



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Jacob Slavin's adopted daughter opened his eyes to a diverse world the NHL is discovering

By Luke DeCock

The awakening came for Jacob Slavin in the form of a baby girl. As other white NHL players on Thursday — for the first time, really — started to acknowledge the feelings and experiences of their Black peers and teammates, Slavin was more than a year into his own new understanding.

The Carolina Hurricanes defenseman and his wife Kylie [last April adopted an infant and named her Emersyn Ruth](#). Emersyn is Black. The Slavins are white. Immediately, whatever Slavin thought he knew about racism and race relations in America he quickly realized he did not.

So what happened in Toronto and Edmonton on Thursday, as white NHL players reached out to their peers in the Hockey Diversity Alliance to try to understand the pain they felt when the NHL played on Wednesday night while many players in other professional leagues did not — in the NBA, WNBA, MLS and MLB, to protest the shooting of Jacob Blake — evoked emotions that were all too familiar to Slavin.

“Over the course of this year, over the course of my daughter’s life, I’ve been trying to educate myself on these matters,” Slavin said. “I’m still learning. I definitely do not know everything. I’m just trying to learn and to educate right now, that’s super important. Listening to Black people, to the people who are experiencing what’s going on right now, is really big.

“Then taking what you learn from those conversations and yeah, you definitely want to have those hard conversations with people on the team, with the people that you’re closest to outside of hockey, whoever it is. Those conversations aren’t easy but they’re important to bring awareness and hopefully start that change.”

Would Slavin, without Emersyn, have fully understood what it meant to play Wednesday night, if he and the Hurricanes had been sitting in Toronto ready for a playoff game? Almost certainly not. But he does now. The contrast between his answer Friday and Jordan Staal’s answer on Thursday was all too apparent, but so is their personal experience now.

Slavin, by virtue of his daughter’s skin, has been forced to educate himself about what her life might be like as a person of color in America. Very few NHL players grew up with that knowledge. Fewer still have taken the time to understand it.

“I get a different viewpoint from it now,” Slavin said. “It’s different now that I’m living it and experiencing it. Before, I wasn’t fully aware of everything that was going on around the world. I realized that racism existed. I didn’t see how deeply rooted it was. It’s hard to see what’s happening in our country right now. It’s hard to live with the fact that Emersyn is going to grow up in this world. Obviously we want to see change happen. There’s a long way to go.”

Until Thursday, the few Black players who had the courage to show any demonstration of dissent generally did it alone, from J.T. Brown’s raised fist on the bench in 2017 to Matt Dumba’s kneeling during the anthem last month. The first step forward was taken when three white players joined Ryan Reaves in kneeling before a playoff game — two Canadians and a Swede joining a Canadian-American dual citizen. Thursday’s player-led decision not to play may have been a day late, but it was not too late.

“I’m sure it wasn’t an easy decision for those guys to make, to say, ‘Hey let’s postpone this game,’” Slavin said. “But I think what they did is awesome. It showed great support for the black community, for a black community that’s suffering right now.”

But hockey, where the players are 95 percent white, still has a long way to go. Even NASCAR has taken a stronger stand against racial inequality during this summer of upheaval.

“There needs to be change,” Slavin said. “What the NHL did with postponing the games is a sign of solidarity, it’s awesome to see that. At the same time, there’s still a lot more that needs to be done than postponing one game, right? Or postponing a couple games. There’s a lot of change that needs to happen and a lot of action that needs to happen outside the game of hockey, but it is awesome to bring more awareness to it and continue that conversation.”

Slavin should not have to bear the responsibility of sharing his experience with his teammates, but just as he has an obligation to keep listening and keep learning, he has the same obligation as a father to spread that knowledge within a sport that doesn’t have its eyes open, whether he asked for it or not.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

Andrei Svechnikov feeling good after ankle injury — and also very lucky

By Luke DeCock

If the Carolina Hurricanes were still playing, Andrei Svechnikov says he'd be playing, too. Now almost two weeks removed from the high-ankle sprain he suffered when Boston Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara knocked him backward in front of the net, Svechnikov says he's ready to go again. Or would be.

"I would say so, I would play, you know," Svechnikov said Friday. "I feel almost 100 percent."

It's a little hard to believe given how bad the injury looked at the time, Svechnikov's right ankle buckling grotesquely as Chara pushed him back over his own skates late in the Hurricanes' Game 3 loss. Svechnikov grabbed at his right knee as he lay on the ice, and the Hurricanes expected the worst, a broken leg or torn ligaments, with a long rehab to follow.

It became clear almost immediately that Svechnikov had escaped disaster, which was confirmed by an MRI exam. Svechnikov never exited the NHL's Toronto bubble, hoping to play again, but the Hurricanes dropped the next two games to lose to the Bruins in five. Unlike a year ago, when Svechnikov bounced back from a concussion suffered in the first round to play in the conference finals, there would be no second chance.

But that doesn't mean the high-scoring Russian winger who scored 24 goals in 68 games in his sophomore season is not feeling fortunate.

"Yeah, it was pretty scary," Svechnikov said. "I kind of saw that moment on the video and I was like, 'No way.' That's hard. But I did an MRI there and everything shows fine. I think I got very lucky there."

Svechnikov attempted, before his injury, to try his now-signature lacrosse move from behind the net against the Bruins, a move that worked twice to score goals during the regular season but was quickly snuffed out by alert defenseman Matt Carlo. That internet-breaking move was actually incorporated into the new NHL 21 video game, and Svechnikov said he bought a PlayStation so he could try the move virtually as well.

That may be the only time he tries it. Acknowledging that other teams have caught on, Svechnikov said he's working on some new viral content for next season, whenever that is.

"It's so hard to do right now because the (defensemen) know," Svechnikov said. "I think I've got a couple more tricks. It's going to be really hard to make them but I'm going to try to keep working on it. Maybe one day I show some other tricks."



Jacob Slavin Speaks Out Against Racial Injustice

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes, now a week removed from the Toronto bubble, are closing out the prolonged 2019-20 campaign with end-of-season virtual press conferences featuring management and players.

Though the message would typically hone in on the strides made by the team's young core, the tough lessons learned in the postseason and the bright future ahead - and, to a certain extent, that has been discussed - the conversation has understandably shifted.

How could it not?

On Aug. 23, Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back by a police officer in Kenosha, Wis., leaving him paralyzed. Blake's name is the latest on a far-too-long list of police encounters with Black people like Atatiana Jefferson, like Breonna Taylor, like George Floyd, that have ended in tragedy, sparking a nationwide groundswell for racial justice.

That uprising prompted a historic week in the sports world, which saw players from a number of leagues - first the NBA and WNBA, followed by MLB, MLS, professional tennis and the NHL - boycott and refuse to play their scheduled games and matches in lieu of seeking actionable solutions to help conquer racial injustice.

Jacob Slavin, a white defenseman in a predominantly white sport, has a unique perspective on the current landscape. He and his wife, Kylie, adopted Emersyn, a Black child, in mid-April of 2019.

Since then, the Slavins have paused to listen and reflect as they've experienced a real-time shift in their perspective on realities of systemic racism.

"It's different now that I'm living it and experiencing it. Before, I wasn't fully aware of everything going on around the world. I knew racism existed, but I just didn't realize how deeply rooted it was," Slavin said on Friday. "It's hard to see what's happening in our country right now. It's hard to live with the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

fact that Emersyn is going to grow up in this world. We want to see change happen. There is a long way to go."

