



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Comparing Canes' stacked D corps to the Metropolitan Division

Where does this year's blue line rank among the division?

By Andrew Schnittker

Today, we wrap up our three-part series comparing the Canes' three skater groups (we won't torture you with a goalie comparison that has an inevitable conclusion) with the overwhelming strength of this year's roster, the defensemen.

The trade for Dougie Hamilton, who tied for the league lead for goals among defensemen with 17 and has had four straight seasons of 40-plus points, and the signing of the steady Calvin de Haan gives Carolina an absolutely loaded D corps. The Hamilton trade did cost the team a player with a high ceiling in Noah Hanifin, but Hanifin's ceiling is what Hamilton is now.

The moves allow the Canes to construct a top four that consists of elite shutdown duo Jaccob Slavin and Brett Pesce, along with Hamilton and de Haan. Rod Brind'Amour can either keep Slavin and Pesce together and pair up the new guys, or shake things up and pair Slavin with Hamilton and de Haan with Pesce. Either way, that's a formidable quartet.

That pushes Justin Faulk, who had an abysmal season defensively and down year offensively, to the third pairing. Faulk's down year, however, still saw him pot eight goals and 31 points. Getting those third pairing matchups should make things easier on him in his own zone, and also give him better matchups to exploit with the puck on his stick.

Solid, quiet (in a good way) Trevor van Riemsdyk rounds out the top six, and leaves Haydn Fleury, Trevor Carrick and Roland McKeown vying to be the extra blueliner.

Even if the team trades Faulk for a forward before camp or early in the season, that's a phenomenal d corps. With him, it's stacked, and one of the best in the league. Is it the best in the Metropolitan Division? Let's find out.

Washington Capitals

John Carlson leads the way here as one of the best defensemen in the league, coming off a career-best season (and being paid handsomely for it) with 15 goals and 68 points. He'll likely pair with trade-deadline acquisition Michal Kempny, who combined with him to form a solid due during last year's playoff run.

Dmitry Orlov also got a nice raise after a 31-point season, and should pair with puck mover Matt Niskanen on the second pair. Brooks Orpik was traded to the Avalanche with Philipp Grubauer, bought out and then brought back at a much cheaper price (nice piece of work there, Mr. MacLellan). He should get one spot on the third pairing, with youngsters Madison Bowey and Christian Djoos fighting it out to join him.

The Capitals give the Canes a decent run for their money here. That's a good top four, and Carlson would probably be the Canes' best d-man (it's close with Hamilton). However, the Canes' top group is still a step above, and the third pairing of Faulk and van Riemsdyk pushes them over the top.

Edge: Carolina

Pittsburgh Penguins

Kris Letang bounced back from an injury-filled season to give the Pens a 51-point season. He leads the way, followed by Justin Schultz, who missed some time but still put up 27 points in 63 games, and Olli Maatta, coming off a 29-point campaign. Former Hurricanes draftee Brian Dumoulin has been a steady hand in Pittsburgh.

For some unfathomable reason, Jim Rutherford decided to give Jack Johnson a five-year contract with an AAV of \$3.25 million. Congrats on finally getting him signed? Yeah, I've got nothing on that one. Trade acquisition Jamie Oleksiak should snag a spot as well, with Chad Ruhwedel, Stefan Elliott and Chris Summers serving as depth options.

Once you get past Letang here, the pendulum swings pretty quickly in Carolina's favor.

Edge: Carolina

Philadelphia Flyers

We continue the theme of each team having at least one standout blueliner, with Shayne Gostisbehere coming off a 65-point season. 2015 seventh-overall pick Ivan Provorov is coming into his own, with 17 goals (tied with Hamilton for the league lead), 41 points and a plus-17 rating in year two.

After that is where things get interesting. The Flyers' roster actually only lists five defensemen, with major penalty machine Radko Gudas, albatross Andrew MacDonald and free agent signing Christian Folin. Prospects Robert Hagg, Samuel Morin and Travis Sanheim will get a crack at the roster, with at least one of them pretty much a lock to make it.

It's a pretty steep drop from Gostisbehere and Provorov here. That duo can compete with whatever the Canes' top pairing is, but after that it's a landslide.

Edge: Carolina

Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets have one of the best d pairings in the league in Seth Jones and Zach Werenski (another top-10 pick from that 2015 class). Markus Nutivaara will look to continue building on a decent sophomore season, and David Savard is a solid, if unspectacular, option.



