts with Kessel. He doesn't play on the top line, but he's the best right wing on the team and one of the best in hockey. He produced a career-high 92 points last season, was the orchestrator of the league's best power play and is lethal in three on three hockey. The Penguins have experimented with Kessel on the left side but he's clearly more comfortable at his natural right wing and he'll figure to stay there this season.

Patric Hornqvist scored 29 goals last season, his best total as a member of the Penguins. He was rewarded with a five-year contract and is among the most valuable players on this team. Like Kessel, Hornqvist has been used on the left side occasionally but has never looked comfortable there. He can play on any of the top three lines and be effective. Hornqvist always plays well with Crosby and clicked with Malkin as well.

Bryan Rust has been a reliable presence during the past three seasons. He's at his best on the right side but has proved capable of playing on the left side. He doesn't score in bunches but is a perfect fit for the Penguins. His speed creates significant trouble for opposing defensemen and he's an able penalty killer. He's also a big game artist. His knack for scoring in the biggest of games is difficult to ignore.

Then, there is Daniel Sprong. GM Jim Rutherford insists Sprong will be in the lineup to start the season, and there's little reason to think this won't be the case. The Penguins' most gifted prospect is capable of scoring in bunches at the NHL level. He also has a reputation — fair or not — for not being particularly interested in playing defense, which doesn't always endear him to coaches.

Jimmy Hayes scored 19 goals with the Panthers four years ago and could play either wing for the Penguins.

Left defense: The Penguins possess a pretty outstanding situation here.

Dumoulin has emerged as the Penguins' most reliable defensive player. His performance in the 2018 postseason — to say nothing of what he did in the previous two springs — was a study in defensive precision. He's the classic, new-age defensive defenseman. He's not physical but doesn't need to be. His size, smarts and skating ability make him quite a



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bargain at \$4.1 million per season. His quiet demeanor makes him the perfect defense partner for Letang.

Maatta is pretty similar to Dumoulin stylistically and in terms of his quiet demeanor. Maatta does possess more offensive upside, which was evident at times during the 2017-18 season when he produced seven goals and 29 points. While he isn't a gifted skater, Maatta is an above average, two-way NHL defenseman and, at 24, only figures to improve with time. He's one of the Penguins' most solid players.

Johnson ... let the drama begin. A vocal portion of the Penguins' fan base was less than amused by the five-year deal Johnson received on July 1. While the Penguins almost surely didn't need to offer Johnson five years, he surely isn't as bad at ice hockey as many will have you believe. The Penguins want him to be a No. 4 or No. 5 defenseman. That's all. He should be able to manage this, though there's no question he'll be in the spotlight when the season begins.

Right defense: Letang will see the most ice time here and his troubles have been well documented. Even when he struggles, though, Crosby and Malkin will tell you they prefer being on the ice with him because of his ability to deliver them the puck in seemingly every situation. It will be interesting to see how he rebounds this season.

Schultz has been quite a success story with the Penguins, who acquired him from the Oilers for a third-round pick in what was one of the best trades of the Rutherford era. While he's a very good offensive player and runs the power play exceptionally well, Schultz's defensive work has been the most startling aspect of his game since joining the Penguins. He's not Doug Harvey, but rarely does Schultz make a mistake. He's a legitimate, top-four NHL defenseman with a real flair for the offensive game.

Speaking of reclamation projects, Oleksiak thrived almost immediately after working with Jacques Martin and Sergei Gonchar. Of note, the 6-foot-7 Oleksiak was more effective playing on the right side even though he is left-handed. Look for him to begin the season on the right side on a pairing with either Johnson or Maatta. Oleksiak will be used heavily in penalty killing situations and the Penguins strongly believe he will develop into a top-four defenseman.

Goal: Murray already has two Stanley Cup rings, so suggesting that he has anything to prove is probably unfair.

However, Murray is coming off a decidedly average season. It can't be ignored that 38 NHL goaltenders enjoyed a better save percentage than Murray's .907 mark last season. Of course, Murray had a couple of factors working against him last season. The Penguins were horribly undisciplined for most of the season, allowing odd-man rushes with disturbing frequency. The shots Murray faced weren't exactly routine offerings from the point. Indeed, the degree of difficulty of the shots Murray faced was out of whack. Also, the death of Murray's father midway through the season obviously and understandably took a toll on the young goaltender. A bounce-back season certainly feels likely.

But who will play behind Murray? Tristan Jarry and Casey DeSmith will battle for that role during training camp. DeSmith outplayed Jarry slightly last season and thus was given the nod as the Penguins' No. 2 goalie. Jarry, a former second-round pick, certainly possesses more of a pedigree than DeSmith. It should be an interesting battle.

Special teams

Power play: Well, duplicating the 2017-18 season won't be easy. But it will be fun to try.

The Penguins led the NHL with an outrageous 26.2 conversion rate. They essentially went wire to wire with the NHL's best power play. You can expect Crosby, Malkin, Kessel, Hornqvist and Schultz to start the season on the top power play.

The power play works because of the extreme talent on display and because everyone knows his role.

Crosby is at his best when he works down low, and that's where he has always been positioned on the power play during the Sullivan era. It works.

Malkin is at his best on the right-wing wall, where his one-timer is a lethal weapon. It works.

Kessel really is the player who runs the power play from the left-wing wall, where he has Crosby and Malkin as outlet options. Or, Kessel can walk off the boards and fire world-class wrist shot. It works.

Hornqvist is arguably the NHL's best player in front of the net. And he doesn't move from that spot very often. He's also extraordinarily good at retrieving loose pucks. You'll count on one hand how many 50/50 puck battles he'll lose all season.

Schultz is the perfect point man for this group because he doesn't cater to Crosby, Malkin or Kessel. They all demand the puck, as stars always do. Schultz doesn't care. When he has an open shot, he takes it. Perfect.

There's also plenty of depth here. Letang is much different than Schultz in terms of style but the numbers indicate he's been just as effective at running the point, and he'll see plenty of time on the top unit. If any of the forwards were to become injured, they'll be replaced by Guentzel, who can work the half wall or be effective in front of the net.

Also, Brassard is very comfortable running a power play from the right-wing wall. Johnson has seen much power play time in his career. Aston-Reese will be a very good net-front guy at some point. This has the makings of pretty good No. 2 unit.

Penalty kill: The Penguins were a very ordinary 17th in the NHL in penalty killing, finishing with an 80 percent kill rate.

Dig deeper and you'll see reasons for concern. While fans can (and will) debate how much Ian Cole's departure affected the penalty kill, some numbers don't lie. Following Cole's trade in the Brassard deal on Feb. 23, the Penguins only killed 69 percent of the penalties they took for the remainder of the regular season. He was their best penalty killer.

While they enjoyed very good penalty killing (91 percent) against the Flyers in the first round, they allowed a power play goal in four consecutive games against the Capitals in the second round. It's an issue moving forward. Look for Hagelin, Cullen, Sheahan, Dumoulin, Maatta, Letang and Oleksiak to receive heavy minutes on the penalty kill. One more forward — Rust and Aston-Reese are the best candidates, along with perhaps Brassard — needs to contribute here as well.

Martin coaches the penalty killing unit and he does so brilliantly. It's a good thing because this area appears to be a slight concern.

In the pipeline

Center: Jordy Bellerive is a very interesting prospect. He escaped potentially serious injuries in a fire this summer and should be fine for training camp. He has the skill level to make an impact at the NHL level. Also, the Penguins really like Teddy Blueger. The problem for him is simply that the Penguins are more loaded at center than any other NHL team.

Left wing: The Penguins love Filip Hallander. You'll recall that they traded up to grab him in the second round of the NHL draft in June. While he has played a good bit at center, he will probably be deployed as a left wing at some point. His skill level is high and so is his competitive level. He won't be in the NHL for a while, but the Penguins believe they have a good one in him.

Right wing: Not much to speak of here, but keep your eyes on Jan Drozg. He's a highly skilled player and it will be interesting to see how he develops.

Left defense: Clayton Phillips is a talented kid. He was a third-round pick last June and the Penguins really like this puck-moving defenseman. But again, he's not close to being NHL ready.



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Right defense: Calen Addison was selected in the second round earlier this summer and the Penguins believe he has the opportunity to be an impactful NHL player. Huge amount of skill. Excellent skater. The classic offensive defenseman. He's small but, as we've seen during the past decade, defensemen no longer must possess significant size to be effective.

Goal: Jarry and DeSmith are still essentially prospects. One will be Murray's backup this season, the other will receive the bulk of the playing time in Wilkes-Barre. After these two, there's a fairly large drop in NHL-ready talent, though Alex D'Orio is quite an athlete.

Salary cap watch

There isn't much room but there's also no reason for panic.

The Penguins are about \$1 million under the salary cap currently, so Rutherford can't be especially flexible. But there is plenty of good news.

Crosby, Malkin, Kessel, Hornqvist, Murray and the entire top-six on the blue line are under contract for at least two more seasons. Not a bad foundation.

Guentzel will need a new contract next summer and he'll receive huge money, rightfully so. Hagelin and Brassard are entering the final seasons of their respective contracts and both could walk next summer. The Penguins love Hagelin, but he'd likely need to take less money in order to remain in Pittsburgh for the long term. Brassard clearly has much to prove this season.

The Penguins don't have much to spend but are very comfortable with the players already locked into long-term deals. This roster doesn't figure to become drastically different for at least a couple of more years.

Final assessment

This remains a great team. Five years from now, will the Penguins pay a price for the "win-now mode" philosophy of dealing high draft picks and prospects? Of course.

But who cares? They're in the business of winning championships, and business has been very good. A window remains for this group to win the Stanley Cup again. They'll have to deal with a powerful Eastern Conference — Toronto and Boston are on the rise, Tampa Bay is loaded, and another second-round clash with the Capitals feels as inevitable as cherry blossoms in the Washington spring — but the rest of the conference must deal with the Penguins, too.

Fully rested, Crosby, Malkin and Kessel could carry the Penguins quite far this spring.

Unlike much of their younger competition in the East, they already know the way.

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The Athletic / Stars & Stripes conversations: On Suter skipping, Zetterberg's bleak future and Matthews' contract

By Craig Custance Aug 27, 2018

PLYMOUTH, Mich. — The first call came a couple weeks ago. Wild GM Paul Fenton saw defenseman Ryan Suter's name on a roster expected to play in Sunday's Stars & Stripes showdown to honor the late Jim Johansson and he didn't think it was a particularly good idea. Suter has been rehabbing his ankle all summer and things have been going well. Really well.

"He said, 'What if a pass hits you? What if it hits in just the right spot and you're set back?'" Suter told The Athletic. "You went through so much, why now would you do this? Just go and support him."

And in case he wasn't clear, Fenton followed up with a text on Sunday morning looking for confirmation that Suter wasn't playing. Suter assured him he wouldn't.

Instead, Suter joined Tony Granato, Jeff Blashill, John Hynes and David Quinn behind the bench as coaches of the charity game set up to honor Johansson, the USA Hockey executive who died in January at age 53.

Suter joked at just how impressive the players were from a coaching perspective. Most notably Toronto's Auston Matthews.

"He is a stud. He's going to be so good. He's already good," Suter said. "He is a stud."

The coaching vantage point also reinforced Suter's suspicions that he has zero interest in pursuing that profession when his playing days are over.

"I could never be a coach," Suter said. "Too many egos. Too high-maintenance of a job. You have to worry about everything. GM would be awful too."

For now, Suter's focus is strictly on getting back on the ice and staying there. He said he fully expects to be ready for the start of training camp, unless he milks his injury a bit to get out of testing. He also said he should be available for his usual two preseason games.

But until he gets out there and is able to show everyone where he's at health-wise, there's going to be some doubt. He says he's completely fine but that's what you'd expect from Suter.

"You know him, you're going to ask him and he's 'I'm fine, nothing is wrong,'" teammate Zach Parise said. "Once he gets himself in the more intense practices, when you're not doing a scripted drill, you have to play and just react — that's when you can really test where your injury is. Fingers crossed."

More conversations from Sunday's exhibition game in Michigan

It seems like every time somebody with the Red Wings publicly addresses Henrik Zetterberg's future with the team, the outlook gets a little more dire. That was certainly the case with Blashill after the game. He all but declared Zetterberg out for the season because of a back injury.

"All signs indicate to me right now it'll be very difficult for Henrik to be cleared to play," Blashill said. He also said that if Zetterberg isn't cleared to play at the start of camp, he doesn't expect him to play at all this season.

The Red Wings coach has been in communication with his captain this summer and the message from Zetterberg is that his back has not reacted well. He said Zetterberg hasn't really had an opportunity to train.

"I don't know how you go through not being able to train and being able to play an NHL season," Blashill said. "I think it's almost impossible."

At this point, you have to operate under the assumption that Zetterberg isn't playing for the Red Wings. They will do their physicals on Sept. 13 in Traverse City, Michigan, as part of the start of training camp, but veterans have the option of completing their physical before then. That will probably be the case for Zetterberg. If he fails his physical — and again, all signs point in that direction — Blashill offered some clues on Sunday as to how he'll handle it.

First, on the ice. If Zetterberg is out, Andreas Athanasiou will open camp as a center.

"That, to me, is his natural position anyways," Blashill said.



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That would give the Red Wings a foursome of Dylan Larkin, Athanasiou, Frans Nielsen and Luke Glendening down the middle, with Blashill preferring to keep Darren Helm on the wing.

If this is the case, the Red Wings may have a real issue in the faceoff circle. Of the top three centers in that group, Larkin had the highest faceoff percentage at 49.9 percent. Nielsen was next at 46.4 percent and Athanasiou 41.6. Glendening, who will center the fourth line, is the only guy over 50 percent (58.0).