In a movement spearheaded by players within the Toronto and Edmonton bubbles and in conversation with the Hockey Diversity Alliance, the NHL postponed its two-game slates on both Thursday and Friday nights.

"I think it's a great sign of solidarity. It's awesome to see that," Slavin said. "At the same time, there's still a lot more that needs to be done than postponing a couple games. There is a lot of change that needs to happen and a lot of action that needs to happen outside the game of hockey, but it is awesome to bring more awareness to it and continue that conversation."

These are conversations, uncomfortable as they may be, that Slavin now finds himself having with teammates and those closest to him outside of hockey.

This movement, after all, transcends both hockey and sports. Initiate conversation. Encourage progress. Promote change. For Emersyn, it has to be different.

For a just and righteous future for all Black people, it has to be different.

"Listening to Black people and to the people who are actually experiencing what's going on right now is really big," Slavin said. "The biggest thing right now is everyone just taking a look at their own heart in this matter. ... That's the issue. It's a problem of the heart right now and how we look at our peers. Those conversations need to continue."



Hurricanes should sign Andrei Svechnikov to contract extension as soon as possible

By James O'Brien

Even during uncertain times, the Carolina Hurricanes should pounce on the opportunity to sign Andrei Svechnikov to a contract extension. And it would absolutely behoove the Hurricanes to sign Svechnikov to an extension as soon as humanly possible.

NHL.com's Tom Gulitti reports that Svechnikov said he's open to signing a contract extension with the Hurricanes before the 2020-21 season begins. Svechnikov, however, will leave the details to his agent, Mark Gandler.

"I'm open," Svechnikov said Friday, via Gulitti. "I think my agent is going to do that job and I tell him I don't want to know anything [until] it's going to be done. So he's going to tell me when it's going to be done and I just don't want to worry about that."

Should Svechnikov want to sign a contract extension? Under normal circumstances, probably not. We've really only seen the tip of the iceberg (the lacrosse net during a lacrosse goal?) when it comes to a rising talent. But, after injury scares and amid COVID-19 uncertainty, one couldn't totally blame Svechnikov if he craved long-term security.

And so the Hurricanes should jump at that opportunity. Let's examine why.

Svechnikov is already a star, and that will become clearer with time

Even at only 20 years old, it's already clear that Andrei Svechnikov is a star. In case you were going to interject: there's no need to attach "rising" in front of star.

And, the more the Hurricanes wait, the more likely it will be clear that Svechnikov is a *superstar*.

You simply don't come across many stars as polished as Svechnikov has been basically since day one.

Consider how well Svechnikov compares to teammate Sebastian Aho on Bill Comeau's SKATR charts. (Svechnikov compares well to other stars, including Art Ross winner Leon Draisaitl.)

Just two years into his career, Svechnikov already flies off of many charts. Looking at this Evolving Hockey's Goals Against Replacement chart, Svechnikov ranked in the top 30 in 2019-20, in between Sean Couturier and Nikita Kucherov.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

As far as the Hurricanes go, only Jaccob Slavin ranked higher.

So far, Svechnikov aced every test, and is only likely to add accolades going forward.

Hurricanes could save a lot of money by signing Svechnikov to a contract extension ASAP

Look, I've been beating the "give Svechnikov more ice time" drum since he was a rookie, but perhaps the indirect benefit might be keeping costs down when it comes to re-signing him? At least, that's a possibility if the Hurricanes decide to be proactive.

When you look at Svechnikov's box score numbers (24 goals, 61 points in 68 games), you'd probably be impressed, but not blown away. Consider that Svechnikov managed almost a point-per-game despite averaging 16:44 minute per game, which landed him outside the top-100 for NHL forwards this season, though.

Health and worldwide pandemic permitting, Rod Brind'Amour probably has no other choice but to unleash Svechnikov in

2020-21. So, for all of the attention Svechnikov received for lacrosse-style goals, he could really break through as a mainstream star if he's finally healthy during a playoff run.

Again, Svechnikov hasn't enjoyed the greatest luck. His 2018-19 playoff run ended at Alex Ovechkin's knuckles, and he dealt with a serious injury scare getting tangled up with Zdeno Chara during the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs. With Svechnikov indicating that he avoided anything too major — he even believes he could've played in the Second Round — it's now reasonable to picture a healthy start to 2020-21.

"I would say so, I would play, you know," Svechnikov said, via Luke DeCock of The Charlotte Observer. "I feel almost 100 percent."

Even if Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon is still feeling the sting from that AAF investment, the Hurricanes would still be wise to sign Svechnikov to an extension as soon as possible. Chances are, they'll be happy they did. If not, Svechnikov could turn a lot of heads (and fatten his wallet) with a big contract year.

SportScan

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

The Athletic / Inside the NHL's Saturday return, the league's time to stand with its players

By Scott Wheeler

Aug 29, 2020

TORONTO — On Thursday night, a day after Milwaukee Bucks players decided they weren't going to play and the sports world came to a halt once more following the police shooting of Jacob Blake, Steve Mayer, the NHL's bubble man, met with a group of Vegas Golden Knights players in Edmonton to discuss it all.

Mayer's goal was to start a dialogue between the league and its players where, he hoped, the league could support its athletes in whatever their eventual return to the ice looked like.

By then, many of the NHL's players had decided they weren't going to play. The NHL, in response, postponed two days worth of games.

When hockey was re-scheduled to return on Saturday, though, the messaging from the top down had already been muddied. After the players had come together in Edmonton for a joint press conference unlike any in hockey, Flyers head coach Allain Vigneault plead ignorance in his Thursday remarks before reading a prepared statement on Saturday.

And less than an hour after Vigneault talked of never bothering to "ask or check with anyone what was going on in the world," the NHL had to show they were committed to fighting racism in that world.

The players had done much of the talking and it was the league's turn to take the 48 hours that preceded their return a step further — and to show they were committed to supporting the players in their efforts.

Before the hockey world got to see what the league and its players were going to do with Saturday's return to action, the Lightning, the first team back, elected to put preparation for the game itself on the back burner.

On Friday night, when Lightning head coach Jon Cooper met with his team before their noon matchup with the Bruins, they didn't go over tape or structure like they normally do the evening before a game in the bubble.

"Consciously, as a coaching staff, you don't want to take the focus away from the last few days and that's what we did. We meet as a group the night before each game and we didn't do anything really hockey-related. There's no turning the page with what's gone on but you have to re-focus," Cooper said. "It was a delicate balance but we didn't want to put the game ahead of what's gone on until this morning."

In Edmonton, too, Canucks coach Travis Green was still trying make sense of the previous two days while his game loomed.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

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As Green spoke in Edmonton, Saturday's new slate of games rolled around in Toronto. The first sound of hockey's return to the ice from a two-day absence was Brad Marchand as he leapt out through the boards behind Jaroslav Halak for warmups.

"Oh yeah!" he screamed through the silence, seconds after his Bruins were welcomed to the ice.

For a brief moment, shortly before noon on Saturday, the pre-game routines of Marchand's Bruins and the Lightning played out as they have nearly a dozen times now at Scotiabank Arena.

The Bruins, the designated home team, got their introductory hype video, with "Lions Inside" by Valley Of Wolves bellowing through the empty arena.

After warmups had finished, when they returned for the anthems, another now-familiar bubble sound followed.

"Ladies and gentleman, please welcome your Boston Bruins!" announced through the speakers while Audioslave's "Cochise" rang out.

But as the players gathered at their blue lines and the lights dimmed, something different had to follow. Silence was no longer an option. And the typical anthems, sung before each Bruins home game by Todd Angily, had to wait.