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Ryan Murray has been an injury-prone disappointment since being drafted second overall in 2012, but maybe he still has some potential. Dean Kukan, Scott Harrington and Tommy Crosswill vie for the sixth spot.

Murray and Jones are probably better than the Canes' top pair (though that's debatable if it's Slavin and Hamilton), but like the Flyers before them, the Canes' bottom four is leaps and bounds better.

Edge: Carolina

New Jersey Devils

The Sami Vatanen-Adam Henrique trade was one of those rare deals that works out well for both sides, as Vatanen had 28 points in 57 games with New Jersey after the swap, and should do even better with a full season and training camp with the Devils. Will Butcher was a revelation as a rookie, with his 44 points ranking fourth on the Devils' roster.

Captain Andy Greene has some miles on him, and while he's still a steady leader, is not what he used to be. Damon Severson had another solid year, and youngster Mirco Mueller still has some potential. It'll be between Mueller, Ben Lovejoy and Brian Strait for the last two spots.

The Canes are head and shoulders above the Devils here. Give me Hamilton and Slavin over Vatanen and Butcher, and the rest of Carolina's dmen over New Jersey's for that matter, too.

Edge: Carolina

New York Islanders

Nick Leddy ranks as one of the better trade acquisitions Garth Snow made on the Isle, and leads the way here offensively coming off a 42-point season, although he is coming off an ugly -42 rating. Ryan Pulock has a cannon from the blue line, and put up 10 goals and 32 points last season.

Johnny Boychuk missed 24 games last season, but still put up 18 points. Thomas Hickey, Adam Pelech and Scott Mayfield round out the group.

The Islanders were one of the worst defensive teams in the league last year, and losing de Haan to the Hurricanes won't help.

Edge: Carolina

New York Rangers

Remember when the Rangers had one of the best blue lines in the league? It's definitely getting more difficult. The Ryan McDonagh trade leaves this group very thin. Kevin Shattenkirk's first season in New York was a disappointment and he missed almost half the season, but he's still the best the Blueshirts have to offer.

Brady Skjei will look to rebound from a bit of a sophomore slump, as he fell from 39 points to 21 and a plus-11 rating to minus-27. Marc Staal is over the hill and at the bottom of the other side of it. Youngsters Neal Pionk, Frederik Claesson, Tony DeAngelo and John Gilmour will fight for spots.

I shouldn't have to tell you the Canes' defense is better than this.

Edge: Carolina

Final Verdict: The Canes have the best blue line in the division, and having gone through all the teams, that's a fairly easy statement to make. There's one or two teams with a defenseman who would be the Canes' best, but the addition of a top-15 guy in Hamilton makes that a tougher claim to make.

A handful of the teams can match or better the Canes' top pair, and a couple can compete with the top four, but it's the third pairing of van Riemsdyk, and, in particular, Faulk, that puts Carolina over the edge in every case. This d corps isn't just the best in the Metro, it's right up there with the Nashville Predators for the best in the league.



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The Hockey News

NHL Rookie Radar: Team-by-team Calder Trophy candidates and freshman hopefuls for 2018-19

By: Sam McCaig

A team-by-team peek at the Calder Trophy candidates and rookie hopefuls for the 2018-19 NHL season.

There's a plethora of Calder Trophy contenders and first-year arrivals entering the 2018-19 NHL season. Here's a team-by-team look at this year's rookie crop:

Anaheim Ducks

Sam Steel is gunning for a job at center, especially with Ryan Kesler's status for 2018-19 up in the air, and the 30th overall draft pick in 2016 could score his way into the Calder Trophy conversation. Forwards Max Jones (24th overall in 2016) and Troy Terry (148th overall in 2015) are also knocking on the door. Jacob Larsson (27th overall in 2015) endured an injury-plagued campaign last season, but should be ready for work on the Ducks' third defense pairing.

Arizona Coyotes

Center Dylan Strome isn't rookie-eligible after playing seven and 21 NHL games in the past two seasons, but the third overall pick in 2015 is the Coyotes' most promising up-and-comer. Right winger Nick Merkley (30th overall in 2015) isn't real big, but he is real skilled and should be able to crack the roster. Kyle Capobianco, 21, and former KHLer Ilya Lyubushkin, 24, are in the mix for depth spots on the blueline.

Boston Bruins

The Bruins employed five rookies on a regular basis last season, and that doesn't include promising winger Anders Bjork, who was limited to 30 games due to injuries and no longer qualifies as an NHL rookie. Boston won't have that kind of quantity this season, but they have quality in Calder candidate Ryan Donato (56th overall in 2014). Donato put up nine points in 12 games when he jumped to the NHL late last season after leaving Harvard, and has a chance at top-six ice time this year.