Off the ice, Blashill said it's too early to speculate what the team will do with the captaincy.

"Those are discussions we'll have once we have a better idea where everything is at for real," Blashill said.

One last note on Zetterberg and Plan B for the Red Wings: Michael Rasmussen, Detroit's first-round pick in 2017, is expected to get a long look in training camp and, barring a disaster, should make the team.

He was drafted as a center, although the expectation is that he'll ease into the NHL on the wing. That said, Blashill didn't rule him out as a center option for the Red Wings minus Zetterberg.

"I certainly wouldn't say I wouldn't consider him. That's not the case at all," Blashill said.

He agreed that it's easier to break into the NHL on the wing, but the bigger reason Blashill likes Rasmussen as a winger is his ability to play in front of the net. You could tell that Blashill was eager to get the 6-foot-6 Rasmussen out there.

"He might end up being a winger in the National Hockey League," Blashill said.

Senators goalie Craig Anderson has never been afraid to speak his mind, but he wasn't piling on his team's rough offseason. He said he's eager to get back to Ottawa and try and push for a return to the playoffs. Like teammate Erik Karlsson, Anderson's name has been in trade rumors but he said he's not eager to get out.

"I've got no interest in going anywhere else, as long as we can clean up what was going on this summer," Anderson said. "We want to go to the rink, enjoy ourselves, move forward. That's our focus right now. Fresh start."

He said living in Florida has allowed he and his wife a bit of distance from some of the controversy that has surrounded the Senators.

"For the most part, we just kind of stay away," Anderson said. "I've got two kids with three activities, sports — started school two weeks ago. Sometimes, it's nice to be in Florida."

Matthews was one of the captains of the charity game, an honor he didn't know he was receiving until he saw his jersey with the "C" on it hanging in his dressing-room stall. He said he enjoyed playing with a talented group of Americans on Sunday and is especially eager to get going in Toronto with the addition of John Tavares.

Matthews has skated a couple times this summer with Tavares and got an up-close look at the player he's been competing against.

"He's so skilled, so hard to knock off the puck," Matthews said. "When he loses it, he gets it right back. His reputation in the league speaks for itself."

Matthews is entering the final season of his entry-level contract and discussions on his second contract have been ongoing. He didn't sound particularly concerned if those talks extend into the season.

"Honestly, I don't mind either way," he said. "If I sign before the season, during or after; I'll leave it up to the management staff, my agents. I'll go out there, play hockey and not worry about that stuff."

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The Athletic / State of the Franchise: Ducks hopeful Stanley Cup window still open despite aging, expensive core

By Eric Stephens Aug 27, 2018

Mediocrity breeds contempt.

If you're going to fail, might as well fail like no other. That might be the mantra for fans who see anything short of winning the Stanley Cup or playing for it as failure. That's reserved for the extremists among us as only one team tastes ultimate success every season. The other playoff teams will lose their final game.

Even more rational thinkers often subscribe to the philosophy that if you're going to make the playoffs, have a team that's capable of making a deep run. Quick exits sometimes carry the feeling that it wasn't worth it. Why bother qualifying — and making the emotional investment — if there isn't a realistic chance of winning a round or two?

Situations and expectations do play into how a team is perceived and what will define success or failure. A fanbase that sees its team overcome low expectations will view a season one way. One that sees it not meet visions of grandeur will view it as another.

Being in the middle, though, ferments the feeling of hopelessness in this day and age. Being awful is no picnic, but that at least fosters the hope of a high draft pick and selection of a top young player who will turn the franchise around. Being the team that isn't bad enough to be in that position but not good enough to be a real contender — well, what's exciting about that?

The Ducks are trying to avoid the middle. They've been dealing with high expectations since starting their run of playoff berths in 2013, mixing in coming close to meeting them on occasion with marches to the Western Conference final twice and being bounced before the playoffs start to get serious.

Last year felt different. The first four-game sweep they suffered since 1999 — and only the third among their 29 best-of-seven playoff series. Calls for major change were put out into the air, and that can be done in an instant with a few punches of fingertips. After all, this is 2018. Fire Randy Carlyle. Fire Bob Murray. Trade this player. Buy out that one. The end of life as a contender has come. The championship window has shut.

Just rebuild, baby. Clean house and go all in.

Don't be surprised to see those who work at the corner of Katella Avenue and Douglass Road start singing the chorus as The Team That No One Believes In. Say that their time of relevancy has passed, if you dare.

"I think people maybe count us out a little bit," Ducks goalie John Gibson told The Athletic this month. "They say people have gotten a little older and everything. But I think that us in the locker room, we all believe that we're more than capable to be there in the end and to bring a Cup to Anaheim."

Not to be Joe Pessimist here, but that's probably not happening when we get to Spring 2019. But you're not going to ever see Bob Murray embracing "The Tank." Put the #SnoozeForHughes hashtag on another team to bottom out for the No. 1 pick. Too many accomplished, competitive players of varying ages still around to allow that to happen.

The trick for this team in transition mode is to avoid spinning its wheels the way others have.

Biggest on-ice question



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In such a team sport where so much is organized chaos and entities such as randomness and luck are at play, it's probably not fair to put that on one player. And even when things do center on one player, it's usually the goalie, as he can often impact a game like no other on the ice.

But with the Ducks, it's not Gibson. Not by a longshot. Even if he hasn't completely eradicated the perception that he's fragile, the fifth-year backstop is coming off a season when he played the most games and faced the most shots of his career while avoiding any injuries that kept him out long-term. His talent is undeniable, and he's just starting to enter his peak years.

No, this section is reserved for a right wing who had 17 goals and 32 assists last season. On the surface, that's not bad — for a support piece. But we don't think of Corey Perry in those terms, do we? At least we didn't.

Set the historic 50-goal MVP season of 2010-11 aside if you will and there's still a former star with five other 30-goal campaigns. Whose 366 career goals are 10th among active NHL players. And we haven't touched the other legacy-making team accolades he's been part of. But we're dealing with the here-and-now, and 17 goals after a down 2016-17 season in which he pocketed only 19 are not pretty. Perry is a scorer, first and foremost. And when he doesn't score, he's not a player of great value on the ice.

Experience and know-how can take you only so far. Perry is critical to Anaheim's efforts in areas from him being the offensive force he once was and providing necessary goal scoring on any one of the top three lines to his \$9 million salary for 2018-19 (\$8.625 million salary cap hit) and his full no-movement clause on a contract running through 2021, impacting what moves Murray can make to augment his lineup.

And if there's no bounce-back and the decline is in irreversible effect, then there is the wholly uncomfortable scenario of whether he is blocking the development of a younger (and cheaper) top-nine player. The best-case scenario — or somewhat realistic one — is Perry putting up numbers more befitting of a legitimate top-six threat. That'll help him, his teammates and the front office.

A knee injury did cost Perry 11 games last season, and that affected him to a degree. But his 10.1 shooting percentage was only a small tick up from his career-low 8.8 in 2016-17 and still a severe drop from the 15.3 percent he averaged over a six-season span before that. More alarming is the plummeting attempted shots. When he scored 43 goals in 2013-14, Perry took an average of 6.07 per game. When he had 34 goals in 2015-16, it was 4.68. Even in falling to 19 goals in 2016-17, he still took 4.70 shots per game. But the number fell to just 4.03 in 2017-18.

Fewer shot attempts, fewer shots that are put on goal and a lower-than-career shooting average form some bad math when you make your living lighting the lamp. The winger and the Ducks have to find a solution to this problem.

Depth chart analysis

Center: Ryan Getzlaf isn't getting any younger and is no longer a top-10 player, but the 33-year-old is still a high-quality all-around No. 1 center. Many still and probably always will beg for him to shoot the puck more. His 11 goals and 117 shots in 2017-18 attest to that, but he's still a point-per-game weapon who can play the physical game as well as the finesse one. His passing and vision remain at an elite level.

Adam Henrique was an impact pivot for the Ducks upon his arrival last December. Not only did he help fill a gaping hole when Getzlaf and Ryan Kesler were out of the lineup due to injury, but the seven-year veteran also settled in on the third line and played well in between Nick Ritchie and Ondrej Kase. His 15.9 shooting percentage (including 19.6 percent in 57 games with the Ducks after a trade from the Devils) could regress, but it isn't such an anomaly when you look over the course of his career.

Now here's a true wild card with Kesler. Will he be the injury-hobbled center who showed a lot of will but was a shadow of the Selke Trophy-contending demon at both ends of the ice? Or can "the one with the bad

hip" regain most of the movement and powerful skating that makes him a two-way force? If it's the latter, Anaheim will be stacked in the middle. If it's the former, the Ducks are a lot less deep. If this means anything, Kesler is at least up to renewing his friendship with Nashville's Ryan Johansen.

Signed to a three-year deal, Carter Rowney figures to have the edge as the fourth-line anchor. He has good size (6-foot-2, 200 pounds), is willing to bust his butt on the ice and can win faceoffs (52.9 percent in 2017-18). Don't look for him to get a ton of offensive zone starts. But he can be an option on the penalty kill as Pittsburgh employed him third-most among its forwards last season in terms of average ice time.

Left wing: The first line is about as secure as it gets with the Ducks' top sniper on it. Go beyond that and the left side sees a serious drop-off when it comes to the ability to score.

Last season, Rickard Rakell went from being their top goal scorer (33 goals in 2016-17) to their top point producer (34 goals and 69 points in 2017-18). Is he heading toward becoming their best player? He still has some road to travel there, and the Ducks have others that can lay claim to that title, but he has moved in that direction with regard to his overall game.

Now, does Anaheim have a second-line option? Not a true one. Andrew Cogliano is as professional and committed as a player can get. At 31, Cogliano still has his wheels and plays a very responsible game. Just don't count on much more than 10 to 15 goals and 30 to 35 points. This is a year for Ritchie to prove if he's more than a big body who can bang and create space for his linemates. Being only 22 is still in his favor. Defending teammates is a good thing. Repeatedly taking offensive zone penalties is not.

There's one spot left. Brian Gibbons was brought in on a one-year deal, and he'll get a long look to land it. He's not big at all (5-foot-8) and he's not young (29), but he's emblematic of the way Murray is trying to take the team. His speed can be an asset on the penalty kill. Three of his 12 goals in a breakout season for New Jersey came while the Devils were shorthanded.

Starting another season with Rakell on the left side provides comfort, but it remains a problem area for the Ducks when it comes to finding a consistent finish.

Right wing: No single position may be as deep as this one for the Ducks, and it may be the most volatile in terms of what they'll get out of its participants. Who's going to be on what line? This will be the spot that will draw the most attention during training camp.

Armed with a new three-year deal, Kase continued to impress in his second NHL season and could top the 20 goals and 38 points he had in 2017-18 with more ice time. But is he a true top-line sniper? Patrick Eaves seems to be past his health issues that wrecked last season for him and he had tremendous chemistry with Getzlaf after coming over from Dallas in 2016-17. He'll also go to the dirty areas and does his best work around the net.

And there's Perry. It is undeniable that he and Getzlaf formed one of the league's best duos for a decade. Few teammates read off each other as well as these two. It is also undeniable that he's lost the step that got him the separation needed to put his soft hands to work. When you weren't a speedster to begin with, that matters. But the only way he has a chance to regain some of that lost production is if he's playing significant minutes.

We can't ignore Jakob Silfverberg, a trusted, defensive-minded forward who can excel in a shutdown role, deliver effective play in all situations and provide 18 to 20 goals. Among the critical decisions Carlyle must make is where he plays which winger and how he does out the playing time to each. One also shouldn't rule out a trade to beef up another area.

All in all, it is a position that can make a difference for the Ducks — one way or the other.



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Left defense: Though he wasn't quite the possession monster last season that he's been in previous years, Hampus Lindholm is the Ducks' most complete defender. Certainly the best in the defensive zone, and he's coming off a career-high 13 goals despite being parked on the second power-play unit. And he's judiciously added a more physical element to his already stout positional game. You still wonder if there's another level he can get to if he's unleashed for 26 or 27 minutes a night.

Cam Fowler gives the Ducks a strong one-two punch that can give them a high-level defender on one side of the ice for more than two-thirds (if not three-fourths) of a game. He has also suffered significant injuries right before the playoffs in three of the last five seasons. The concern is whether those are starting to add up for a player who's already got a lot of mileage for someone entering his age-27 season.

With Francois Beauchemin in retirement, the No. 5 job is up for grabs and there'll be an opening for a youngster to grab. Marcus Pettersson showed in a 22-game stint (and four more in the playoffs) that he can be a capable defender who can make a good first pass at the NHL level even with some of the rough moments he had when the pressure was turned up. Major knee surgery set Jacob Larsson's development back, but the 21-year-old appears set to challenge Pettersson for the third-pairing spot.

Right defense: Josh Manson has to have all the confidence in the world as he enters 2018-19. He led Anaheim's blueline with a career-best 37 points. None of those came on the power play. All but one came at even strength. Everything might have gone right for the 26-year-old, but he's long had underrated offensive ability to go with his hard-nosed shutdown game. He's not a star, but he could be an important player for the next seven or eight years.

Now that the freshly re-signed Brandon Montour has a full 82-game schedule under his belt, he has the chance to become a top-four fixture. While his skating is top-notch and he can recover quickly, Montour still has to master when to go up in the play and when to play it safe. His cannon of a shot from the point needs to be put on target more often, but that's fixable and can be an instrument the Ducks feature, especially on their ailing power play.