In its place, a video began playing on the jumbotron. The Lightning starters, who were facing the flags high behind their nets, turned to look up at the screen behind them for a change.

"As we resume play today, the NHL and our players unite in the fight to end racism. We stand together for a common cause that needs action today, tomorrow, and well after the Stanley Cup playoffs end," began public address announcer Simon Bennett.

A video followed, stitched together with scenes from the bubble, from the Western hub's joint press conference of a day earlier to Matt Dumba's centre-ice address of four weeks before that.

"In hockey, we often let our effort, determination, and passion to win do the talking," began the video, using the same voiceover from the video the league played during their initial Aug. 1 return. "But when an issue is bigger than the game, we must speak out, starting with three words that we need to get comfortable saying: Black Lives Matter. Equality is the only way forward. As players, as fans, and as active citizens we must confront these issues. We must be clear about what we skate for. We skate for Black lives. And even in an empty arena, we never skate alone. Together, we must be a part of the movement to end racism. Because what we skate for today will bring us a better tomorrow."

As the video finished, a brief silence hung and the words of Black poet and activist James Baldwin took over the jumbotron: "Nothing can be changed until it is faced."

The first video was followed by a second, shot a day earlier. It featured comments from the Lightning's Kevin Shattenkirk and the Bruins' Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand.

As they each spoke, their words appeared bolded in white on the black screens behind their benches.

Shattenkirk started, looking straight into the camera.

"I think for us, the decision to postpone our games and sit out was viewed as an opportunity to highlight a bigger issue than hockey. We wanted to make sure that every Black player in this league can feel safe and feel like they have a voice," he said. "We want to make sure that we continue these conversations moving forward and making sure that the sport is progressing in the right way as well."

Bergeron followed.

"It was amazing to see everyone coming together and realizing this is bigger than sports. It's about human rights. It's about supporting our Black players and being there for them and realizing we need change. This is just the beginning," he said. "We know that there needs to be reflections and discussion and conversations but there also needs to be actions and we want to be there for that."

Marchand finished.

"The last number of days have been very impactful for not only NHL players but people all over the world," he said. "We want to continue to use our platform to show that we stand together with all of our players of colour to continue to show that we're going to be better. This is the start of the beginning of a lot of change."

The ceremony lasted a little over three minutes. When it was over, the players banged their sticks in unison, the building rested in silence for a brief moment, the anthems were sung, the players stood where they always do — on the bench and their blue lines — and the lights eventually rose for hockey to be played.

"We just got the thought process going and one of the things that I wanted to do and they wanted to do, was just something that was short and simple and yet recognized the return," Mayer said.

On Friday morning, following his conversation with the Golden Knights, Mayer and the league reached out to each of the eight remaining teams to ask if they could get a representative or two who would be willing to speak for individual vignettes that they would run before each of Saturday's games, hoping they could have a variety of players speak to what the last 48 hours meant.

Those players became Bergeron, Marchand, Shattenkirk, Islanders defenceman Ryan Pullock, Flyers forward James van Riemsdyk, Canucks captain Bo Horvat, and Golden Knights forward Ryan Reaves, the lone Black player of the group.

The NHL quickly worked to shoot each player's statements and build the visuals that would support them inside both arenas.

"We just asked one question and they answered that question. And we took what we felt were the important words and the messaging and that was part of the display that was on our video board," Mayer said. "When you look at what they had to say, we felt that it really summarized what they were all about and what they were thinking and doing over this two days, recognizing that this was bigger than sports and that they stand together and that they're going to get better. All of these interviews and statements I felt were very powerful."

The question posed to each player was the same: What do these two days mean to you, to your team, and to hockey?

"We wanted to make sure that they could articulate why taking this time off was important and I think they all did it in a slightly different way," Mayer said. "But the message was important. It takes a lot to get in front of people and really express yourself and I really believe the players did an incredible job. (It) was really important to show what has transpired here."

A few hours after the Lightning defeated the Bruins in the first game back, van Riemsdyk and Pullock followed ahead of the second.

"It has been great to see the players come together and have discussions over the last few days and educated themselves on issues much bigger than the sport of hockey," van Riemsdyk said. "As far as postponing the games, we felt that it was the best thing for us to do to stand in support of the Black players in our league and also start a conversation about these issues going on. Hopefully it can lead to some action and some change going forward."

"Our goal moving forward is that no matter the colour of your skin or your sexual orientation, you feel comfortable playing the game of hockey. We want equality for everyone," Pullock said



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

In their own way, the players had managed to keep their voices at the centre of the NHL's messaging. Victor Hedman had spoken about how none of the conversations he'd had with his teammates in recent days were about hockey. Blake Coleman had insisted it was important the players did what they did.

While the Islanders and the Flyers took the ice for the second game of the day, Nathan MacKinnon spoke in the Avalanche's daily availability.

"Talking to (Nazem Kadri) and (Pierre-Edouard Bellemare), we'd like to figure out a way to contact activists back in Denver. I'm a White person, I don't know what people are going through and I'm not going to act like it. That's why you have to ask questions and learn," MacKinnon said. "We were a day late (to postponing). It's unfortunate. But we're doing our best to make up for it."

In Edmonton, when the day's third and final game approached puck drop, the lights darkened and the buzzer sounded once more. Robin Lehner joined his teammates on the blue line while Jacob Markstrom remained in the Canucks net.

Fittingly, Reaves got the first word in the pre-game ceremony.

"Over the last two days, a predominantly-White sport decided to take two days off (and) step aside from the game to discuss Black issues around North America. For those athletes to step aside and say 'I've never walked a mile in your shoes, I don't know what your people go through on a daily basis, but we see the problem and we stand behind you,' is a very impactful and strong statement," Reaves said.

Then came Horvat, the last of the day's jumbotron speakers.

"So we met as a team in the morning and we felt it was the best decision to go to Vegas and get their take on everything. We talked to Ryan (Reaves) and he made some amazing points and really got the ball rolling. We agreed with everything, wanted to be supportive and we felt it was the best course of action to take two days, reflect, and learn about everything that's going on in the world. We stand behind our decision," Horvat said. "I'm really proud of our guys to take a stand to come together as one and be united. I'm really proud that we did what we did."

Back in Toronto, as the day came to a close, Islanders captain Anders Lee sat at a podium and tried to make sense of hockey's small role in a 48 hours in sports history.

"As professional athletes, young kids look up to us and I think we can set a great example of unity and coming together," Lee said. "I think it was a great couple of days for all of us to have conversations I don't think we have enough."

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"We just got the thought process going and one of the things that I wanted to do and they wanted to do, was just something that was short and simple and yet recognized the return," Mayer said.

On Friday morning, following his conversation with the Golden Knights, Mayer and the league reached out to each of the eight remaining teams to ask if they could get a representative or two who would be willing to speak for individual vignettes that they would run before each of Saturday's games, hoping they could have a variety of players speak to what the last 48 hours meant.

Those players became Bergeron, Marchand, Shattenkirk, Islanders defenceman Ryan Pullock, Flyers forward James van Riemsdyk, Canucks captain Bo Horvat, and Golden Knights forward Ryan Reaves, the lone Black player of the group.

The NHL quickly worked to shoot each player's statements and build the visuals that would support them inside both arenas.

"We just asked one question and they answered that question. And we took what we felt were the important words and the messaging and that was part of the display that was on our video board," Mayer said. "When you look at what they had to say, we felt that it really summarized what they were all about and what they were thinking and doing over this two days, recognizing that this was bigger than sports and that they stand together and that they're going to get better. All of these interviews and statements I felt were very powerful."