Buffalo Sabres

There's help on the way. The Sabres' bid for respectability will be aided by not one, but two bona fide Calder contenders. Rasmus Dahlin, the No. 1 draft pick last June, arrives as a do-it-all defenseman with superstar potential. The NHL isn't an easy league for 18-year-old blueliners, but all signs point to Dahlin bucking the trend and making an immediate impact. He's joined by Casey Mittelstadt (eighth overall in 2017), who had five points in a six-game NHL debut last spring and enters training camp as the projected second-line center. Fleet-footed Brendan Guhle (51st overall in 2015) played 18 NHL games last year and should find work on the blueline. The best-case scenario? Buffalo's best rookie crop ever.

Calgary Flames

The Flames don't have any sure-thing freshmen,

but Rasmus Andersson (53rd overall in 2015) looks good for depth work on the blueline. Forwards Andrew Mangiapane, Morgan Klimchuk and Spencer Foo have a chance at a bottom-six spot.

Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes are young up front, and they're going to get even younger with full-time jobs anticipated for Andrei Svechnikov (second overall in 2018), Martin Necas (12th overall in 2017), Valentin Zykov (37th overall by Los Angeles in 2013) and perhaps Warren Foegele (67th overall in 2014). Svechnikov, Necas and maybe even Zykov could score their way into the Calder race.

Chicago Blackhawks

Chicago needs an infusion of young talent, and this season it's coming in the form of skilled-but-small left winger Dylan Sikura (178th overall in 2014). He had a cup of coffee in the NHL at the end of last season, along with Blake Hillman (173rd overall in 2016), who has a chance for a depth role on defense. Neither player figures to rise into Calder contention.

Colorado Avalanche

Skilled center Vladislav Kamenev, obtained in the Matt Duchene trade, and physical left winger A.J. Greer (39th overall in 2015) are both on track for NHL jobs. Kamenev could end up as the Avs' second-line center — and a Calder candidate — when all is said and done. Conor Timmins (32nd overall in 2017) might break in on the blueline. If he does, he'll add mobility and an offensive bent to Colorado's defense corps.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Already stocked with young talent, the Blue Jackets might have to make room for a couple more kids. Gabriel Carlsson (29th overall in 2015) is in line as a third-pairing defender, while speedy Vitaly Abramov (65th overall in 2016) could force his way into the lineup after ripping up the QMJHL.

Dallas Stars

There's only one rookie on the radar in Dallas, but he's a good one. Miro Heiskanen (third overall in 2017) is expected to seize a top-four job on the blueline and don't be surprised if he's a Calder candidate.

Detroit Red Wings

It looks rough for the Red Wings, but at least there's promise in a flock of first-year hopefuls. Detroit got a steal at the 2018 NHL draft when winger Filip Zadina fell to sixth overall, and the teen sniper might make some noise in the Calder race. He could be joined up front by forwards Evgeny Svechikov (19th overall in 2015) and Michael Rasmussen (ninth overall in 2017), while Dennis Cholowski (20th overall in 2016), Joe Hicketts (free-agent



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signing in 2014) and Filip Hronek (53rd overall in 2016) could see some time on the blueline.

Edmonton Oilers

Kailer Yamamoto (22nd overall in 2017) had some chemistry with Connor McDavid in a nine-game NHL audition at the start of last season. If he makes the team and sees time with McDavid in 2018-19, the points will come and perhaps some Calder hype, too. Evan Bouchard (10th overall in 2018) has the mobility and offensive skill set to play in the NHL, but the Oilers will be wary of rushing an 18-year-old defenseman. Ethan Bear (124th overall in 2015) is a few years older and fared well in an 18-game look last season, so he might be a better bet to stick around.

Florida Panthers

Henrik Borgstrom (23rd overall in 2016) and Owen Tippett (10th overall in 2017) should make the roster, and perhaps Maxim Mamin (175th overall in 2016) as well, with Borgstrom the best bet to make a Calder push. Bogdan Kiselevich, 28, is too old to be considered a rookie, but the KHL veteran brings defensive acumen to the blueline.

Los Angeles Kings

Center Gabe Vilardi (11th overall in 2017) and defenseman Kale Clague (51st overall in 2016) are the most likely rookies to make the team, but neither player is guaranteed a spot.