Veterans Andrej Sustr and Luke Schenn have been brought in to serve as potential partners for one of the young guys on the left side. Sustr uses his 6-foot-7 frame more to defend with his stick or through positioning. Schenn can lay a big hit when he's able to line up an opposing forward and will likely draw the assignments against physical teams — which could largely be a dose of Pacific Division foes. They'll hope that either (or both) will give them much more than what Kevin Bieksa had left.

Goal: This is the area the Ducks should feel the most comfortable about as they move into the season. Gibson is a legitimate No. 1 who's coming off a season in which he established career highs in games (60), wins (31) and save percentage (.926). Only Nashville's Pekka Rinne had a higher save percentage among goalies who played 50 games or more.

Gibson has been .920 or better in each of the past three seasons. He's got 14 shutouts over that span. It's very simple with the oft-injured goalie. As long as he stays on the ice, the Pittsburgh native can deliver elite-level netminding. If anything, he'll now deal with the pressure of being a big-money No. 1 even though his rich eight-year contract extension doesn't kick in until 2019-20.

Ryan Miller adapted very well to the backup role. The 38-year-old with the enviable résumé had his best goal-against average (2.35) since his Vezina Trophy season of 2009-10 while also registering a .928 save percentage and four shutouts. Most importantly, he proved that he could still win games when Gibson needed a breather or close them out when injuries forced his fellow goalie to leave.

Special teams

Power play: Former assistant coach Paul MacLean was essentially nudged aside in part because the Ducks' work with the man-advantage

had fallen from first in the league percentage-wise to deep within the pack and their units failed to score at critical times. Steve Konowalchuk got the ax after one season as an assistant because those units were worse.

It is hard to imagine a Getzlaf-run power play icing only two players (Rakell and Montour) with more than four goals scored on it. There were seven who had five or more in 2016-17. Too often, they were a stagnant bunch with zone entries and set plays leading to shooting options that were too easy to decipher. And when there were rebounds at the net, they often didn't find those pucks to put them in.

Losing Getzlaf and Kesler for significant lengths of time did hurt. But they've also got to establish multiple threats, starting with a feared one at the point, whether that's the captain if he isn't operating along the half-wall or Montour unleashing rockets. Fowler wasn't as efficient with his decision-making as in previous years, resulting in Lindholm taking his place on the top unit on occasion when they simplified their approach.

The potential return of Eaves could be a big boost. He could be a first-unit option with Getzlaf, Rakell and Henrique. Perry could be the fourth forward in an attempt to get him off to a strong start, but Kase could take his place. Or they could go with Fowler and Montour to balance out the units, with Perry or Kase joining Kesler and Silfverberg along with Lindholm. Heck, give Manson some power play looks.

Whatever way you slice it, the Ducks have too much proven offensive talent to be substandard.

Penalty kill: Having Gibson as the last line of defense is a big part of why the Ducks have been successful. His .906 and .916 save percentages shorthanded have led all NHL goalies the past two seasons. That'll help a team have a top-five kill, which Anaheim has had for three years running.

And yet assistant Trent Yawney was given the heave-ho despite glowing statistics. It appears there was more of a philosophical divide in terms of how the defense got the puck up the ice rather than how the penalty kill was run. But new first-year Ducks assistant Marty Wilford has the people to keep it at a high level.

Kesler and Cogliano are stalwarts up at the top. Rowney and Gibbons figure to be drafted to give players like Silfverberg and Getzlaf more relief from those duties. When he's in the lineup, Schenn will block shots and can move people in front. He was on an Arizona penalty kill that finished 19th last season.

Rowney should help with faceoff wins on the kill. It was an area where usual ace Kesler struggled as he won only 42.4 percent (45-for-106) of his draws when the Ducks were shorthanded. Henrique could take more turns in the circle on it as they no longer have faceoff wizard Antoine Vermette.

In the pipeline

Center: Sam Steel will be one of those closely watched during the rookie tournament next month in Las Vegas and the main training camp. After a decorated run in the Western Hockey League, the playmaking pivot now gets to show how much development he's made toward playing at an NHL pace after a so-so initial camp that got him sent back to the Regina Pats.

Kalle Kossila doesn't have Steel's pedigree but did get 10 games with the Ducks in the early part of last season. He's five years older and did lead the AHL's San Diego Gulls in all three main scoring categories. First-round pick Isac Lundestrom is ticketed to play another season for Lulea in Sweden.

Left wing: There's no sure-fire NHL player yet within the organization. Kevin Roy flashed some skill (six goals in 25 games), but there was no willingness from the coaching staff to commit to the diminutive former Northeastern standout. Nic Kerdiles was traded to Winnipeg. Undrafted Giovanni Fiore had a great camp in 2017 and could get a call-up after scoring 18 times for San Diego last season.



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Maxime Comtois is the brightest prospect on this side of the wing after a 44-goal season in the QMJHL, but the 19-year-old doesn't meet the AHL age requirement and is probably playing a fourth season in the Q after being traded from Victoriaville to Drummondville. Max Jones, their top pick in 2016, will miss the start of the AHL season because of a torn ligament in his hand.

Right wing: If it weren't for the fact that he plays at the deepest spot on the big club's roster, Troy Terry would likely be penciled in for opening night in San Jose. Perhaps he could still make it impossible for the Ducks' brass to start him in the minors with a dynamite camp. But while a trip down Interstate 5 might be in the cards, Terry may be the closest among Ducks forward prospects to make the leap.

Corey Tropp, 29, is an AHL lifer who may fill in if there's a series of injuries. Oft-injured Anton Rodin is a low-risk flyer that could be a solid depth move. Beyond that, there's not much that could help right now.

Left defense: Since it appears that Larsson or Pettersson could graduate to the next level for good, the Ducks' next best option would be Josh Mahura as he'll set out on the professional level after putting up big numbers for the Pats. Mahura and the loser of the Larsson-Pettersson camp battle will play a big role for the AHL's Gulls. University of North Dakota product Keaton Thompson provides added depth.

Right defense: Whether it said more about his rise into becoming an option or Bieksa's ineffectiveness at the position, Andy Welinski was on Anaheim's third pairing for three of the four playoff games against San Jose after a strong year with the Gulls. Korbinian Holzer, 30, has handled the seventh defenseman role for the Ducks over the last three years but the additions of Schenn and Sustr put his hold on that in jeopardy.

Goal: The No. 3 job in an organization is important as he'll be the one called up if there's an injury to either of the two on an NHL roster. Now that Reto Berra has signed on to play in his native Switzerland, there'll be a battle with the incoming Jared Coreau — formerly with Detroit — and the incumbent Kevin Boyle. Coreau, 26, has had a rough go of it in his limited action with the rebuilding Red Wings. Boyle, 26, has put up save percentage of .924 and .921 in two seasons with the Gulls.

Salary cap watch

Between Murray's unwillingness to throw big money at free agents and the three priciest players already on his roster, he has largely focused on re-signing his younger stars and filling out the roster with serviceable low-cost pieces.

It has led to questions of whether the longtime GM can build a championship group around the Getzlaf-Perry-Kesler trifecta. And as that trio continues to head upward in age, their ability to contend in the Western Conference will have to rely more on the Rakell-Gibson-Lindholm-Fowler group to lead the way.

All four of them are signed through at least 2022, as are Henrique and Manson. It is great to have a core in place for the long term, but that also does a number on the cap. The Ducks have navigated that pretty well in recent years, though they've also rarely spent to the absolute limit.

Murray has been able to dump much of Simon Despres's contract and purge his mistaken overpay to Clayton Stoner, though the cost to do the latter was giving up Shea Theodore. The \$4 million AAV extension he gave to Bieksa is now history. But even with the bump in the cap for 2018-19, there's still just \$6.1 million available, according to Cap Friendly.

The good news for them is Montour and Kase are signed to bridge deals that aren't exorbitant for players of their experience and stature. There shouldn't be any youngsters that demand a cap-busting second contract — unless Terry or Steel were to move into more front-line roles and produce in the next year or two.

Anaheim should be fine this season. There is money available to make a significant move if the Ducks are in contention (and there could be a lot more if a failure for Kesler to recover from his hip problems forces him to

be put on long-term injury reserve). But with \$69 million already committed to 14 players for 2019-20, that could make things tricky in terms of re-signing Silfverberg or getting a new backup goalie if Miller isn't re-signed (or retires).

Now, if Rakell puts up more 30-goal seasons until he's up in 2022 ... well, it might be better not thinking about what that cap number will be.

Final assessment

Much of the criticism Murray gets comes from not reeling in big game on July 1, making the game-changing move that puts the Ducks over the top or passing out a questionable contract to a veteran he likes. But with Getzlaf and Perry as longtime anchors and the addition of Kesler, he's been able to take advantage of the club's strong drafting acumen and support them with high-quality young players to keep the club very competitive in the West.

A run of five Pacific Division titles ended last season, but Anaheim still scratched out 101 points despite being battered by injuries to top players in the first half of 2017-18. It might have been better for the Ducks to miss out on the postseason last spring than get embarrassed by the Sharks but there's too much talent and too many fiery, prideful sorts around to fall off the map.

And with that in mind, the spotlight could turn directly to Carlyle. They've switched out assistants. Maybe there isn't a great core but there's still a good one and there are new parts to support that core. There is a mandate for the Ducks to play faster. And Murray is signed through 2020, where he'll be 65. His coach, who's 62, is only signed through this season (though there is a team option for 2019-20).

As he shepherds a group whose leading voices are running out of time to win it all, we may be also coming up on Carlyle's last ride with them.

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The Athletic / NHL farm system rankings: No. 5 New York Islanders

By Corey Pronman Aug 27, 2018

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

The Islanders' farm system got a huge boost from their 2018 draft class. They also have a number of guys on their AHL team who project to play, and they have one of the best goalies outside the NHL in Ilya Sorokin. Altogether this is a deep farm system both in quality and quantity that deserves to be in the top-five even if they lack a true 'star' level prospect.

Team's 2017 ranking*: No. 4

Prospect Rankings

HIGH-END NHL PROSPECT

1. Oliver Wahlstrom, RW, USNTDP-USHL

Wahlstrom is an elite goal scorer who also has the capability to carry a line due to his skill and creativity, and he generates a lot of clean entries. He's more of a shooter than a playmaker, but he can certainly make tough passes when he needs to. Wahlstrom has an elite shot and can score from a distance, with a special instinct in terms of seeing shooting



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lanes develop and knowing how to beat goalies. He's OK defensively, I've seen him be passable on the PK and, while he can be strong on the puck, he's not going to throw his body around a ton. He can skate fine, although I think sometimes he plays slower than he should, but he can get around the ice without issue and push defenders back off zone entries.

VERY GOOD NHL PROSPECT

2. Noah Dobson, D, Acadie-Bathurst-QMJHL

Dobson shows good vision and has QB'd the first PP unit for Bathurst, making excellent decisions with the puck, showing great poise and getting a ton of shots through. He's a high-end skater who can activate quite well into the attack for a big man and, with his size/mobility, can stay with most attackers without issue. His puck skills aren't as standout as his brain/skating, but he can handle it fine and make the odd move to create space. He could be a second unit power play guy as a pro, while taking tough defensive matchups in a team's top-four.

3. Kieffer Bellows, LW, Portland-WHL

Bellows bounced back nicely after a disappointing 2016-17 after he departed college for the WHL. He has one of the best shots outside the NHL and can score a ton of goals. He has skill, but he needs someone to get him the puck to put up big numbers as I wouldn't describe his skill as dynamic. Also, he could use an extra gear in his skating. Bellows is a very smart player though who moves the puck well and plays with pace. He's hard on pucks and can be tough to push around.

4. Ruslan Iskhakov, RW, CSKA-MHL

Iskhakov's a tiny forward at 5-foot-8 and that might be generous, but his puck skills are fantastic. His brain is also high-end, if not elite. He sees plays developing so well and can outsmart defenders with his hands and vision. He made some of the best passes I saw all season, and the way he improvises on the ice to get out of tough situations with his creativity is worth the price of admission. The major issue I have in his projection isn't his size but rather he's not a blazing skater, which isn't ideal for a guy his size. He lacks a dangerous top gear, but he does have above-average speed. He's good on his edges and he can be elusive.

5. Bode Wilde, D, USNTDP-USHL

Wilde's speed and skill level for a 6-foot-2 defenseman is elite. You see rushes from Wilde where he looks like a top three-to-five pick with the way he can blow by guys, create a clean zone entry and start the offense for his club. I'm impressed at times by his offensive instincts in how creative he is with the puck, and the way he moves it out of his zone with skill or can hit a teammate through a tight seam in the offensive zone. Despite being known as an offensive player, he can close on guys and is quite physical. He's not afraid to lean on guys with his frame. The big issue with him is decision making. I generally am fine with high-skill guys turning pucks over – It's a necessary evil that comes with having the puck a lot – but he makes a lot of overly risky plays, poor turnovers and can be on the butt end of too many highlight reels for the opposing team.

LEGIT NHL PROSPECT

6. Josh Ho-Sang, RW, Bridgeport-AHL

Ho-Sang began the season with the Islanders before a mid-season reassignment. He was good in the AHL after that, but he wasn't dominant. When you watch Ho-Sang, you see the high-end speed, skill, creativity and vision and you can be blown away by the plays he makes. He takes far too many bad risks though, which are fine to take in spurts because you'll like to trade the odd mistake for a lot of offense, but the balance is weighed too much to one side with him. Add in indifferent play off the puck and he still has some work to do. That said he's not far away from more NHL time.