The question posed to each player was the same: What do these two days mean to you, to your team, and to hockey?

"We wanted to make sure that they could articulate why taking this time off was important and I think they all did it in a slightly different way," Mayer said. "But the message was important. It takes a lot to get in front of people and really express yourself and I really believe the players did an incredible job. (It) was really important to show what has transpired here."

A few hours after the Lightning defeated the Bruins in the first game back, van Riemsdyk and Pullock followed ahead of the second.

"It has been great to see the players come together and have discussions over the last few days and educated themselves on issues much bigger than the sport of hockey," van Riemsdyk said. "As far as postponing the games, we felt that it was the best thing for us to do to stand in support of the Black players in our league and also start a conversation about these issues going on. Hopefully it can lead to some action and some change going forward."

"Our goal moving forward is that no matter the colour of your skin or your sexual orientation, you feel comfortable playing the game of hockey. We want equality for everyone," Pullock said

In their own way, the players had managed to keep their voices at the centre of the NHL's messaging. Victor Hedman had spoken about how none of the conversations he'd had with his teammates in recent days were about hockey. Blake Coleman had insisted it was important the players did what they did.

While the Islanders and the Flyers took the ice for the second game of the day, Nathan MacKinnon spoke in the Avalanche's daily availability.

"Talking to (Nazem Kadri) and (Pierre-Edouard Bellemare), we'd like to figure out a way to contact activists back in Denver. I'm a White person, I don't know what people are going through and I'm not going to act like it. That's why you have to ask questions and learn," MacKinnon said. "We were a day late (to postponing). It's unfortunate. But we're doing our best to make up for it."

In Edmonton, when the day's third and final game approached puck drop, the lights darkened and the buzzer sounded once more. Robin Lehner joined his teammates on the blue line while Jacob Markstrom remained in the Canucks net.

Fittingly, Reaves got the first word in the pre-game ceremony.

"Over the last two days, a predominantly-White sport decided to take two days off (and) step aside from the game to discuss Black issues around North America. For those athletes to step aside and say 'I've never walked a mile in your shoes, I don't know what your people go through on a daily basis, but we see the problem and we stand behind you,' is a very impactful and strong statement," Reaves said.

Then came Horvat, the last of the day's jumbotron speakers.

"So we met as a team in the morning and we felt it was the best decision to go to Vegas and get their take on everything. We talked to Ryan (Reaves) and he made some amazing points and really got the ball rolling. We agreed with everything, wanted to be supportive and we felt it was the best course of action to take two days, reflect, and learn about everything that's going on in the world. We stand behind our decision,"



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

Horvat said. "I'm really proud of our guys to take a stand to come together as one and be united. I'm really proud that we did what we did."

Back in Toronto, as the day came to a close, Islanders captain Anders Lee sat at a podium and tried to make sense of hockey's small role in a 48 hours in sports history.

"As professional athletes, young kids look up to us and I think we can set a great example of unity and coming together," Lee said. "I think it was a great couple of days for all of us to have conversations I don't think we have enough."

Sportsnet.ca / Black Lives Matter remains focus as NHL returns from player-driven postponement

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

August 29, 2020

TORONTO — Black Lives Matter.

Those words were expressly blared through the Scotiabank Arena sound system before the resumption of the Stanley Cup Playoffs on Saturday afternoon, part of a pre-game video played during a three-minute Moment of Solidarity.

"In hockey we often let our effort, determination and passion to win do the talking," commentator Kevin Weekes said in the video, which was similar to one played Aug. 1 at the outset of the playoffs. "But when an issue is bigger than the game we must speak out, starting with three words we need to get comfortable saying: Black. Lives. Matter."

"Equality is the only way forward. As players, as fans and as active citizens we must confront these issues."

The NHL's player-driven postponement of four games this week followed similar actions taken by athletes in the NBA, WNBA, MLS, MLB and professional tennis.

It happened after a group of players chose to put aside their individual pursuits of the Stanley Cup to take a collective stand. That decision was reached inside the NHL-created bubbles in Toronto and Edmonton during a series of face-to-face conversations, plus conference calls with founding members of the Hockey Diversity Alliance.

It brought members of the Tampa Bay Lightning and Boston Bruins together for a meeting on Thursday morning, less than 12 hours after playing each other. Those teams were immediately back at it Saturday, as Tampa took a 3-1 lead in the second-round series with a 3-1 victory in Game 4.

"It was a delicate balance," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "But we didn't want to put the game ahead of what's gone on, until this morning. That was our message to the guys is just make sure we come to this rink, it's hockey, and I thought our guys did a really good job focusing."

"A little bit of difference going into today's game after the last 48 hours," Tampa defenceman Victor Hedman added. "The conversations we've had within our team and within the whole bubble, interacting with other teams, that's been anything but hockey. But today was a different day."

There was no evidence of the competitive edge being dulled during a game that featured a couple spirited scrums and a five-minute boarding penalty to Boston's Nick Ritchie for a late hit on Yanni Gourde. Ritchie then fought Barclay Goodrow in the third period.

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy didn't agree with the major assessed to Ritchie following a video review by the referees: "Gourde was down on the play. He's a good player, a real good player for them, clever obviously, got them on the power play for five minutes. He finished the game, had no problems in the third period."

Ondrej Palat scored twice while Hedman added a power-play goal as Tampa moved one win away from reaching the Eastern Conference Final. Jake DeBrusk replied with a goal for the Bruins.

During the 48 hours without games, there was very little talk about hockey around the NHL. The walls of the Toronto bubble were even decorated with messages like "Black Lives Matter," although those drawings were only visible to the players and staff on the inside.

"There are bigger things than hockey," DeBrusk said. "That's probably one of the things that's been focused on the most here."

On Saturday morning, Lightning defenceman Kevin Shattenkirk took advantage of the relaxed dress code to arrive for the game in a black "HDA" hoodie. He was among the players shown on the pre-game video discussing the impact of this week's stand against systemic racism, along with Brad Marchand and Patrice Bergeron of the Bruins.

"We all need to learn a lot about what's happening outside of our own lives," Marchand told reporters Friday. "A lot of us, we don't truly understand what it's like in other peoples' shoes, and we need to. It's the only way things are going to change."

The NHL ran a quote on the video board saying: "Nothing can be changed until it is faced."

"As we resume play today the NHL and our players unite in the fight to end racism," the in-arena host said, "we stand together for a common cause that needs action today, tomorrow and well after our Stanley Cup Playoffs end."

Now that the players and league have started looking more intently at this issue, they can't avert their gaze.

Even with the chase for the Cup back on.

Sportsnet.ca / What do NHL scouts make of hockey in the bubble?

Gare Joyce

There was no consensus about who lands where and how but most said that, for aesthetic value, they'd most like to see a Vegas-Dallas Western Conference final. "Those are the teams not just with the depth of goaltending but with deep lineups," says one. "They just keep rolling really proven, experienced guys out at you. Dallas even has a third-liner [Corey Perry] who's won a Hart Trophy, a Cup and two gold medals."

The quality of the playoff hockey is helping to take the scouts' minds off some industry-wide concerns, stuff that's flying below the radar for even dedicated hockey fans but hits team staffers where they live and work. Only one of the scouts I spoke to had real cause to worry about whether he'd stick with his organization until next summer — although his team fell short of the post-season, he's been kept on by management. While he alone in his group is worried about his job security, some developments are cause for universal concern.