Minnesota Wild

Left winger Jordan Greenway (50th overall in 2015) turned pro after his Boston University season ended last year, and played a handful of games — plus all five playoff contests — for the Wild. He's 6-foot-6 and 226 pounds and should bump his way into the middle-six. Luke Kunin (15th overall in 2016) is an all-around center coming back from ACL surgery and has a chance to stick. Nick Seeler (131st overall in 2011) played 22 games on the blueline and didn't back down from anybody.

Montreal Canadiens

Left winger Nikita Scherbak (26th overall in 2014) and defenseman Noah Juulsen (26th overall in 2015) acquitted themselves well when they were called up down the stretch last season and should remain with the team for the long haul in 2018-19. Goalie Charlie Lindgren is bidding his time behind Carey Price and Antti Niemi.

Nashville Predators

The Predators are loaded, but who couldn't use a little more scoring pop from the wing? That's what Eeli Tolvanen (30th overall in 2017) brings to the table, and he should find a spot on Nashville's deep roster.

New Jersey Devils

The Devils ran with a handful of rookies last season, led by 2017 No. 1 pick Nico Hischier and quarterback defenseman Will Butcher. The new faces this season won't be as plentiful — or as talented — as last year, but one or two of John Quenneville (30th overall in 2014), Michael McLeod (12th overall in 2016) and Joey Anderson (73rd overall in 2016) could earn a spot up front.

New York Islanders

Unfortunately for the Islanders, there's no John Tavares Jr. joining the team this season. Defenseman Devon

Toews (108th overall in 2014), no relation to Chicago's Jonathan, might stick as a third-pairing defender. Up front, scoring winger Kieffer Bellows (19th overall in 2016), son of retired NHLer Brian, has a chance, too, but he might need another year of seasoning.

New York Rangers

It's all about the rebuild for the Rangers and there's no shortage of rookie options. A couple of 2017 first-round picks, Lias Andersson (seventh overall) and Filip Chytil (21st overall), look good to claim jobs at center. Both players got into some early games last year as 18-year-olds, and they represent hope for New York's future forward corps. Give Andersson a slight edge, both in his ability to make the team as well as contend for the Calder. Neal Pionk forfeited his rookie status playing 28 NHL games last season, but he fared so well that he skates into training camp as one of the team's top-four defenseman. Alexandar Georgiev (free-agent signing in 2017) had a 10-game audition in net and appears ready to back up Henrik Lundqvist.

Ottawa Senators

The reeling Senators need someone to send in the cavalry, but a cavalcade of rookies will have to do for now. The one that everyone is watching is Brady Tkachuk (fourth overall in 2018), a power winger in the grand Tkachuk tradition. Do the Sens want to expose a teenager to the trials and tribulations that likely lie ahead this season? Well, they signed him to an entry-level deal, thereby ending his NCAA career, so the signs point to another Tkachuk in the big leagues. Centers Colin White (21st overall in 2015) and Logan Brown (11th overall in 2016) should find full-time work up front, while wingers Drake Batherson (121st overall in 2017) and Alex Formenton (47th overall in 2017) also have a shot.

Philadelphia Flyers

No sure things, but Philippe Myers (free-agent signing in 2015) and Samuel Morin (11th overall in 2013) will battle for spots on the blueline. Morgan Frost (27th overall in 2017) is a shifty center who's on the cusp. But the youngster who's most in the spotlight in Philadelphia is goalie-of-the-future Carter Hart (48th overall in 2016). Expect some spot starts this season, and then full-time graduation to the NHL next year.

Pittsburgh Penguins

The Penguins have regularly cycled in young players in a supporting role during their decade of Stanley Cup contention, and that will continue this season. Zach Aston-Reese (free-agent signee in 2017) played 16 games last year, plus nine more in the playoffs, and the gritty winger should have a job locked up. Daniel Sprong (46th overall in 2015) gives Pittsburgh another offensive weapon if he's able to stick for good. Teddy Blueger (52nd overall in 2012) is another AHL-to-NHL option.

St. Louis Blues

The Blues bolstered their forward group with a slew of veteran free agents this summer, but St. Louis might want to make room for some rookies up front, too. Two-way center Robert Thomas (20th overall in 2017) is the headliner and has Calder potential, while Jordan Kyrou (35th overall in 2016) and Klim Kostin (31st overall in 2017) could accelerate their NHL ascension with a strong showing in camp. Jordan



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Schmaltz (25th overall in 2012) is hoping to break into a stacked blueline.