7. Ilya Sorokin, G, CSKA-KHL

Sorokin is the complete package in goal, and NHL-ready when his KHL deal expires following the 2020 season. Sorokin has good size and can

make stops due to his top-level athleticism moving across the crease at the level of a typical smaller goalie. He's a reasonably smart positional player, and as well he's a battler between the pipes who doesn't shy away from playing aggressive angles, although that can sometimes lead to being over-aggressive.

8. Sebastian Aho, D, Bridgeport-AHL

One of my longtime favorite prospects, Sebastian Aho (the defenseman) had a great first season in North America, being a top player in the AHL and doing decently in his NHL call-up. He's a great skater and puck-mover who can impact the transition game at a high level. He may not be incredibly dynamic for a small guy, but he makes things happen. Aho is better defensively for his size than one would imagine, competing hard for pucks. He's knocking on the door.

9. Devon Toews, D, Bridgeport-AHL

Toews was one of the best defensemen in the AHL this past season when healthy. He's a high-end skater who can disrupt forechecks, lead a rush and walk the blueline well due to his mobility. He won't wow you with highlight-reel plays, but he moves the puck well, has decent hands and brings a steady presence to every shift in terms of his IQ at both ends of the rink. He looks ready to make the jump next season.

10. Mitchell Vande Sompel, D, Bridgeport-AHL

I love Vande Sompel, and while he's small and there are guys ahead of him on the depth chart, I think he's the kind of guy who will find a way to make it. He's very smart and a very good skater. He understands the game so well, and with his mobility he's able to impact shifts offensively as a puck-mover or as a rusher. He's small and will need to improve defensively at the pro level, but he showed in his junior days he has what it takes to check and improve in that area, even at times killing penalties as a forward.

HAVE A CHANCE

11. Michael Dal Colle, LW, Bridgeport-AHL

The former fifth overall pick has had a rough go at it since turning pro. He's got a lot of skill, a decent frame, can make plays and has a good shot. The foundation is there for him to be a player. He's not a great skater though, compounded a lack of hustle and issues with pace can make it seem like he gets lost in the play at times. I don't think he's the 'B word' (bust) yet, but the best case for him is likely a third-line forward who is offense-only.

12. Logan Cockerill, LW, Boston University-Hockey East

The numbers haven't come yet for Cockerill (though he did better in the second half), but I'm a big believer in this kid and think they will eventually. He's a great skater, and is a ball of energy bursting up and down the ice attacking the puck. He's not all energy though, as Cockerill has good playmaking abilities and can make skilled plays even if he's not as skilled as you'd like at 5-foot-9.

13. Linus Soderstrom, G, HV71-SHL

Just like I didn't think Soderstrom was this super dominant goalie prospect his .943 save percentage reflected two seasons ago, I don't think he's as bad as his 2017-18 numbers suggest either prior to his injury. The answer is somewhere in the middle. He's a very smart goalie who tracks the puck well and squares up a ton of pucks. He has controlled aggressiveness in his positioning, but isn't a very explosive side-to-side goalie.

14. Anatoli Golyshev, LW, Yekaterinburg-KHL

Golyshev had a nice bounce-back season in the KHL after taking a step backwards in 2016-17. He is highly skilled and has a big shot He's small and skates well, but I don't see him as a dynamic skater or playmaker. Some scouts I've talked to describe him as feisty, but his team has also called him out for his work ethic, particularly last season.

15. Parker Wotherspoon, D, Bridgeport-AHL



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Wotherspoon was hard-pressed to get power play time on a stacked Bridgeport blueline, but he was impressive at even strength. He doesn't stand out to you, but he's effective. Wotherspoon has above-average mobility and hockey sense, moves the puck well, and works very hard to win puck battles. He projects as a steady two-way defender who slots into the bottom half of a roster.

16. Jakub Skarek, G, Jihlava-Czech Extraliga

Skarek moves very well for a 6-foot-3 goalie and can make difficult saves seem routine based on how quickly he can take shooting lanes away. I've seen the occasional soft goal from Skarek, but generally I like his focus and his reads are decent. He can be a little over-aggressive and his positioning will be off as a result. I've also talked to some goalie coaches who feel he's a little too suspect on his glove hand.

17. Ben Mirageas, D, Providence-Hockey East

Mirageas surprised me with how well he did as a freshman this season on a good Providence team. He's a good skater, with solid two-way intelligence. He never blows you away outside the odd good rush, but he's a steady defender with size who showed this season he could make plays from the blueline better than I thought.

18. Otto Koivula, LW, Ilves-Liiga

Koivula had a decent season in Finland. He's got nice puck skills, a good shot, he's 6-foot-4 and that trio can lead to the odd highly impressive shift especially when he's consistently making plays. Koivula's big issue historically is he's a very poor skater, and I also don't think he's always as engaged as he should be.

DEPTH NOTES

19. David Quenneville, D, Medicine Hat-WHL: Big shot, great puck-mover, skilled, led all WHL defensemen in goals and points, but he's very small and while he skates well, he doesn't skate as well as you'd like at 5-foot-8. He'll need time if he does make it to improve his defense and feet.

20. Robin Salo, D, Sport-Liiga: Disappointing season for Salo. I like his vision and IQ with the puck, but otherwise his game is very bland to me. For his style, he struggled more defensively than you'd like a player like him to, when I watched.

21. Blade Jenkins, LW, Saginaw-OHL: Jenkins is a pro-sized winger who can win battles and get to the net. He has a very good shot and can finish chances from a distance. His feet are decent, and he has good puck skills. I question his hockey sense.

22. Arnaud Durandau, LW, Halifax-QMJHL: He has a lot of skill and works very hard, but has average hockey sense on top of not being the biggest guy.

23. Kyle Burroughs, D, Bridgeport-AHL: The talent base for Burroughs isn't that high. He's a tail-end roster guy if he makes it, but good IQ and high-end physicality/work ethic make him interesting.

2018-19 Impact

I think Bellows can get a look at camp, but he likely goes to the AHL for a bit. The AHL defensemen are knocking on the door. Toews and Aho could both step into the Islanders' lineup if needed. As for Josh Ho-Sang, who knows what the future holds for him. Wahlstrom I think needs one year before making the jump.

Organizational Top 10 (23 and Under)

Mathew Barzal, C

Oliver Wahlstrom, RW

Anthony Beauvillier, LW

Noah Dobson, D

Kieffer Bellows, LW

Ruslan Iskhakov, RW

Bode Wilde, D

Ryan Pulock, D

Josh Ho-Sang, RW

Ilya Sorokin, G

What else is there to be said about Mathew Barzal? Elite skill/IQ combo, great edges, speed to burn. He's going to be an All-Star in this league for years. Beauvillier took a significant step forward this season, becoming a solid two-way forward. He has more offense to give, and he's only 21 still. He may never be a star, but he has the skill, IQ and work ethic to be a legit top-six guy. I've steadily come around on Pulock, but still have hesitations about his defense and skating. He's got a big shot though and can run a power play. His five power play goals were third on the Islanders despite his having the ninth-most ice time on the man-advantage.

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The Athletic / State of the Franchise: Are improved Sabres ready to make the postseason?

By John Vogl Aug 27, 2018

It's finally over, right? The long, painful era of suffering is at an end. It's time to say goodbye to the boring games, lifeless efforts and nights when fans wanted to be anywhere but the Sabres' arena.

At least that's what Buffalo hopes. For the first time in a long time, those hopes are well-founded.

General manager Jason Botterill shook the Sabres to their core, trading Ryan O'Reilly and bringing in Jeff Skinner, Conor Sheary and Carter Hutton, among others. In a much-needed dose of good luck, the Sabres won the NHL draft lottery and landed potential superstar Rasmus Dahlin.

Will it be enough to squash the franchise-record seven-year playoff drought? Probably not when you consider the Sabres' elite foes in the Atlantic Division, but the moves should be enough to get Buffalo into the postseason conversation. After all the misery of three last-place finishes in five years (including last season), playoff talk would be welcomed chatter.

"We've made quite a few adjustments to our team, and we're excited about those changes and excited about some of our young players who are coming into our group," Botterill said. "Now it's important that our guys step up."

Ah, performance. That's why the good vibe is more of a cautious optimism. Buffalo was supposed to be better last season, too. Instead, it plummeted back to the bottom after a 6-17-4 start. There are still question marks up and down the roster. The queries extend to the bench, where coach Phil Housley is starting his second season after a forgettable first.

But any kind of optimism is better than none at all. Breathe it in, Sabres fans. It's been a long wait.

BIGGEST ON-ICE QUESTION

Will the Sabres learn (or remember) how to score?

There are dull jobs in the world, and being the goal-light operator for Buffalo tops the list in the NHL. The Sabres have averaged a paltry 2.19



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goals per game during the past five seasons, easily the worst in the league. Here is where they've ranked and how they've compared to the NHL leaders:

The Sabres haven't been in the top half of the NHL in scoring since ranking ninth in 2010-11, which is also the last time they made the playoffs. The major problems come at five-on-five, where Buffalo has 572 goals in its past 410 games. That's last, of course, 53 behind 29th-ranked New Jersey and a whopping 250 behind the league-leading New York Islanders.

It's why the additions of Skinner and Sheary were met with such enthusiasm. Skinner is a three-time 30-goal scorer. When it comes to even-strength goals, Sheary's 37 over the past two seasons were tied for third in Pittsburgh with Phil Kessel. Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin had 50 each, putting Sheary in good company.

The new left wingers should make life easier for center Jack Eichel. As Ryan Stimson wrote for The Athletic, Eichel took an abnormally high number of shots after carrying the puck into the offensive zone. One of the main reasons was that he had no snipers waiting for a pass. Having Skinner and Sheary in scoring position should unlock Eichel's playmaking skills and give the goal-light operator something to do.

The Sabres could also move up the goal-scoring chart with a return to form by Kyle Okposo. Normally a 20- to 25-goal scorer, he dipped to 15 last season. He scored just six times in the opening 41 games, a slow start that can be attributed to offseason concussion complications. The 30-year-old is wed to the Sabres for five more seasons at \$6 million per year, so Okposo's vows to be better and faster could bring bliss to their marriage.

The defense also needs to say "I do" when it comes to scoring. Buffalo's blueliners played until December without a goal last year. The 13 defensemen used by Buffalo totaled just 19 goals, led by six from Rasmus Ristolainen.

By comparison, Housley's former team in Nashville received 56 goals from its defense. Housley wants that type of activity from his blueliners, so clearly there's a lot of work to be done.

DEPTH CHART ANALYSIS

Center: On draft night in 2015, Buffalo thought it solidified the middle for years to come with the selection of Eichel and the acquisition of O'Reilly. The one-two punch lasted three seasons.

The good news is Buffalo once again thinks it has solidified the middle for years to come. Eichel is entering the first season of an eight-year, \$80 million contract extension. His entry-level deal featured 0.85 points per game, tied for 33rd in the NHL. But two ankle sprains sidelined him for 36 games. Staying healthy could pump that per-game point total even higher.

Rookie Casey Mittelstadt has replaced O'Reilly as Eichel's partner in the middle. The 19-year-old had five points in his first six NHL games after leaving the University of Minnesota. Mittelstadt doesn't have the experience to handle the No. 2 role on a nightly basis, so expect him to alternate with veteran Patrik Berglund depending on the opponent's center depth. If Buffalo is playing Pittsburgh, for example, there's no reason to test Mittelstadt against Crosby or Malkin. The rookie can use his speed and playmaking on the second line against lesser talents.

Berglund, acquired from St. Louis as part of the O'Reilly trade, had 17 goals in 57 games last season, including 13 at even strength. Berglund's 0.30 goals per game tied him for 79th with Johnny Gaudreau, Adam Henrique, Rick Nash, Thomas Vanek and O'Reilly, which is a pretty nice peer group.

Zemgus Girgensons and Johan Larsson could battle for the fourth-line role.

Left wing: This was a wasteland until the trades for Skinner and Sheary. Now it should be a strength. The newcomers give Buffalo legitimate scoring threats on the top two lines. Skinner is entering the final year of

his contract, so the 26-year-old has millions of reasons to show Buffalo (and the rest of the NHL) that he's still an elite scorer. The former Carolina winger dipped to 24 goals last year after depositing 37 the previous season.

Evan Rodrigues missed the opening two months of last season with a broken thumb, but he returned to record seven goals and 25 points in 48 games. His speed could give him the third-line edge over Vladimir Sobotka, who adds spunk and faceoff prowess after being acquired in the O'Reilly trade. Scott Wilson, who has a fan in Botterill from their days together in Pittsburgh, is in the mix after re-signing for two years.

Right wing: The first three spots on the depth chart are easy to analyze. Buffalo has 22-year-old Sam Reinhart leading the way. He had 20 goals and 39 points in the final 44 games, lifting his season totals to 25 goals and 50 points. Reinhart finished his entry-level contract with 0.27 goals per game, which ranks in the top 100 over the past three seasons. The restricted free agent is still negotiating with the Sabres, but neither side seems worried about the talks.

Okposo slots into the second line, followed by fellow veteran Jason Pominville. He'll be 36 in November, but Pominville can still find the net. He had 16 goals last season, his highest total since 2014-15.

Competition for the final spot should be intense. Tage Thompson, a 2016 first-round pick by the Blues and part of the O'Reilly deal, wants to show Buffalo he can play. Justin Bailey and Nick Baptiste are out of the waiver-free zone after struggling in the NHL and producing in the minors during their entry-level contracts. They need to make the full-time jump or could find themselves elsewhere. Bailey had a stellar three-game run during the AHL playoffs, creating scoring chances and diving to block shots.