Typically, scouts are on one-year contracts. They work through the draft in late June and, if retained, get new deals in the mail on July 1. Generally, a bit of movement is expected in any given year — some retire, some find coaching jobs, some are reassigned within their organizations. With the draft shifted to October this year, just about everybody stayed in place with the exception of Buffalo where the firing of GM Jason Botterill in mid-June set in motion a punting of virtually the entire scouting staff by his successor, Kevyn Adams.

Many expect changes in Florida, where the Panthers have cut ties with long-time GM Dale Tallon, and in Arizona following the messy divorce of GM John Chayka and the Coyotes. Says one scout sympathetically: "By the time [Chayka was out], he'd already gutted a real good scouting staff over the past few years."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

Even in Florida and Arizona, though, everyone is standing pat at least this summer. "Just about everyone got a slide for a year to see how this plays out with COVID," the soon-to-retire scout explains.

Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Players make unified anti-racism statement from bubble

Elliott Friedman | August 30, 2020, 7:36 PM

- Panthers conducting broad search for next GM
- Fallout from Coyotes' violations come to light
- What would Maple Leafs want for Nylander?

Friday afternoon, one day before the Vancouver Canucks and Vegas Golden Knights resumed their fierce playoff encounter, Scott Oake ended an excellent interview with Ryan Reaves by asking, "How hard is it going to be to flip the switch and go back to hating their guts in the rest of this series?"

"(It's) not going to be hard at all," Reaves answered with a wry smile. "I left my family a month ago for a reason. I came to this bubble to win a Stanley Cup. I haven't lost sight of that.

"For three hours (Saturday night) ... they are my enemies again, but I will say, again, that as much as I hate them on the ice, I am very proud and I have nothing but respect for every single player that stood behind this."

He wasn't lying. The Golden Knights controlled the 3-0 victory, grabbing a 2-1 series lead. For the third-straight game, Antoine Roussel and Robin Lehner set the tone, chirping each other in warmup. The Canucks forward was a regular target, goaded into his second misconduct of the series. It was an edgy, intense night — not for the faint of heart. Reaves was Reaves.

When the puck drops, commit to your job. Around that, be human.

It makes perfect sense that Vancouver and Vegas were the drivers behind the players' two-day stoppage of game action. They were the only teams not playing Wednesday as the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks refused to step on-court for their game against the Orlando Magic, igniting action across all sports. (Did anyone else find it extremely strange to watch half of MLB vote to play, including the Toronto Blue Jays, while everyone else didn't?)

Undistracted by game preparation, the Canucks and Golden Knights could pay more attention to significant life events unfolding in real-time. Before players on the two teams met face-to-face at their morning skates on Thursday, Vancouver knew how its players felt, and informed the NHL.

Reaves said he was at dinner with a few teammates on Wednesday night when Brayden McNabb asked, "Do you think we're going to play tomorrow?"

"Yeah, why wouldn't we?" Reaves answered. "And then I got to my room and said, 'Are we really going to play tomorrow?'"

At 12 a.m. Thursday, he texted Marc-Andre Fleury to see if the goalie was still awake. They talked for an hour. "(He) let me vent a little bit, heard me out and gave me his thoughts ... But as much as he helped, I still didn't know how it was going to (go) over."

As we now know, Reaves awoke to texts from Canucks captain Bo Horvat and former St. Louis teammate Kevin Shattenkirk, now in Tampa Bay. At the morning skate for their scheduled game, Reaves met with several Vancouver players, including (but not limited to): Horvat, Alex Edler, Jacob Markstrom, Tanner Pearson, Brandon Sutter, Chris Tanev and Tyler Toffoli.

New York and Philadelphia were getting ready for the second half of a back-to-back. As Islanders coach Barry Trotz indicated Thursday morning, those players were discussing what was happening, but expected to play. When they talked with Reaves, they changed their minds.

One Eastern Conference player chuckled a little as he explained how a serious conversation was connected through three smartphones. One looped in Minnesota's Matt Dumba and San Jose's Evander Kane, members of the Hockey Diversity Alliance; the others featured two separate teams. Among non-Black players who spoke passionately about a temporary halt were Shattenkirk and Philadelphia's James van Riemsdyk.

"I couldn't be more proud of the players in this league," he said. "(This is) not an issue that necessarily touches them or that they know a lot about. But the fact that they see it through the media and social media obviously proves the point that it's a big problem, for them to take a stand like that ... I didn't know how my teammates were going to take it, how I was going to go about it, how the league was going to take it."

"It wasn't just me leading a charge by myself ... It was, 'Reavo, tell us what you think.' They listened. If you think this is the right thing to do, we're going to step away."

The HDA did a presentation with players in both bubbles on Friday, and indicated they were particularly struck when showed vicious, racist notes sent to the organization's general email account and to Akim Aliu on social media.

Late Saturday night, the HDA released its "Ask of the NHL." There were eight requests: including specific hiring targets for Black hockey and non-hockey personnel in the sport; an immediate commitment to zero tolerance with respect to racial discrimination and abuse; a refusal to "support, partner with or accept support from any organization that has engaged in, promoted or failed to appropriately respond to racist conduct in their organization of any kind;" and funding. It has been reported that the HDA has asked for \$100 million over 10 years.

The NHL remains quiet, for now. That doesn't mean nothing's happening with its own work (particularly the Inclusion Steering Committee), but that it can't afford a mistake in implementation. The league has to get this right.

This does not come without challenges. The Las Vegas Police Union denounced the Golden Knights' statement. Dallas President & CEO Brad Alberts told The Dallas Morning News' Matthew DeFranks that some season-ticket holders cancelled their accounts over the Stars' support for the players' actions, including kneeling during the national anthem earlier in August.

"But we'll stand by our organization's commitment and support our players 100 per cent to express their views," Alberts said.

The players made it clear: they won't have it any other way.

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

31 THOUGHTS

1. With 20/20 hindsight, I hope everyone involved looks back and sees what was missing on Wednesday: a big-picture thinker to step up and say, "We need to take a 30-minute timeout. Really look at what's going on, and what that means for us."

The Flyers and Islanders were playing. Boston and Tampa Bay were approaching a huge Game 3 in a 1-1 series. Colorado's Nathan Mackinnon maturely accepted blame, saying, "I guess we were a day late ... but we're doing our best to make up for it." The Avalanche and Stars were the late game that night, but I can see many of those players being in preparation mode, not focused on the outside world.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

Someone with clout from the NHL, the NHLPA or the organizations themselves needed to be that voice. It didn't happen and there was fierce blowback. God forbid anything else happens that forces a similar situation in the future, but there has to be a contingency plan — allowing everyone to understand the moment.

2. Florida Hockey Now's George Richards broke the story of an NHL investigation into "racially-charged" comments made in the bubble by former Panther GM Dale Tallon.

"I have never said anything of the sort," Tallon told Richards in response.

The league declined to comment on the scope of the investigation until it is concluded, but there's a lot at stake here. There will be plenty of scrutiny because Tallon hired Bill Peters to coach AHL Rockford, and we now know what happened between Peters and Akim Aliu there. (It is believed the HDA knew about the bubble allegation before it became public.) It is also believed at least one other team was considering Tallon in an advisory role, which obviously can't happen until there is clarity.

3. The Panthers' introductory interviews for their GM vacancy were done mainly by President & CEO Matt Caldwell, along with Michael Viola — one of owner Vinny Viola's sons.