San Jose Sharks

Full-grown fish only, please, everything else gets thrown back. The veteran Sharks aren't expecting an influx of rookies, with 24-year-old free-agent signing Antti Suomela, who led the Finnish League in scoring last season, the lone legitimate candidate. He's the early favorite to center San Jose's fourth line.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Good luck finding work with the top-to-bottom loaded Lightning, kids. Anthony Cirelli (72nd overall in 2015) ended up as Tampa Bay's third-line center down the stretch and in the playoffs, but he's still considered a rookie. Mitchell Stephens (33rd overall in 2015) will have to leapfrog some veterans to stick around.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Andreas Johnsson (202nd overall in 2015) got a late-season call-up and then they couldn't take him out of the lineup, including in the playoffs. And when Toronto's post-season ended, Johnsson returned to the AHL and led the Toronto Marlies to the Calder Cup, claiming playoff MVP honors in the process. He's got speed and skill and could be a Calder dark horse. Free-agent signee Par Lindholm, 27, is too old for official NHL rookie status, but he comes over from Sweden with designs on the fourth-line center job. Another import, 25-year-old Russian defenseman Igor Ozhiganov, is trying to make the jump from the KHL.

Vancouver Canucks

Brock Boeser's rookie breakout was last year, and now Vancouver is hoping that it is Elias Pettersson's turn. The fifth overall pick in 2017 dominated the Swedish League last season, leading the loop in scoring and winning MVP honors in both the regular season and playoffs. He'll get every chance to center a scoring line, and enters the 2018-19 NHL season as one of the Calder favorites. Better yet for the

Canucks, Pettersson isn't the only kid expected to make an impact in 2018-19. The blueline will get a lot more mobile if Olli Juolevi (fifth overall in 2016) and perhaps even 2018 first-rounder Quinn Hughes (seventh overall) make the grade. Jonathan Dahlen, obtained from Ottawa at the 2017 trade deadline in the Alex Burrows deal, and Adam Gaudette (149th overall in 2017) are also expected to contend for spots up front.

Vegas Golden Knights

The NHL's newest franchise might not have any new young faces. It makes sense. When you make it to the Stanley Cup final as an expansion team, you probably don't want to change things up too much. Cody Glass, the Golden Knights' first-ever draft pick (sixth overall in 2017), has a chance to earn a job at center, but Vegas isn't going to rush him so he'll have to really shine in camp.

Washington Capitals

Teams that win the Cup don't usually ice too many rookies the following season, so don't look for a rookie wave in Washington. The one to watch is goalie-of-the-future Ilya Samsonov (22nd overall in 2015), although he's expected to marinate in the AHL in his first North American campaign. Travis Boyd (177th overall in 2011) and Shane Gersich (134th overall in 2014) are depth options at center.

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets have been churning out rookie stars in recent years, but don't expect another Patrik Laine, Kyle Connor or Nikolaj Ehlers to come down the pipe this season. Any freshmen who make it onto Winnipeg's stacked roster will arrive as depth support. Sami Niku (198th overall in 2015) and Tucker Poolman (127th overall in 2013) are among a group of hopefuls for the No. 6-7 spots on the blueline, while grinding Brendan Lemieux and offensively inclined Mason Appleton are in the mix for fourth-line duty. Eric Comrie (59th overall in 2013) could be called upon to back up starting goalie Connor Hellebuyck.



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PHT Power Rankings: 10 NHL people that need to be better in 2018-19

By Adam Gretz

It is the summer and with no games being played at the moment it is awfully difficult to rank the NHL's 31 teams on a weekly basis. So the PHT Power Rankings will spend the next month taking a look back at some of the best (and worst) developments in the NHL, both past and present. Best trades. Worst trades. Best all-time teams. Any other random things we feel like ranking. This week we look at 10 people around the NHL that need to have a better season in 2018-19.

A lot of general managers, coaches, and players had great performances during the 2017-18 season to help their teams.

Many of them were expected, some of them were not.

This week's power rankings are not about them.

This week we look at 10 people around the NHL that, for one reason or another, really need to have a better performance during the 2018-19 season.

To the rankings!

1. Eugene Melnyk, Ottawa Senators — It is almost remarkable the roller coaster of emotions Ottawa Senators fans have been on over the past two years, and sadly, just how hopeless the entire operation feels entering the 2018-19 season.

After coming out of nowhere to go on an improbable run to the Eastern Conference Final in 2017 — where they were in double overtime of Game 7, one shot away from the Stanley Cup Final — the entire organization completely imploded on itself over the year that followed.