Here's a look at possible line combinations using CapFriendly.com. The contract figure for Reinhart is approximate.

Left defense: This is the most crowded position on the roster, not that Buffalo is complaining. The Sabres have waited decades for a game-changing defenseman, and they finally landed one in Dahlin. No one is expecting the 18-year-old to win the Norris Trophy in his rookie season, but the Swedish import is a fast learner who will make an immediate impact. Something as simple as five goals and 20 assists would make Dahlin the Sabres' second-most productive blueliner. (Aaron Ekblad, the previous D-man taken first overall, had 12 goals and 27 assists in his rookie year.)

Marco Scandella led the left side last season, and he's expected to remain on the top pair until Dahlin is ready. Scandella played 23:19 per game, a five-minute jump from his previous season in Minnesota. The 28-year-old set a career high with 17 assists (13 at even strength) and added five goals.

The fight for a spot on the third pair should be a knockdown, drag-out affair. Jake McCabe has the inside track after recovering from shoulder surgery, but he'll battle with NHL veterans Matt Hunwick and Nathan Beaulieu, second-year pro Brendan Guhle, and Swedish defenseman of the year Lawrence Pilut.

Right defense: Though Dahlin played on the right side in Sweden, Botterill said the No. 1 pick will start on the left. That leaves this as a cut-and-dried position with Ristolainen on the first pair, Zach Bogosian on the second and Casey Nelson on the third.

Ristolainen has taken to the gym and Instagram this summer, posting pictures of bulging biceps and overhead lifts thrown with boxing gloves. He needs to bring that intensity to the rink every day. He's been Buffalo's best defenseman, ranking 30th among NHL blueliners with 147 points over the past four seasons, but he's a key part of a group that has lacked a competitive edge. The 23-year-old must help annihilate the apathy.

Bogosian has plenty of doubters after a three-year run of injuries in Buffalo. He had no goals and one assist in 18 games last season, a year that ended with hip surgery. The 28-year-old wants to fulfill the promise that saw him drafted third overall by Atlanta in 2008 and earned him a seven-year, \$36 million contract from Winnipeg in 2013. He set his



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career high in goals (10) in 2009-10 and posted his best assist total (25) in 2011-12. Shaking the dust off those personal marks would be a huge boost to him and Buffalo.

Nelson, 26, re-signed for two years after becoming a lineup fixture for the final 38 games last season.

Goal: We mentioned this after the Sabres signed Hutton to be their starter, but it certainly bears repeating: Buffalo was 30th in one-goal games last season with a .324 winning percentage. Hutton, meanwhile, went 9-2-3 in one-goal games with St. Louis. A goalie is the one player who can make a difference on his own, and the Sabres are banking on Hutton in close games.

The 32-year-old career backup is getting his first look at the No. 1 job, and the numbers suggest he's earned it. Hutton led the NHL with a .931 save percentage while going 17-7-3 in 32 appearances for the Blues last season.

Linus Ullmark graduates from the AHL to be Hutton's backup. The 25-year-old was a workhorse in Rochester the past two seasons and has a .917 save percentage during his 26 appearances with Buffalo.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Power play: The fall was as swift as it was unexpected. After boasting the top power play in the NHL in 2016-17 at 24.5 percent, the Sabres dropped off the cliff. They were languishing in 30th place at 11.9 percent midway through the season before rallying to finish 20th (19.1 percent). They were also among the league's worst by allowing 10 short-handed goals.

Eichel's power-play goal total fell from 10 to three as the puck moved toward O'Reilly's side. The departed center led Buffalo with 15 power play goals, nearly double his eight from the previous season. Skinner or Sheary will move into O'Reilly's spot on the right side, allowing the left-handed shooters to tee up their one-timers. Still, the Sabres need to find a way to get Eichel's rocket off the launch pad more often.

Buffalo absolutely has to get more production from the second unit. Last year's top five (Eichel, O'Reilly, Reinhart, Okposo and Ristolainen) combined for 37 goals and 108 points. The other 12 players to get power play time totaled a measly 12 goals and 34 points.

Penalty kill: As could be expected from the NHL's worst team, the penalty kill unit didn't fare well. It finished 22nd at 77.9 percent, a minuscule bump from the 25th-place ranking and 77.6 percent the previous season.

Once again, the Sabres are counting on Hutton to turn the numbers in their favor. The goalie posted a short-handed save percentage of .910 last season, second only to the .916 put up by Anaheim's John Gibson. Buffalo's Robin Lehner ranked 25th at .882, while teammate Chad Johnson was 44th at .841.

IN THE PIPELINE

Center: The Sabres have intriguing options hoping to crack the big club, including Swedish import Rasmus Asplund, Notre Dame product Andrew Oglevie and Buffalo-area native Sean Malone. We'll look to Oglevie, who shined during his first development camp after signing as a free agent. He put up 36 goals and 80 points during his final 76 games with the Fighting Irish. Though he's a first-year pro, Oglevie is a mature 23-year-old who could contend for a job sooner rather than later.

Left wing: It's too early to call Alex Nylander a bust. He's only 20 years old and his entry-level contract technically hasn't even started. But the No. 8 overall pick from 2016 has played in Rochester for two seasons and shown little. He has 18 goals and 37 assists in 119 AHL games, and he disappears for long stretches. He was hampered by a lower-body injury at the start of last year. If he can start well this season, Buffalo will give him a shot.

At the other end of the spectrum are two left wingers who've performed well. C.J. Smith put up 17 goals and 44 points in 57 games for Rochester as a rookie. Newcomer Victor Olofsson may have the best shot in the

organization, and he used it to lead the Swedish Hockey League with 27 goals in 50 games.

Right wing: While the winner of the Thompson-Bailey-Baptiste battle will get a spot in Buffalo, the other two will try to quickly unseat him. Thompson was the prospect piece of the O'Reilly deal, and the 20-year-old has the 6-foot-5 frame that makes coaches drool. His skating needs work. Meanwhile, Baptiste's speed helped him stay in Buffalo for 33 games last year. He contributed just four goals and two assists. He has 32 goals in his last 95 AHL games.

Defense: Guhle's skating reminds people of Housley, who was merely one of the most productive defensemen in hockey history. The 21-year-old Guhle loves to pinch from the left point, showing the aggressiveness that fits in well with Housley's demands. Of the top eight defensemen outside of Dahlin, Guhle is the only one who doesn't need to clear waivers. That could be his ticket to Rochester to start, but his skills will be the ride back to Buffalo.

Goal: The Sabres drafted Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen in the second round in 2017, and they're going to get a closer look at him this season. The 19-year-old has decided to leave Finland and will play for Sudbury of the OHL. He could be four or five years away from playing in Buffalo, but the new development path will let Sabres brass monitor and influence Luukkonen's progress.

SALARY CAP WATCH

The Sabres are an expensive bunch. Their NHL roster is hovering around \$74 million with Reinhart still needing a deal. His signing could bring them close to the \$79.5 million cap. The Sabres don't want to be anywhere near there since Dahlin and Mittelstadt could add \$3.7 million to the total in year-end bonuses. If those incentives push Buffalo over the cap, it would subtract from the team's cap allowance in 2019-20.

The payroll exploded this offseason with the additions of Skinner (\$5.725 million), Berglund (\$3.85 million), Sobotka (\$3.5 million) and Sheary (\$3 million). Eichel's salary jumped from a base of \$925,000 to \$10 million. Plus, the Sabres are still on the hook for \$3.975 million of Matt Moulson's \$5 million deal. The left winger will be loaned out for the second straight season.

If Okposo fails to excel, that \$6 million cap hit will become a \$6 MILLION CAP HIT! Pominville makes a hefty \$5.6 million, but he's in the final year of his deal. Bogosian has been earning more than \$5.1 million on the sidelines. Beaulieu, who may not get ice time, has a \$2.4 million hit.

The Sabres failed to make noise while Eichel and Reinhart played out their entry-level deals, but Buffalo needs to move up while Dahlin and Mittelstadt are earning rookie pay. The money crunch eases a little in 2019 and significantly in 2020, which is right about the time Buffalo hopes to be a legitimate Stanley Cup contender.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

There are questions in Buffalo, but the dreaded one – Will the Sabres finish last overall? – is gone. The Sabres are in position to be the most improved team in the NHL. They've turned off the basement lights and are ready to reside on higher floors for years to come.

Still, with a 25-45-12 record, they finished 35 points out of a playoff spot. That's a monstrous hill to climb. Even a 15-win improvement would get them to around 92 points, which would have been five short of the postseason last year.

But after the pain that fans have endured for years, this is a time of optimism in Buffalo. The additions are legitimate players. The prospect list is growing. Games after Thanksgiving – and maybe even after St. Patrick's Day – will finally mean something again.

Those are victories that Sabres fans can embrace.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Connor McDavid yearning for more goals this season

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris August 27, 2018

TORONTO – These words are coming in the wake of an historically significant season.

Connor McDavid racked up 84 of his league-best 108 points at even strength last year – more than any other player this century. Yes, that means more than Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin achieved at their height, more than Joe Thornton and the Sedins and a whole host of other future Hall of Famers.

While most hockey fans will remember McDavid's Edmonton Oilers being out of the playoff race before it truly started a season ago, few probably realize he scored 26 times in the final 33 games to reach a career-best 41 goals. Amid a disastrous campaign, the game's premier playmaker made good on a promise to become one of its most dangerous snipers.

"It's crazy that we have a season like we did and he's able to produce the way he did," said teammate Darnell Nurse.

And still, at the dawn of his fourth NHL season, McDavid is yearning for more.

"I've always said I want to score more," he said Monday during a break at the BioSteel Hockey Camp. "That's what I want to do. I want to find ways to score. I think I'm a good passer and can make plays and all that, but there's definitely a knack to putting the puck in the net that I seemed to find a little bit later in the year last year and I'm hoping to carry that into this year."

Opposing goaltenders, be forewarned.

McDavid's words sound eerily like an early-career Crosby, who captured the Rocket Richard Trophy by scoring 51 goals in his fifth NHL season. The Pittsburgh Penguins captain famously spends each summer working on a specific facet of his game and zeroed in on scoring after 39-, 36-, 24- and 33-goal seasons to start his career.

Indeed, there seems to be a relentlessness shared by the best in any field. A tendency to steer well clear of complacency and hammer away at every perceived weakness.

On the surface, McDavid's summer looks similar to the ones that came before it. He was back working with Gary Roberts on his fitness and did his usual on-ice skills training with Power Edge Pro. This week's BioSteel Camp is an annual fixture for him as well.

However, he's prioritized improving his shot throughout this off-season and will look to bump the number he takes for the fourth straight year.

"I think there's always ways to improve your game and ways to be more dangerous and dynamic and I'm hoping to do that this year," said McDavid.

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If it all goes to plan, we should not be surprised to see him challenge Ovechkin and contemporaries like Patrik Laine and Auston Matthews in the 2018-19 goals race. The NHL's reigning two-time Art Ross Trophy winner has shown a knack for delivering on tasks he's set his mind to.

He should also get a boost from the only significant change in an otherwise quiet Oilers off-season – a completely overhauled coaching staff under Todd McLellan. McDavid has only had brief conversations with new assistants Glen Gulutzan, Trent Yawney and Manny Viveiros, but has to like the early indications that Edmonton intends to play at a

higher pace at 5-on-5 while reimagining a power play that clicked at an NHL-worst 14.8 per cent last season.

There should be more goals and points available to him with the man advantage.

Teammates and opponents marvel at the internal drive that accompanies McDavid's other-worldly skill. It's apparent even during an August scrimmage with no one watching in the stands.

"He's hungry to get better no matter what level he's at and that's why he's so great," said Nurse.

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Max Domi first heard about McDavid while playing two age groups ahead of him in minor hockey around the Toronto area. He was even in the building when the young phenom scored his first Ontario Hockey League goal against Domi's London Knights.

And after a June trade from Arizona to Montreal, he'll welcome seeing a little less of No. 97 on the ice this coming season.

"His speed is second to none, right?" said Domi. "He can make plays that no one else sees, but the best part is that he does it at such a high speed. That's what makes him so dangerous. Whenever he has the puck he's going to do something.

"I'm definitely excited to be in the other conference."

Even with the disappointing memory of Edmonton's 78-point season still fresh in McDavid's mind, these are still pretty heady times. Just 21, he's already reached the pinnacle of his sport individually and received a \$13-million signing bonus when his new contract kicked in earlier this summer.

With the next flip of the calendar, he and the Oilers get a clean slate to start working their way back to respectability – and they'll do so with much more modest expectations than the Stanley Cup predictions they were bombarded with last September.

"I don't think it changes much," said McDavid. "We have to go in and work hard. I think the only thing that really changes is just that bitter taste in everyone's mouth at where we finished and where we left off last year. Everyone should be highly motivated.

"Everyone had a good summer, worked hard, and now it's time to kill it."

One goal at a time.

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Sportsnet.ca / Signs point to bridge deal for Oilers, eager Darnell Nurse

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox August 27, 2018

TORONTO – Darnell Nurse doesn't want to drag this out much longer.

The supersized defenceman with genes you wish you had and jeans you'll never fit into calls his fellow Edmonton Oilers his brothers, his family.

He can't imagine not joining them in Alberta in a couple weeks, under lowered expectations and heightened urgency, of stepping into camp determined to build off his best year personally and a kick in the head professionally.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 28, 2018

The catch: Nurse, one of the NHL's several restricted free agents still unsigned in these back-to-school shopping days, is the only Oiler without a job in place for the 2018-19 season — yet.

"No matter how long it takes or what goes down, I'm always ready to go. That's always been my main focus: When the puck drops, I'll be there," Nurse said Monday at BioSteel Camp.