As The New York Post's Larry Brooks reported, Rangers assistant GM Chris Drury withdrew from consideration. He was a serious contender, if not the front-runner, and there are sources who believe he was going to be offered the job, if he hadn't been offered it already.

The Panthers have talked to a ton of people, including: St. Louis assistant GM Bill Armstrong, Montreal scout Sean Burke, former Edmonton GM Peter Chiarelli, Boston executive director of player personnel John Ferguson, former Los Angeles assistant GM Michael Futa, Toronto assistant GM Laurence Gilman, former Philadelphia GM Ron Hextall, former Vancouver GM Mike Gillis, OHL London's Mark Hunter, Montreal assistant GM Scott Mellanby, NBC's Ed Olczyk and NHL Network analyst Kevin Weekes.

4. Head coach Joel Quenneville is expected to become more involved as the finalists are selected. That might seem counter-intuitive, but when your head coach has as much juice as Quenneville does, it makes sense. The Panthers' timeline for a new hire was early September, and the calendar flips on Tuesday.

5. Arizona's search will take longer, partially because it just started. They obviously know interim GM Steve Sullivan, who, according to other clubs, is making sure the Coyotes are connected with what other teams are considering. (The Pittsburgh-Toronto trade effectively ended the off-season.) As Chris Johnston reported Saturday, the candidate list will be similar to Florida's. Owner Alex Meruelo and President/CEO Xavier Gutierrez are relatively new to the league. They're going to take their time and collect information. I'd assume they'll want someone in place by the draft.

6. Let's talk some more about Arizona. This is not an easy job right now, but there will still be interest. There are only 32 of these positions, and they are coveted. The Meruelo family is in the casino business, which has been hammered by COVID-19. There's been significant layoffs on the business side, and, last week, assistant coach John MacLean and video coach Steve Peters were let go. Several bonuses are due in September, including Oliver Ekman-Larsson's. During their post-season appearance, players were upset about late payment of per diems. The goal will be to cut payroll and rebuild. The Coyotes have a tight cap situation for 2020-21, but then it eases. There's also the matter of the NHL's stiff punishment for prospect workout violations.

7. We'll get to the machinations of that decision shortly, but the penalty means no current selections in the first three rounds of the 2020 draft and no first- or third-rounder in 2021. Expect the Coyotes to try and restock that. Even with an active goalie market, Darcy Kuemper is a very attractive piece thanks to his impressive playoff performance. He's signed for two more years at \$4.5 million per. Ekman-Larsson has seven years remaining at \$8.25 million per season, and the team would like to

test his marketplace. A no-move clause gives him control, but word is he's not opposed to the idea pending the landing spot. It's not an easy contract to handle at this time, but there are teams out there who believe Ekman-Larsson would be revitalized by a fresh start. Arizona has four other defenders — Jason Demers, Alex Goligoski, Niklas Hjalmarsson and Jordan Oesterle — with one year remaining on their contracts. All of them could help another team. Hjalmarsson, in particular, is much-loved around the league.

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

8. Okay, the punishment. When John Chayka terminated his contract as President of Hockey Operations and General Manager, one of the reactions was that he'd given commissioner Gary Bettman an "out." Bettman's fought harder for the Coyotes than any other franchise, consistently powering through challenges no matter the obstacle. They were excited about Meruelo's ownership, and, in 2014, erased a penalty to the New Jersey Devils (the loss of a first-round draft pick for the Ilya Kovalchuk signing) to support its new leadership.

There appeared to be a simple path: allowing Chayka out of his contract while suspending him for what happened under his watch. Take the medicine, then potentially join New Jersey. Bettman still needs to rule on that situation, but the severity of the penalty certainly accomplished the main goal: ensuring that no one in the future will break prospect testing rules. "It would have been better to fine them \$5M than do that," one agent said. Other teams, however, were adamant the Coyotes needed to suffer, especially in a year where there's no combine. (Some have asked the NHL if they could meet in-person with players now that they know their draft order, but that's been denied, too.)

The ruling shocked team staff, since Gutierrez indicated when he was hired in June that he wasn't expecting serious punishment.

9. In the aftermath of Bettman's ruling, a clearer picture into what happened has emerged. After a complaint from the WHL's Vancouver Giants, the NHL informed the Coyotes on Jan. 22 of accusations about illegal testing. Two weeks later, the franchise retained the law firm Snell & Wilmer to conduct an internal investigation. The league pointed to regular memos, the most recent from April 2019, detailing policies that prohibit medical examinations or physical testing of prospects prior to the combine.

One of Arizona's arguments was that there was a breakdown in disseminating these rules through its staff. (Chayka accepted responsibility for this.) Tommy Powers, hired as the Coyotes' strength and condition advisor in September, said he'd never seen them. According to the Snell & Wilmer report, the Coyotes believed Powers was mandated solely to conducting verbal interviews. The firm found him in violation of that, subjecting "at least" 20 prospects to testing.

Powers said he deleted the data before sharing it, and the team said it did not benefit because they were notified in January, with team scouting meetings not held until February. The Coyotes said Powers was kept in a minor role at those meetings, knowing he was under investigation. (He was let go by the team this week.)

10. There was a Zoom hearing with the commissioner on Aug. 6, featuring three witnesses: NHL Executive Vice-President and Senior Director of Hockey Operations Colin Campbell, Chayka and Powers. At the beginning, Arizona acknowledged a violation, but argued it did not deserve a stiff penalty. The Coyotes brought up minutes from a June 2003 league meeting, where it was discussed that teams had violated policy but not been punished. Campbell replied by saying the NHL has worked since then to make sure everyone is aware of the rules, and that was 17 years ago.

Interestingly, Arizona also argued some NHL teams have an advantage because their owners also own major junior teams. As mentioned, Chayka accepted blame for not making sure everyone on his staff understood the rules, but maintained he did not direct Powers to illegally



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

test anyone. He said there was no intent to violate the rules, no instruction to violate the rules, and no benefit gained.

Powers testified he never distributed his videos or notes to any club personnel and that no Coyotes scout had any knowledge or reason to believe that he performed physical testing on prospects. The commissioner attacked that testimony in particular, because it was alleged a scout was present for the incident the Giants complained about.

11. In their closing argument, the Coyotes restated they felt they should not be sanctioned, but if any sanction is imposed, it should be lenient. Three reasons: they did not gain because the testing was not shared; Powers conducted physical testing without the knowledge of an ownership that has committed to ensuring future compliance with all league rules; that other clubs were not disciplined for older violations, and that NHL ownership of junior teams could be more advantageous than anything Arizona gained.

12. Finally on this issue: I'm not sure where this goes, if anywhere, but a lawyer buddy is wondering if the Coyotes have an appeal case because the change in combine testing rules was never brought to the Board of Governors for approval and/or ratification.

13. I don't believe Calgary wants to take a long time to decide on Geoff Ward's future. Maybe a week or two. Not fair to him to wait too long, but it sure sounds like the Flames wanted to avoid the emotion of the moment being a factor in their decision. Ward stabilized them in a very difficult situation.

14. Jacques Martin, let go in Pittsburgh, could replace Lindy Ruff with the Rangers.

15. Washington has permission to talk to Peter Laviolette, and he is very much a contender.

16. Former Capitals coach Todd Reirden could be on the radar in both Florida and Pittsburgh as an assistant. The Penguins' connection is obvious (he used to work there), while the Panthers may replace Mike Kitchin, who did not join them in the bubble. (This, of course, is pending any head coaching jobs he pursues.)

17. I'm not sure about his status in Arizona/Florida scenarios, but Washington assistant GM Ross Mahoney had three interviews with New Jersey before the Devils stayed with Tom Fitzgerald.

18. St. Louis and Alex Pietrangelo met this week as the grind begins on extension attempts in St. Louis. As I've said many times, I believe the captain wants to stay a Blue. But a couple of sources warned that it hasn't been easy for Pietrangelo to see extensions elsewhere along the lineup (Justin Faulk, Marco Scandella, Brayden Schenn) while his talks completely stalled. A lot of emotion here, and that makes talks more difficult.

19. The Carolina Hurricanes have interest in Frederik Andersen, but Toronto's made it clear it has no desire to make a move just for the sake of change. If it happens, it's for an upgrade, which means the Maple Leafs could wait to see how a loaded group of goaltending free agents shakes out.

20. The Pittsburgh/Toronto trade surprised teams because they thought the Maple Leafs' ask of a first-round pick and a prospect for Kasperii Kapanen was more of a "draft time" move than anything. I think some would have considered a first for him, but not yet. Penguins GM Jim Rutherford doesn't wait when he knows what he wants, so he pounced. With tighter budgets and a tight cap, both teams showed they didn't want to risk being dateless at the prom. Find your partners before there's no flexibility. The draft might not be until October, the playoffs are still going on. Normally, that's nap time, but this deal sent a message: time to do business.

21. Most annoyed by the trade: the teams still playing, not really able to bid on a) Kapanen or b) the Penguins' pick.

22. Unwilling to pay the price for Kapanen, teams were asking Toronto what other forwards are available. Based on what I'm hearing, I don't think William Nylander is going anywhere without a legit top-four right-handed defender coming in return. Filip Hallander was high on Toronto's list when the Maple Leafs picked 52nd overall in 2018, although Toronto went with Sean Durzi — who went to Los Angeles in the Jake Muzzin deal. So it wasn't a shocker that he's the prospect they wanted from Pittsburgh.

23. Phillip Danault's post-elimination comments did not go unnoticed. The Montreal centre, who finished behind surging Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Nick Suzuki on the depth chart, said, "It made my role a bit unclear moving forward." The Canadiens are being asked about their plans for him. Good player. Very confident. Unrestricted in a year. Also hearing Max Domi will consider an agent switch, possibly as soon as this week.

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24. Pittsburgh is testing the market on Jared McCann, a surprising healthy scratch in the Montreal series.

25. Adding to the goalie glut, Columbus — with a very deep prospect pool at the position — would consider moving one of its top two for some scoring. Elvis Merzlikins is expansion exempt, but Joonas Korpisalo and Matiss Kivlenieks aren't.

26. One of Minnesota's major priorities is to figure out what it will cost to extend Jonas Brodin, unrestricted after next season.

27. So, Miro Heiskanen or Seth Jones for the 2021 Norris?

28. It took the New York Islanders until Game 2 of their second-round series against Philadelphia to move out of first place in five-on-five goals allowed. They'd given up six in their first 10 games. That tied them with Winnipeg, who gave up six in four games.

29. Kevin Bieksa doesn't think I know anything about goalies (sadly, he's right) but spies have noticed adjustments in Semyon Varlamov's style from March to now. In particular, the way he held his glove was slowing his movements left-to-right and opening his five-hole. Smarter people than me say the difference is apparent. Results speak: 1.69 GAA, best among starters.

30. I don't believe there will be a bubble (or bubbles) next season. The players won't want it, and, quite frankly, neither will the owners. They'll want a path towards attendance and will wait as long as possible to try and see one. I do think one season of regionalized travel is possible, with teams playing back-to-backs in one city. Yes, that could mean a Canadian Division, for one year only.

31. This tweet about Wayne Gretzky and lacrosse was fun and interesting. It's also led to a rumour Gretzky will consider minority ownership in the National Lacrosse League. He's clearly got a passion for it.

Sportsnet.ca / How players pushed the game aside to take a stand against systemic racism

Chris Johnston | August 28, 2020, 7:31 PM

TORONTO — On another day, in another playoffs, the trials and travails of Luke Schenn and Braydon Coburn would make for fine copy.

The veteran Tampa Bay Lightning defencemen each left families behind to spend a month inside the Stanley Cup bubble getting scratched before finally having the chance to contribute in back-to-back wins over the Boston Bruins this week



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

However, when asked about that Friday afternoon, I heard a response unlike any I can recall in 15 years of covering the NHL on a daily basis.

"Thanks for the question," Coburn began. "I think today for the most part ... we kind of want to make sure that we keep the attention and the conversation around the issues and that's kind of where I think our heads are at right now. Thank you, though."

Let's mark this down as the kind of small, but significant change that shouldn't go unnoticed after NHL players decided to postpone two days worth of games to make a statement about systemic racism.

Or, how about this from Boston Bruins winger Brad Marchand?

"Sports, it's a luxury. It's a luxury to watch this game, to play this game," he said. "But when it becomes about people's safety and people's lives and people feeling comfortable to be in their own skin, it's much more important than that. I understand people want to watch the games and I understand people want to see this, but it's too bad."

History will eventually judge if this was a movement or a moment by the tangible steps taken in our sport — be it establishing grassroots programs, specific hiring targets for Black executives or even having NHL arenas opened as polling stations — but in real time we shouldn't overlook some of the finer shifts already taking place.

What happened inside the bubbles late Wednesday night and all through Thursday was organic. It was real. This was a group of predominantly white players engaging in conversations most had never been part of before and ultimately deciding to take a collective stand.

"Never in my NHL career did I think that we'd be with four other teams and you'd be having these discussions that we had," said Coburn. "I think it's very productive, it's been enlightening and it's something that a lot of guys are very proud of."

For the Lightning, Bruins, Philadelphia Flyers and New York Islanders, it started on Wednesday night.

Each of those teams played games at Scotiabank Arena that day — while the Milwaukee Bucks were refusing to take the court in the NBA's Disney World Bubble, and WNBA, MLS and MLB players started following their lead — which brought the discussion to Hotel X here in Toronto.

Those talks first played out among the individual teams. Then the Bruins and Lightning, in the midst of a second-round playoff series against each other, made plans to meet Thursday morning. Then a discussion started among players waiting outside the interview room set up on the second floor of the hotel.

"It kind of snowballed from there," said Bruins centre Patrice Bergeron.

Eventually there were veteran players from each of the four teams remaining inside the Eastern Conference bubble gathering together for honest dialogue. A similar scene was playing out in Edmonton, where members of the Vancouver Canucks reached out to Vegas Golden Knights forward Ryan Reaves, who is Black, to discuss the possibility of stepping back from Thursday's game.

Reaves had also been in touch with former teammate Kevin Shattenkirk of the Lightning, while members of the Flyers were speaking with Chris Stewart of the Hockey Diversity Alliance.

The spark had been lit.

"I was actually just outside our coaching room and you saw 30 or 40 players together," said Islanders coach Barry Trotz. "All from different teams, all who maybe the night before or hours leading up to that would have been on the ice going nose-to-nose gathering around and trying to come up with solutions and understanding and being very supportive."

"When you look back at that, those are powerful moments that you sometimes don't recognize because of the bigger picture that's not even evolving yet."

In the next few weeks, one of those teams will get a chance to play for the Stanley Cup.

But all of that was pushed aside for 48 hours designed to make a statement about the importance of human rights. The NHL is trailing behind other sports when it comes to both conversation and action around the Black Lives Matter movement, but there's been an awakening at a level never previously seen.