"I know at some point I'll be playing in Oilers colours. I want to get it done before camp." Then, perhaps realizing he sounds too eager for his own financial good, he adds: "What I want and what will happen are two different things."

Nurse may be tipping his hand in this staredown with general manager Peter Chiarelli in which his only real ace to play would be to ghost at camp. Or, more dramatically, sit out actual games in which his presence in the top-four has become all that more critical with the news of Andrej Sekera's injury.

But players want to play.

"He's going to need to be there," said captain Connor McDavid, point blank. "I think his game is only going to get better."

Because Nurse, 23, had no arbitration rights this summer and because the Oilers are down to just \$3.98 million in projected salary cap space, per CapFriendly.com, the wiggle room here is minimal, and a long-term commitment to the club's top-scoring defenceman of 2017-18 appears like a long shot.

"I don't see with their cap space being what it is that they can entice us with much term," Nurse's agent, Anton Thun, told the Edmonton Journal. "If they've got \$5 million in cap space, it's not going to be a long-term deal."

OK, then.

For Nurse's part, he uses words like "funny" and "weird" and "educational" to describe this summer's negotiations, which have him and fellow RFA blue-liners on the rise Noah Hanifin (Calgary), Shea Theodore (Vegas) and Josh Morrissey (Winnipeg) embroiled in stalemates.

"Both sides want something a little different. There's both good and bad with the fans. Some fans get on you and say, 'You're not that good. You don't deserve that much.' Others are like, 'Ah, you're great.' It's funny — a whole balancing act," Nurse explained with a chuckle.

"I'm learning a lot going through this whole contract. It takes time. I have a lot faith I'll be there in camp."

No doubt, Nurse has kept a keen eye on comparables like Brady Skjei, who signed for six years at \$5.25 million annually in New York, and Brandon Montour, who opted for a two-year bridge with Anaheim at a \$3.38-million cap hit.

McDavid believes Nurse busted out of his shell this past season, both physically and offensively. The third-year defenceman's 82 games played, six goals, 20 assists, 67 penalty minutes and plus-15 rating (on a minus-29 team) were all career bests, yet because Nurse believes he's just scratching the surface of his offensive potential, he's not afraid to bet on himself.

Nurse said Monday he'd be fine with a bridge contract, and we're circling Montour (another BioSteel camper) as a reasonable template. Settle in the \$3.4-million range, then knock your next deal out of the park. Make 'em pay for your UFA years.

"I'm pretty smart. I think anyone going through this process has an eye for what's going on. I like to stay pretty involved in what's going on. At the end of the day, we're talking about my life here, too, not just my agent's," Nurse said.

"[Term] doesn't matter to me. Either way, I have a lot to prove still. It doesn't matter how long it is; I'm going to be hungry."

Mama said knock you out. pic.twitter.com/7u3WJ1YCHw

— Edmonton Oilers (@EdmontonOilers) August 4, 2018

They all should be, those Oilers.

Nurse calls the club's 25-point year-over-year plummet, from 103-point threat in 2016-17 to 78-point embarrassment in 2017-18, "a kick in the head." A chip for every shoulder.

After sniping and smiling on consecutive three-on-three rushes Monday, Nurse talked about how he has incorporated boxing, under trainer Jorge Blanco, to his training regimen this summer. He vows to be more dynamic, more disciplined, more physical. He wants to be counted on as a shutdown guy.

"Whatever he's asked to do, he'll do. He's going to try and help his team win however he can. You have to have a lot of respect for a guy like that," says Montreal's Max Domi, a close friend and golden world junior teammate in 2015.

"He's an unbelievable athlete. Not many people realize he can play football, basketball, soccer, you name it. And he's elite at them all. He's got some good genes."

Goals, Nurse argues, haven't been the issue in Edmonton. Preventing them is. Of all the Western clubs, only rebuilding Vancouver surrendered more goals last season than the Oilers' 263.

"You can't believe your own hype. We didn't have that hunger we did the year before that made us so successful. For us, it'll be good to have that back in the room," Nurse said.

"It leaves a very bad taste in your mouth. All summer you have to think about it. It's going to be a driving factor."

Now, he just needs the keys.

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Sportsnet.ca / Top 100 NHL players of 2018–19: 100–51

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet August 27, 2018

Welcome to Sportsnet's top 100 NHL players of the 2018–19 season.

We didn't arrive at this list overnight. In fact, we started work as soon as Alex Ovechkin and Co. lifted the Stanley Cup in June. First, we asked 16 of our NHL insiders to rank the top 100 players in the league at this exact moment, and then we combined their individual lists to create a definitive master ranking.

The exact formula for what makes an NHLer great — or, more importantly, greater than another — is subjective, and everyone's top-100 list looks different. (At the end of the week, we will invite you to create your own top 10 to show us how you think it should really be done.)

But let's make one key criteria clear: This list is about the 2018–19 season — not last season or the next five years. It's about who's the best right now.

Today, we give you the first 50 names on the list. On Tuesday we'll offer up No. 50 to No. 31, and Wednesday will bring No. 30 to No. 11. Finally, on Thursday we will give you the top 10 players for the 2018–19 season.

But without further adieu, here are Nos. 100 to 51:

100. Alexander Radulov, RW, Dallas Stars



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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What a difference a few years can make. Radulov's second stint in North America has been more fruitful than his first, and his debut season in Dallas was his best output yet as he found his place in the Stars' high-powered offence.

99. Max Pacioretty, LW, Montreal Canadiens

Someday, Pacioretty will be remembered as the Canadiens' captain during one of the storied franchise's most desultory periods (six playoff games spread across three springs). He's a first-line left winger who has regularly scored 35 goals per season without the benefit of playing beside a first-line centre. At some point, that is bound to come to pass — not in Montreal anytime soon, but maybe as early this season somewhere else.

98. Viktor Arvidsson, RW, Nashville Predators

The young Swede matched his breakout 2016–17 campaign with near-identical numbers last season, proving he's the real deal for a promising Predators squad. Heading into the second season of a recently inked seven-year deal, Arvidsson has all the tools needed to potentially turn that \$4.25-million cap hit into one of the league's best bargains.

97. Corey Crawford, G, Chicago Blackhawks

Although he's never finished higher than fifth in Vezina Trophy voting, Crawford has been a model of consistency throughout his career. Since 2010–11 only four goalies have more regular-season wins, and his 48 post-season victories are the most in the league this decade.

96. Charlie McAvoy, D, Boston Bruins

Thanks in part to a star-studded 2017–18 rookie class, it wouldn't quite be fair to say McAvoy was snubbed in Calder Trophy voting. But earning 32 points and playing more than 22 minutes a night — second most on a strong Bruins team — should warrant more than a fifth-place spot, no?

95. Colton Parayko, D, St. Louis Blues

You'd think a player of Parayko's size—six-foot-six and 230 pounds—would be a bruiser, but the reality is his hockey sense and puck movement are perhaps his greatest strengths. The right-handed defenceman also possesses an absolute cannon of a shot from the blue line.

94. Jonathan Huberdeau, LW, Florida Panthers

An exciting package of size and skill made Jonathan Huberdeau the third-overall pick of the 2011 NHL Draft, and the Saint-Jerome, Que., native has steadily delivered on his potential. The 25-year-old had a career-high 27 goals and 42 assists last season and completes a dangerous first line with Aleksander Barkov and Evgenii Dadonov.

93. Jeff Carter, C, Los Angeles Kings

The Kings transitioned to a more offence-focused squad under coach John Stevens last year, but Carter missed most of the season due to a fluke injury. From the time he returned on Feb. 24 through the end of the season, though, only five players put up more goals than Carter's 13. The big centre is a great bet to better 30 tallies once again.

92. Zdeno Chara, D, Boston Bruins

The biggest and strongest man to ever skate in the league, owner of likely the hardest shot to pour in from the point — even today, 1,423 regular-season games into his career. Yes, at 41, the 2009 Norris Trophy winner has lost a step or two, but his game has rarely come down to foottraces, and he remained the first option shut-down blue-liner for a 100-point team in 2017–18, going plus-24. Don't bet on this being his last season.

91. Ivan Provorov, D, Philadelphia Flyers

If Provorov has another season like he did in 2017–18, he is going to get paid. The sophomore blue-liner recorded 17 goals and 41 points and

skated 24:09 per game, the most of any Flyer. Don't be surprised if he starts getting Norris votes.

90. Hampus Lindholm, D, Anaheim Ducks

He's the type of quietly effective blue-liner every club needs in order to thrive — strong offensively, solid in his own zone, and an all-around balanced presence for a fair chunk of minutes each night. Injuries limited him to 69 games in 2017–18, but Lindholm still managed his third 30-point effort (and a career-high points-per-game pace) while playing a key role for a Ducks penalty kill that ranked among the league's top five.

89. Eric Staal, C, Minnesota Wild

Set to be one of the most intriguing regression candidates in 2019, the veteran sniper's future potential is tough to pin down. The elder Staal put up the second-best goal-scoring effort of his career at age 33, a 42-tally gem, topping his total from the two previous seasons combined. But a strong 65-point showing one year prior suggests the fit might simply be right in Minnesota. A contract year in 2018–19 should clear up the debate.

88. Henrik Lundqvist, G, New York Rangers

The most stylish man in hockey did all he could behind an atrocious Rangers team last season en route to posting a 2.98 goals against average — the worst in his stellar career — and a middle-of-the-pack .914 save percentage. He certainly has some great goaltending left in him, but it's only a matter of time before King Henrik relinquishes his Manhattan throne.

87. Ryan Ellis, D, Nashville Predators

Long considered a quality, understated blue-liner, Ellis went to another level during Nashville's run to the 2017 Cup Final. He missed the 2017 portion of last season with a knee injury, but the 0.73 points-per-game he posted upon his return represent a 60-point campaign over a full 82. This is a cerebral player who is only now realizing his full potential. And has a shiny new contract to reflect that.

86. Devan Dubnyk, G, Minnesota Wild

The Wild's franchise record-holder for wins in a single season (40 in 2016–17), Dubnyk has arguably and quietly been the league's most consistent goaltender over the past four years, posting a minimum of five shutouts and a .918 save percentage each season since arriving in Minnesota. While questions surrounding the Wild's offence remain and a full rebuild may be the best option, Dubnyk's steadiness alone should keep this perennial playoff team in the mix.

Florida Panthers defenceman Aaron Ekblad (5) moves the puck past Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Morgan Reilly (44). (Christopher Katsarov/CP)

Christopher Katsarov/CP

85. Morgan Rielly, D, Toronto Maple Leafs

He has been a consistent strength on a blue line that has needed it throughout the Maple Leafs' forward-thinking rebuild. Now the young veteran — hard to believe he's only 24 — is coming off the most productive season of his career and is still barreling toward his prime at the best possible time.

84. Nikolaj Ehlers, LW, Winnipeg Jets

Ehlers is one of several building blocks who could make the Jets look like a stalwart Cup contender for years to come. The 22-year-old Dane already has lethal chemistry with his flashy 20-year-old linemate, Patrik Laine. Ehlers scored 29 goals and 60 points in his third NHL season in Winnipeg. And the Jets are just taking off.

83. Shea Weber, D, Montreal Canadiens

Destined for a greater microscope given his high-profile 2016 jersey swap, the veteran rearguard hasn't helped his cause since coming north.



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Year 1 saw his numbers dip slightly, Year 2 brought an injury-shortened season of just 26 appearances, and Year 3 won't begin until mid-December. With eight years at just under \$8 million per left on the books, a strong redemption campaign is in need for the 32-year-old before the pressure ramps up significantly from the Canadiens faithful.

82. Vincent Trocheck, C, Florida Panthers

Hot off a breakout campaign in which he piled up 31 goals and 75 points and was invited to his first all-star game, the Pittsburgh native will be key to Florida's effort to return to the playoffs. Trocheck's production has improved with every season, and he's that rare Panthers top-six forward who has managed to stay healthy. Knock on wood.

81. Kris Letang, D, Pittsburgh Penguins

A three-time Stanley Cup champion and two-time second-team all star, Letang's reputation as the Penguins' essential No. 1 defenceman took a small hit in '17 when they went the distance despite Letang being sidelined for the entire tournament with a neck injury. A healthy Letang returned in 2017-18 to play his most games (79) in six years and racked up 11 points in 12 playoff contests. He's still the engine from the back and point man on arguably the league's best power-play unit.

80. Tuukka Rask, G, Boston Bruins

After a five-year stretch at the start of the decade in which he racked up a cumulative .926 save percentage, Rask is coming off seasons of .915, .915 and .917, and his performances in the playoffs last spring were a decidedly mixed bag. Rask hit his nadir in Game 5 against the Leafs in the opening round: In a potential series-clinching contest, he allowed four dubious goals on 13 shots before getting pulled. Some image resuscitation is needed this season for him to jump back onto the short list of franchise netminders.

79. John Gibson, G, Anaheim Ducks

The 25-year-old has battled injuries during his relatively short career, but he's about as good as they come when healthy. Gibson's .923 career save percentage is the highest of any active goalie who's appeared in at least 150 games. The six-foot-three American may be the most important player on the Ducks as the club transitions into a more modern outfit.

78. Mark Giordano, D, Calgary Flames

Though he continues to anchor the Flames' blue line and received a handful of Norris Trophy votes, Giordano's offensive output dropped for the second consecutive season in 2017-18. (Granted, last year's fall wasn't as precipitous — he went to 38 points from 39.) Giordano will reportedly reunite with T.J. Brodie to start the season, so that may help the 34-year-old.