"I think for us, we're at the table now and I think that's really the important thing," said Coburn.

Sportsnet.ca / Postponement of NHL games an opportunity for overdue reflection, conversation

Chris Johnston | August 27, 2020, 6:46 PM

TORONTO — The arenas inside the bubbles will go dark tonight.

As they should.

The NHL found a way to safely conduct the Stanley Cup Playoffs in the middle of a pandemic, but it couldn't keep the most important issue of the day outside the walls of the secure zones it constructed in Toronto and Edmonton.

The Black Lives Matter movement has finally arrived in a predominantly white sport, and it's at least a day late and a dollar short. But it's here. The players have used their voices like those in bigger, more culturally diverse and profitable sports leagues and decided not to play the two games originally scheduled for Thursday (Islanders vs. Flyers, and Canucks vs. Golden Knights), plus two more scheduled Friday (Bruins vs. Lightning, and Stars vs. Avalanche).

The Hockey Diversity Alliance helped guide the decision-making process, first by formally asking the league to suspend all playoff games to make a statement about human rights taking precedence over sports, and then by leading a conference call with a meaningful number of players inside the bubble.

Evander Kane, Matt Dumba, Akim Aliu, Wayne Simmonds, Nazem Kadri and the HDA's other founding members have clearly articulated the biggest impediment to change: They can't be the only ones taking up these issues.

If you only ever have Black players and Filipino players and Lebanese players speaking up, they're not truly going to be heard at the volume needed to make a significant impact. To understand why, you need only walk into a dressing room at any level of the sport in basically every place it is played.

I fell in love with hockey while growing up in small-town Canada, surrounded almost exclusively by kids who looked exactly like me. And I consider it one of my life's true blessings that I've been able to turn that passion into a job that never feels like work.

But on Wednesday night, I didn't want to be at work.

The empty stands at Scotiabank Arena couldn't have felt any more hollow while Boston and Tampa played Game 3 of their second-round series. After watching history get made inside the NBA's Disney World bubble, where the Milwaukee Bucks set off a wave of player-initiated strikes in the WNBA, MLS, MLB and professional tennis by refusing to take the court to face the Orlando Magic, it simply didn't feel right to see the NHL play on.

"I don't think anything feels right, right now, to be honest," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said Thursday morning when asked to reflect on the decision to go ahead with the game.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

That's true, but continuing to put their heads down, withdraw further into the bubble and take the ice for games would have been downright wrong.

The hockey community has taken steps in the proper direction since George Floyd, a Black man, was killed by white police officers in Minnesota three months ago. We saw a huge number of NHL players put out statements condemning systemic racism. We saw entire teams wear "Black Lives Matter" T-shirts. We even saw a couple players take a knee during the national anthems at the outset of these playoffs.

But we also saw Dumba forced to kneel alone before the first game played at Rogers Place inside the bubble after delivering a heart-felt message about the need to fight racism.

"Hockey is a great game, but it could be a whole lot greater, and it starts with all of us," Dumba said that afternoon.

The truth is that we've trailed behind the collective conversations being held elsewhere in the sporting world in large part because we weren't forced to have them. Even after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police, plus a list of others so long it should make you cry. Not even after all of that and then the shooting last weekend in Kenosha, Wis., of Jacob Blake, who was left paralyzed after taking at least seven bullets in the back from officers.

It took other leagues stopping to compel us towards action.

The NHL is largely composed of white players from North America and Europe, and largely covered by media members with those same backgrounds.

People like me. People who have incorrectly thought that not being overtly racist in our behaviour was enough, which is the very definition of white privilege. People who can do more to affect change and stand beside our neighbours regardless of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

Do you want to know what postponing a couple hockey games in August accomplishes?

At minimum, it forces those of us inhabiting that world to step back, reflect and have some honest conversations about why it needed to happen. It's a step. The first of many more to come.

"The players are going to have to get involved, I'm going to have to get involved, everybody," said New York Islanders coach Barry Trotz. "And if you do that, that will effect change for our country. And it definitely needs it right now."

It's important to remember that none of us gets to choose the time we live in.

Sometimes a pandemic arrives without warning and turns the world upside down, which can be tumultuous and uncertain and scary even for those of us who enjoy the privilege of a comfortable life.

But we should not lose sight of the fact that with disruption comes opportunity — a chance to slow down, and reflect, and see some things we've been missing in plain view.

That's where we are right now.

I will be the first to put my hand up and say that there have been numerous times in the past when I could have been a stronger, more forceful ally to the Black Lives Matter movement. And I'm sure many others in the NHL community feel the same way, starting with the mistake made by playing games Wednesday night that thankfully won't be repeated here tonight.

That's action, and it means more than the words we've spoken before.

As the Chinese proverb goes, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.

Sportsnet.ca / Postponement of NHL games an opportunity for overdue reflection, conversation

Sportsnet.ca / Joel Ward: Player-led postponement a good opportunity for hockey to step up

Emily Sadler | August 28, 2020, 5:12 PM

Thursday's decision by NHL players to put games on hold was undoubtedly a significant moment for the sport.

"It was a big moment for hockey, a big moment for society," retired NHLer Joel Ward told Hockey Central on Friday when asked about his peers' announcement on Thursday to press pause on the playoffs and stand with the rest of the sporting world in solidarity against racial injustice.

As a founding member of the recently formed Hockey Diversity Alliance, Ward played a crucial role in the player-led postponement of Thursday's and Friday's games. Members of the HDA posted public calls to action directed at the NHL to join their pro sports peers across the NBA, WNBA, MLS, MLB, NFL and professional tennis to halt operations in a widespread demand for change.

"For us, obviously hockey's a different demographic from other sports and we thought it was a good opportunity for hockey to really step up," Ward said. "We wanted to show solidarity. This is an important issue going on in society. People are dying — Black and people of colour are dying on the regular. Everybody sees it, and nobody's doing anything about it. Everybody's just turning a blind eye on it."

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The NBA's Milwaukee Bucks initiated this historic wave of action from around the sports world on Wednesday when they announced they would be sitting out their game against the Orlando Magic in a call for justice after the police shooting of Jacob Blake.

Ward said he and other members of the HDA, including Evander Kane, Akim Aliu, Mathew Dumba, Chris Stewart, and Wayne Simmonds had "good discussions" with players in the Edmonton and Toronto bubbles as well as within the HDA about the key issues at hand leading up to the league's announcement.

Ward said he's proud of what the HDA has accomplished and of his NHL peers for "really understanding and just taking that moment to reflect."

"I think as guys started chatting more and more and realized the importance of what is going on in today's world, it just kind of unfolded, and sure enough, guys agreed to boycott the games and put it on pause for a minute, and you've seen what happened last night," he said.

Of course, what happened on Thursday (and continues Friday) will be a mere moment, not a movement, if the conversations halt when the games pick up again on Saturday.

"This is just a small little moment here," said Ward. "Obviously, you're not going to make drastic changes in the 24 to 48 hours, but I think just having conversations with guys, just educating guys to let them know that this is very serious."

The HDA, though not currently officially affiliated with the NHL, will continue to work with players to help educate them and move forward in their goal to eradicate racism in the game of hockey.

"We need allyship in the hockey community — our former players, current players, everybody in the hockey world to step up and say that, 'Hey, NHL, this is a big issue,'" said Ward.

"Hopefully we can kind of solidify a solid partnership," Ward said of working with the NHL. "We're just trying to help our game grow, and



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 31, 2020

that's what we're all about ... We're just here to make hockey a safe place for all of our kids growing up."