77. Matt Murray, G, Pittsburgh Penguins

It bears repeating: By the end of his rookie season, Murray already had two Stanley Cups to his name. The start to his NHL career has been rather remarkable, although early indications would suggest he's somewhat injury prone. He relies on his athleticism more than he should, but that's a common trait among young goalies and it's correctable. He's still only 24.

76. Rickard Rakell, C, Anaheim Ducks

After another 30-plus-goal season, there's no denying Rakell is the forward to watch on the Ducks. With Corey Perry's scoring touch waning and the team's core getting older, Rakell, 25, has to continue to improve if Anaheim is going to reach the playoffs for the seventh straight season.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliott Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

75. Ryan O'Reilly, C, St. Louis Blues

A bright spot in Buffalo over his three seasons there, O'Reilly's future just got a whole lot brighter after being dealt to the Blues. He's one of the top

two-way centres in the game right now, and he might just be the missing piece to get the Blues back into contention.

74. Mark Stone, RW, Ottawa Senators

Only 13 players posted a better points-per-game mark than Stone's 1.07 last year, and all but one, Connor McDavid, played on squads that — unlike Stone's awful Ottawa club — qualified for the playoffs. The 26-year-old has gone from being a sixth-round pick in 2010 to earning a reputation as one of the smartest all-around forwards in the game. Don't be shocked if he becomes the rare winger to get a Selke nomination in coming years.

73. Dougie Hamilton, D, Carolina Hurricanes

A change of scenery could be just what Hamilton needs — he was clearly unhappy in Calgary, and the feeling seemed mutual. The big, smooth-skating defenceman was T-1 among all blue-liners with 17 goals last season and will have another chance to prove himself, this time with a Hurricanes team that has struggled with goaltending.

72. Brayden Point, C, Tampa Bay Lightning

Sometimes overshadowed on a talented Lightning forward corps, Point is a crafty 22-year-old centre who earned quite a bit of spotlight in a breakout 2017-18 campaign. He had 32 goals and 66 points as a sophomore, giving Lightning opponents a dynamic threat to worry about when the big-name superstars were on the bench. If you don't know much about him yet, you will very soon.

71. Ryan Suter, D, Minnesota Wild

It may be the back nine of his illustrious career, but Suter is still able to carry a big load on a deep Wild blue line. The 33-year-old is best known for his defensive prowess, but was still able to tie a career high in points with 51 in 2017-18. You'll constantly see him near the top of the NHL's ice-time leaders, consistently averaging over 27 minutes a game.

70. Shayne Gostisbehere, D, Philadelphia Flyers

Gostisbehere is 25 and part of a young and talented group in Philadelphia. This puck-moving defenceman is key on the power play and coming off a career offensive year in which he put up 65 points in 78 games. His best is still to come — presumably, so is his team's.

69. Sean Monahan, C, Calgary Flames

With Monahan playing alongside waterbug Johnny Gaudreau, the Flames should have a fun future ahead of them. He's scored 138 goals through five seasons and he's still only 23. Monahan missed the final eight games of 2017-18, but he's fully healthy to start the campaign and fans can expect him to keep padding that goal total.

68. Jonathan Marchessault, LW, Vegas Golden Knights

Marchessault is a perfect example of what an undersized player can accomplish when he's got an oversized chip on his shoulder. After showing plenty of promise in Florida, the undrafted centreman looked right at home in Vegas as the team's second-best scorer in both the regular season and playoffs.

67. Frederik Andersen, G, Toronto Maple Leafs

Andersen has transitioned nicely from a 1A/1B situation in Anaheim to a 66-game workhorse in Toronto, posting a .918 save percentage in each season as a Leaf. The 28-year-old will again be required to mask the mistakes of a young run-and-gun outfit with legitimate Cup dreams. His .896 showing in Round 1's exit to Boston, however, proves there's another level he must reach.

66. Zach Werenski, D, Columbus Blue Jackets

Helping the Blue Jackets to back-to-back playoff appearances for the first time in franchise history, Werenski has splashed onto the NHL scene in a big way. The 21-year-old is a bona fide top-pairing defenceman, and has



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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the vision and speed to contend for the Norris Trophy in the near future, if not already.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

65. Aaron Ekblad, D, Florida Panthers

The 2014 first-overall pick has become your all-around solid pointman, capable of running the power play, ripping one home from the point, and moving the puck out of his own zone. Ekblad is just 22 and his best years are ahead.

64. Connor Hellebuyck, G, Winnipeg Jets

It's hard to believe the goaltender who finished second in Vezina Trophy voting and signed a six-year, \$37-million deal in July wasn't even an opening-night starter last season. With Steve Mason out of the picture, suffice it to say the Jets won't make that mistake again. Add in backstopping the Jets to the Western Conference final and Hellebuyck, 25, is the unquestioned No. 1 goalie in Winnipeg.

63. Duncan Keith, D, Chicago Blackhawks

A goal against St Louis in the last week of the 2017–18 campaign spared Keith an historic if humbling stat: a shooting percentage of <1.0 for the season. That goal, Keith's second, raised his success rate to 1.1. The two-time Norris Trophy winner, 35, vowed to step up his training in the off-season in an effort to get Chicago back into the playoffs, but you have to wonder about the toll that his team's run to championships took on their minutes-eating franchise blue-liner.

62. Mikko Rantanen, RW, Colorado Avalanche

Just 21 years old and entering his third year, and already has an 84-point season under his belt. Yowza. Rantanen is big, he's fast, he can finish and he can pass. The kid is chock full of upside.

61. Joe Pavelski, C, San Jose Sharks

While San Jose's other elite centremen, Logan Couture and Joe Thornton, have battled the injury bug, "Captain America" has missed all of one game over the past seven seasons and threatens 70 points in an off year. A crafty playmaker, driven leader and accurate shooter, Pavelski sets a high bar for a room that will welcome the return of Evander Kane and should, as always, contend for the Pacific crown.

60. Oliver Ekman-Larsson, D, Arizona Coyotes

Ekman-Larsson's decision to sign an eight-year extension with Arizona this off-season represents the best news for the club in a long while. And as the young Coyotes improve, it will only serve to showcase the Swede's skills. His subtle game doesn't smack you in the face; it'll just steal the puck off your stick and send it up ice before you know what happened.

59. Marc-Edouard Vlasic, D, San Jose Sharks

Little flash but plenty of substance. The 2014 Olympic gold medalist is about as reliable as it gets, logging roughly 22 minutes a night usually against opposing teams' top forward units. He doesn't play a physical game, but doesn't need to. His hockey IQ, positioning and skating prowess make him a difficult out for any forward entering the offensive zone.

58. Brock Boeser, RW, Vancouver Canucks

With the hair of Prince Charming from Shrek and a shot that would make Canucks great Pavel Bure jealous, Boeser is a superstar in the making. He had 29 goals in 62 games before a nasty back injury abruptly ended his stellar rookie campaign. He showed off his laser-quick release by winning the accuracy shooting competition at the 2018 NHL All-Star Game by hitting all five targets in 11.136 seconds. A future 50-goal scorer.

57. Logan Couture, C, San Jose Sharks

Yes, the Sharks signed 39-year-old Joe Thornton to a one-year deal when they missed out on John Tavares. And, yes, Joe Pavelski, 34, wears the C in San Jose. But the team's forward of the moment and the future is emphatically Couture. He led the Sharks in nearly every category, including goals with 34. For GM Doug Wilson, continuity is king so locking up Couture with an eight-year extension running through to the 2026–27 season was no big surprise.

56. Jonathan Quick, G, Los Angeles Kings

Not many goaltenders can match Quick's resumé, which includes two Stanley Cups and a Conn Smythe Trophy. The 32-year-old's athleticism results in spectacular saves and frustrated opponents on the regular. He rebounded from an injury-plagued 2016–17 to post an impressive .921 save percentage this past season.

Winnipeg Jets' Dustin Byfuglien and Nashville Predators' Ryan Ellis chase a rebound after Predators goalie Pekka Rinne blocked a shot in an NHL hockey game

55. Pekka Rinne, G, Nashville Predators

After his disappointing post-season, it's easy to forget that Rinne put up a .927 save percentage in 2017–18 en route to the Vezina. Turning 36 in November, Rinne is in the final year of his contract, and this summer his team signed young netminder Juuse Saros to a three-year deal. Rinne will be his solid self in the regular season, but the real test will come in the playoffs.

54. Mitch Marner, RW, Toronto Maple Leafs

When John Tavares announced that he was signing with the Maple Leafs, Marner responded by tweeting a pair of excited eyes. It was fitting commentary from Marner, who has some of the best eyes in the league and led the Leafs with 47 assists as an NHL sophomore. Expect that tally to rise when Marner lines up alongside Tavares this fall.

53. Marc-Andre Fleury, G, Vegas Golden Knights

He could've packed up his three Stanley Cup rings and ridden off into the sunset of his career when he was selected by the Golden Knights in the expansion draft, but instead Fleury posted the best numbers of his career in 46 regular-season starts. His playoff performance was even better. Now with the ink drying on a new deal in the desert, the (always-smiling) face of the NHL's newest franchise looks ready for another run.

52. John Klingberg, D, Dallas Stars

He played in the All Star Game for the first time in 2017–18, led all NHL defencemen with 59 assists — and was tied for second among rearguards in total points, just one behind John Carlson's 68. Expect the Swede to be an offensive juggernaut from the blue line for years to come.

51. Leon Draisaitl, C, Edmonton Oilers

What a difference a year makes — that's all the time it took for the young German to go from breakout star to overpaid headache in the eyes of non-Oilers fans. Draisaitl has all the talent required to live up to the massive expectations surrounding him, but it's how he handles the growing weight of that eight-year, \$68-million deal that will determine how he fares.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Auston Matthews unsure if he'll sign new deal before season



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 28, 2018

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet August 27, 2018

Toronto Maple Leafs star centre Auston Matthews says that while negotiations on a new contract are underway, he's still unsure if he'll sign a new contract anytime soon, and he's cool with that.

"I don't know if I'll sign a new contract before the season or not," Matthews told NHL.com's Dave Hogg Sunday. "I'm not really involved with the talks. That's something being dealt with by my agents and team management.

"They've told me that it will get done when it gets done, and that's fine."

Matthews is entering the final season of his entry-level contract and is set to become a restricted free agent.

Having racked up 132 points and 74 goals in his first two NHL seasons, the 20-year-old will be looking at a considerable raise over his current entry-level deal, which carries a cap hit of \$925,000 before bonuses.

Earlier in the summer, when talks between his camp and the Leafs first began, Matthews appeared just as laidback about the entire process as he seems now.

"They've obviously started [negotiating]. It's not something I'm too in tune with. I let my agent and management handle that and focus on my summer, training, getting on the ice and being ready for the season," Matthews told Sportsnet's Luke Fox in late July. "When it gets done, it gets done, but I don't think anybody's in too big of a rush."

Besides Matthews, the Maple Leafs have a more pressing need in William Nylander, who is a restricted free agent and still remains without a contract with the club with training camp set to begin in about two weeks' time.

By the looks of things, the Nylander deal could go right down to the wire, meaning a similar course of action could apply to Matthews around this time next year.

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Sportsnet.ca / Signs point to bridge deal for Oilers, eager Darnell Nurse

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox August 27, 2018

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"I know at some point I'll be playing in Oilers colours. I want to get it done before camp." Then, perhaps realizing he sounds too eager for his own

financial good, he adds: "What I want and what will happen are two different things."

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But players want to play.

"He's going to need to be there," said captain Connor McDavid, point blank. "I think his game is only going to get better."

Because Nurse, 23, had no arbitration rights this summer and because the Oilers are down to just \$3.98 million in projected salary cap space, per CapFriendly.com, the wiggle room here is minimal, and a long-term commitment to the club's top-scoring defenceman of 2017-18 appears like a long shot.

"I don't see with their cap space being what it is that they can entice us with much term," Nurse's agent, Anton Thun, told the Edmonton Journal. "If they've got \$5 million in cap space, it's not going to be a long-term deal."

OK, then.

For Nurse's part, he uses words like "funny" and "weird" and "educational" to describe this summer's negotiations, which have him and fellow RFA blue-liners on the rise Noah Hanifin (Calgary), Shea Theodore (Vegas) and Josh Morrissey (Winnipeg) embroiled in stalemates.

"Both sides want something a little different. There's both good and bad with the fans. Some fans get on you and say, 'You're not that good. You don't deserve that much.' Others are like, 'Ah, you're great.' It's funny — a whole balancing act," Nurse explained with a chuckle.

"I'm learning a lot going through this whole contract. It takes time. I have a lot faith I'll be there in camp."

No doubt, Nurse has kept a keen eye on comparables like Brady Skjei, who signed for six years at \$5.25 million annually in New York, and Brandon Montour, who opted for a two-year bridge with Anaheim at a \$3.38-million cap hit.

McDavid believes Nurse busted out of his shell this past season, both physically and offensively. The third-year defenceman's 82 games played, six goals, 20 assists, 67 penalty minutes and plus-15 rating (on a minus-29 team) were all career bests, yet because Nurse believes he's just scratching the surface of his offensive potential, he's not afraid to bet on himself.

Nurse said Monday he'd be fine with a bridge contract, and we're circling Montour (another BioSteel camper) as a reasonable template. Settle in the \$3.4-million range, then knock your next deal out of the park. Make 'em pay for your UFA years.

"I'm pretty smart. I think anyone going through this process has an eye for what's going on. I like to stay pretty involved in what's going on. At the end of the day, we're talking about my life here, too, not just my agent's," Nurse said.

"[Term] doesn't matter to me. Either way, I have a lot to prove still. It doesn't matter how long it is; I'm going to be hungry."

Mama said knock you out. pic.twitter.com/7u3WJ1YCHw

— Edmonton Oilers (@EdmontonOilers) August 4, 2018

They all should be, those Oilers.

Nurse calls the club's 25-point year-over-year plummet, from 103-point threat in 2016-17 to 78-point embarrassment in 2017-18, "a kick in the head." A chip for every shoulder.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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After sniping and smiling on consecutive three-on-three rushes Monday, Nurse talked about how he has incorporated boxing, under trainer Jorge Blanco, to his training regimen this summer. He vows to be more dynamic, more disciplined, more physical. He wants to be counted on as a shutdown guy.

"Whatever he's asked to do, he'll do. He's going to try and help his team win however he can. You have to have a lot of respect for a guy like that," says Montreal's Max Domi, a close friend and golden world junior teammate in 2015.

"He's an unbelievable athlete. Not many people realize he can play football, basketball, soccer, you name it. And he's elite at them all. He's got some good genes."

Goals, Nurse argues, haven't been the issue in Edmonton. Preventing them is. Of all the Western clubs, only rebuilding Vancouver surrendered more goals last season than the Oilers' 263.

"You can't believe your own hype. We didn't have that hunger we did the year before that made us so successful. For us, it'll be good to have that back in the room," Nurse said.

"It leaves a very bad taste in your mouth. All summer you have to think about it. It's going to be a driving factor."

Now, he just needs the keys.

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Sportsnet.ca / Not hard to see Evan Bouchard cracking Oilers lineup

Ryan Dixon | August 27, 2018, 9:20 AM

Robert Thomas spent the majority of his major junior career playing on the same London Knights team as Edmonton Oilers prospect Evan Bouchard, during which time the latter demonstrated to the former just how adept he is at finding forwards coming out of the defensive zone.

"Playing with him as a centre, you've just got to find that little bit of space and it's right on your tape," says Thomas. "[He's] so easy to play with."

So is a certain No. 97 on the team Bouchard will one day be starring for. And the time when Bouchard — a six-foot-two, right-shot defenceman — will be starting breakouts by sliding the puck to Connor McDavid, the human afterburner, may not be far off.

With an October, 1999 birthday, Bouchard had to wait an extra year before being selected 10th overall by the Oilers in Dallas at last June's NHL Draft. It was a pick the Oilers appeared quite willing to move until it became clear the best way to address some blue line issues might not be trading futures for an established pro, but by selecting a guy who turns 19 a couple weeks into the season and just may have the game to step in and contribute right away.

"I think he's got all the tools to do it," says Thomas, who was in Toronto with his pal for the NHLPA Rookie Showcase on Sunday. "If he has a good camp, I don't see why not."

Thomas, who'll be trying to make the St. Louis Blues himself come September, isn't the only person high on Bouchard's immediate future. Right after the Oilers drafted the Oakville, Ont., boy, Sportsnet's prospect guru, Sam Cosentino, suggested Bouchard was a strong candidate to at least get a look in Edmonton the way the club's 2017 first-rounder did last fall.

"I believe he's going to be a lot like Kailer Yamamoto," Cosentino said of Bouchard on Sportsnet's Tape to Tape podcast. "He's going to be given an opportunity to start with the big club right out of camp and let him determine his fate the rest of the way through."

Bouchard says cracking the big club has been the goal since the minute Edmonton called his name, though he's trying to keep his famously mobile feet grounded for now.

"It's something you try not to think about too much," says Bouchard, who got a text from McDavid soon after joining the Oilers family. "The only thing I try to focus on is being ready to fill whatever role they need me to."

He certainly did it all in London. Bouchard put up an astonishing 25 goals and 67 assists for 87 points in 67 contests, leading all Ontario Hockey League defencemen in scoring. Nicolas Hague of the Mississauga Steelheads, a Vegas Golden Knights pick, was the only D-man to get within 10 points of Bouchard's total and the only other one to get within 20 was Guelph Storm and San Jose Shark property Ryan Merkley.

While the numbers pop, it's critical to remember that Bouchard is never out there in blind pursuit of goals. Ask him to describe his game and he talks about making good passes in all three zones and taking care of the back end. Thomas, too, mentions how Bouchard manages the home front first, doing a good job of getting the puck back, then moving it out with that vision and poise.

As long as Bouchard can handle himself at five-on-five at the NHL level, it's easy to see a scenario where he plays modest even-strength minutes and uses his fantastic offensive instincts to try and boost an Oilers power play that was the league's worst at 14.8 per cent last season.

Off the ice, Thomas describes Bouchard as a funny guy who can be as selective with his words as his passes. He's always a good time to be around, though, according to his buddy and — perhaps sooner rather than later — fans of the Oilers could really be enjoying his company.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

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TSN.CA / Red Wings, Blackhawks paying for past glory

Travis Yost

Ten years ago, the Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks ushered in a new era of hockey — one built on speed, puck possession and an incredible pool of talent that ensured playoff contention every season.

But hockey, like most things, is cyclical. The state of the organizations in Detroit and Chicago is quite different in 2018. These two historic franchises wrote the playbook on how to build a contender in the modern era. But they also are writing a sequel — one that speaks to the importance of salary cap management and continuous player development.

Detroit's story has already been written. The Red Wings are embarking on a full-blown rebuild and it may be some time before they come out of it. The Red Wings were naturally going to dissolve first. Their core was substantially older than their Original Six brethren, and so was their window of contention.

The Red Wings now carry the league's oldest roster by a significant margin — the average player age working against the Detroit cap is 31, which is three standard deviations from league norms these days.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Players age 34 and up, a vanishing breed in the NHL, are consuming about \$36-million against the cap. Not only are those players relatively unproductive (or, simply not playing, like forward Johan Franzen), but the organization hasn't been able to replace them with competent young talent. The rebuild is ongoing and will take some time.

That brings us to Chicago. I think some are expecting the team to rebound from last year's dead-last finish in the Central Division. The Blackhawks do have some young talent on their roster (including Alex DeBrincat and Brandon Saad, who is just 25), and, sans Marian Hossa, their "core" is still intact.

But the Blackhawks core may be a bit more problematic than what appears on the surface. Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, Duncan Keith, and Brent Seabrook – four Blackhawks stars who are eminently responsible for three Stanley Cups since the 2009-10 season – just aren't the same players in 2018. They are still impact players, but the degree to which they impact games certainly comes into question.

Let's talk about what happened with Detroit's core for a moment from their peak during the 2007-08 Stanley Cup through today. Those legendary Red Wings teams had a lot of core contributors, but from a longevity perspective over this timespan, you can isolate it to about five guys: Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg, Johan Franzen, Niklas Kronwall, and Nicklas Lidstrom.

Here is each player's Goal%, by year:

The common theme here, not surprisingly, is that these guys faded in effectivity as they aged – from dominance, to quality, to mediocrity, and almost perfectly in that order. That shouldn't be surprising in any way but it does emphasize the importance of being able to replenish this type of talent through draft and development or external acquisitions.

The Red Wings haven't been able to do that. And what's left of the core – at this point, it's just Zetterberg and Kronwall, and Zetterberg may have played his final game anyway – doesn't impact the game in any significant way.

Again, this is a logical progression in any league, not just the NHL. But what's important to remember is that these players either were or are eating up extraordinary slices of the salary cap. That's particularly troubling in the NHL, since the league has a hard cap with no wiggle room above the ceiling. Zetterberg and Kronwall currently hit the Red Wings cap for \$11-million. Franzen consumes long-term injured reserve space. At the time of their exodus, Datsyuk and Lidstrom were consuming \$7.5 million and \$6.2 million, respectively.

Another way of saying this: The Red Wings were spending an awful lot of money to preserve a group of players who were incredible in their prime. But their prime was many moons ago. Now it's the biggest reason why Ken Holland and the Detroit front office have such a long road to recovery.

That brings us back to the Blackhawks. Keep in mind the Wings graph when you consider the Blackhawks situation since their first Cup in 2009-10. Also keep in mind that their core four will consume \$34-million against the cap, or 43 per cent of available cap space in 2018-19:

Much like Detroit in their prime, the Chicago core in their heyday manhandled the opposition, consistently outscoring their opponents by about a 60-to-40 margin. Every year since then, that number has dwindled. Last season, Toews and Seabrook just broke even on goals, and Kane and Keith were substantially under the 50 per cent line. For a group commanding such a large piece of the salary cap, that simply can't happen.

I did leave out one player of note here, and that's goaltender Corey Crawford. Crawford has had quite the renaissance in the later phase of his career and is one of the biggest reasons, save last season, why the Blackhawks have remained reasonably competitive. But Crawford has been on the mend with a mysterious injury for the last eight months, and it's still not known if he will be available on opening night. Crawford turns 34 in December, keep in mind.

I'll conclude on a couple of points. There isn't a single soul in Detroit or Chicago who would trade their Stanley Cups for anything, and often times paying legacy players to stick around is about more than just what they do on the ice. Some of these players remain huge draws at the gate, and some can even extend their quality play into their 30s.

But it is interesting how closely Chicago's road seems to be mirroring Detroit's, which is probably not what Blackhawks fans want to hear right now. There is a far cry between retaining superstars at a premium and paying every player who played a role in a Stanley Cup run until the end of time.

The Red Wings and Blackhawks never appeared to know when to turn the faucet off. Now both look like they're heading into a time where things will get worse before they get better.

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TSN.CA / A closer look at cap allocation across the NHL

Travis Yost

All National Hockey League teams are challenged with the question of how best to allocate salary in a hard cap environment. For the 2018-19 season, that means teams must spend at least \$58.8 million (the cap floor) on player payroll, but no more than \$79.8 million (the cap ceiling).

The allocation question is a fascinating one because teams have different visions on how best to construct a Stanley Cup-calibre roster. Some organizations consistently run top-heavy payrolls that see superstars eat into huge portions of the available cap space. Other organizations, perhaps borne out of the necessity of not having superstar players available, prefer flatter spending across the board. Some teams will carve out large pieces of their cap space for their forward group – others, the same, but for defencemen or goaltending.

Now that it's mid-August and most restricted free agent arbitration cases have resolved, we have a general sense of what each team's cap position will be entering the 2018-19 season. As is the case every year, there's a pretty significant divide in player payroll. Contending teams like St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Washington have \$1 million or less in cap space to work with. More fiscally conservative teams like New Jersey and Carolina have nearly \$20 million in space. Then there are teams like Toronto that are flush with cap space (about \$14 million today), but know full well that much of that will be utilized to retain future free agents like Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, Jake Gardiner, and so on.

With this off-season wrapped up, I wanted to take a look at how teams decided to their cap space by position. The table below shows positional spending for every team in the league under the \$79.8 million cap ceiling. It also shows each team in comparison to the league average, which as of today sits as follows: \$42 million for forwards, \$22 million for defencemen, \$7 million for goaltenders, and about \$9 million in unallocated cap space.

A few thoughts, in no particular order:

- Perhaps the most fascinating cap situation involves the Carolina Hurricanes. Obviously they are in a full-blown rebuild, keyed by new ownership and management groups. Part of that transition has created a funky cap situation for this season – one that sees their defensive group (\$28 million) paid more than their forward group (\$25 million). Their blueline, as of today, is actually the highest-paid group in the league. It's one of the big reasons why Justin Faulk's name has frequently been on the trade block – he's a valuable right-shot defenceman who has been played out of his position by the growth of guys like Jaccob Slavin and



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Brett Pesce, plus the acquisitions of top-four types like Dougie Hamilton and Calvin de Haan. On the other side of the equation, Carolina has only one forward paid more than \$5 million a year – that's captain Jordan Staal, who is signed through 2022-23.

- The Dallas Stars are the only team spending more money on their forward group than the Vegas Golden Knights. Yes, David Clarkson's contract – though he's on injured reserve – still impacts the cap, but a lot of their cap growth came at the cost of being a Stanley Cup finalist last season. Jonathan Marchessault, William Karlsson and Tomas Tatar all commanded big raises and the team strategically pursued playmaker Paul Stastny during the off-season. Despite not having an obvious superstar with a heavily burdensome deal on the books, it's worth noting that Vegas' top-six will alone command \$30 million, or 38 per cent of the cap. The team still has plenty of cap space available – thanks in part to an inexpensive blueline, though Shea Theodore is still up for an extension – but it's certainly a different financial position than the one they were in a year ago.

- I mentioned it earlier, but the Maple Leafs are in a quirky position. They have a ton of cap space, but that should be short-lived due to the sheer number of upcoming restricted and unrestricted roster players in 2019-20. Still, that does make Toronto prime for rentals at the trade deadline. Cap space in 2018-19 is a non-issue and the Maple Leafs will be in as strong a position as any team in the league to squeeze any positional player onto their roster in February. A luxury that, say, division rival and fellow Stanley Cup contender Tampa Bay may not have.

- The reverse is true for the Ottawa Senators. Ottawa is actually carrying \$73 million of cap into the 2018-19 season, but an impressive amount of that is tied up in expiring contracts. They stand to shave \$35 million in cap next off-season, which seems like a major victory for an organization that appears ready to rebuild with a budget-friendly roster. The only issue, of course, is a lot of the money coming off of the books is because their best players are reaching expiry on their current deals. Erik Karlsson, Mark Stone, and Matt Duchene – arguably the team's three most talented skaters – all are set to hit unrestricted free agency next summer. The only long-term deal left on the books is tied up with Bobby Ryan, who will post a \$7.2 million hit through 2021-22.

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