On the eve of what should have been the biggest day of celebration for the team during the 2017-18 season — their outdoor game against the Montreal Canadiens — team owner Eugene Melnyk threw the relocation threat out there, while also adding "I'm not going to blow a lifetime of working hard to support a hockey team."

Erik Karlsson, the team's best player, has been on the verge of being traded for a year now while Melnyk reportedly wanted to tie Bobby Ryan's contract to the trade, a decision that would no doubt lessen the return for the best player the franchise has ever seen all in the name of saving the owner some money.

The locker room was ripped apart after the fiancée of former forward Mike Hoffman was accused of harassing the Karlssons following the death of their son, resulting in Hoffman, one of their two best forwards, being traded for some magic beans.

Assistant general manager Randy Lee resigned after he was charged with two counts of harassment at the scouting combine in Buffalo.

Even if Melnyk himself wasn't responsible for all of this individually, it is a total dysfunctional mess of a franchise from the top on down (with an emphasis on the "top" part) and the owner has to take responsibility for that. All of it has resulted in Melnyk becoming the most loathed owner in any of the NHL's 31 markets with fans consistently taking to social media to urge him to sell the team. What could he do to make things better for Senators fans in 2018-19? Selling the team might be a good start, but that doesn't seem to be something that is in the cards. So maybe he could just ... you know ... try to be better in some small way? Anything, really. Maybe don't threaten to move the team the night before the biggest game of the season? Start small, build up from that.

2. Todd McLellan, Edmonton Oilers — This spot could easily be filled McLellan or general manager Peter Chiarelli, but in fairness to Chiarelli, he has already showed signs that he might be doing better this year. For example, he hasn't traded a core player in a lopsided one-for-one, he resisted the urge to sell defenseman Oscar Klefbom at his lowest value, he held on to the No. 10 overall pick and hopefully strengthened the defense long-term, and he didn't sign any ridiculous contracts in free agency. Progress is progress.

That leaves McLellan who will no doubt be on the hot seat if things don't improve dramatically in Edmonton this season, because you don't get the luxury of missing the playoffs very often when you have the best player in hockey on your roster.

The most shocking development in Edmonton last season was probably the way the special teams completely sunk the team, finishing 31st on the power play and 26th on the penalty kill. McLellan assumed more responsibility over the PK in the second half of the season (where it did improve ... a little) and he has an entirely new set of assistants around him, including former Swift Current Broncos coach Emanuel Viveiros, who comes with a reputation for being a strong offensive coach, and defensive specialist Trent Yawney. There won't be any excuses for McLellan this season if things go south again.

3. Marc Bergevin, Montreal Canadiens — Earlier this offseason I took an in-depth look at how Bergevin's tenure has slowly but surely made the Canadiens franchise worse. Nothing has really changed since then. If anything, things seem to be on the verge of getting worse as the Max Pacioretty drama continues to rage on with a trade seemingly being a matter of when, and not if. Once it gets



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completed that means the Canadiens will have wasted the prime years of one of the league's best goal scorers that has been playing for them on a laughably cheap, team friendly, bargain contract.

All Bergevin has done over the past few years is saddle the team with bad contracts, a suddenly aging core, and most recently gambled that Max Domi can be better than Alex Galchenyuk. He has fumbled some of his biggest trades and has one more massive one to make at some point over the next few months (Pacioretty). If he messes that one up it will set the Canadiens franchise back even further than it's already been set back under his watch.

Good luck, everybody!

4. Scott Darling, Carolina Hurricanes — In an effort to solve their long-standing issues in net the Hurricanes traded for Darling before the 2017-18 season and committed to him with a four-year, \$16.6 million contract to be their starting goalie. Year one of the deal was a disaster as Darling, one of the league's best backups in Chicago over the previous three years, turned in one of the least productive performances from a starter in recent NHL history. Despite that performance, the Hurricanes seemingly doubled down on their commitment to Darling as their starter by letting Cam Ward leave in free agency and only signing Petr Mrazek (coming off a down year of his own in Detroit and Philadelphia) to a one-year contract to push him.

For the time being it seems to be Darling's net and if the Hurricanes are going to return to the playoffs for the first time since the 2008-09 season he is going to have to be significantly better than he was last season. The Hurricanes have definitely given him some help by assembling what should one of the league's best defenses around him (they have been one of the best shot suppression teams in the league in recent years) and adding to it this summer with the acquisitions of Dougie Hamilton and Calvin de Haan.

5. Brandon Saad, Chicago Blackhawks — The Blackhawks run of consecutive playoff appearances came to a sudden end this past season with one of the worst records in the NHL. It was a staggering fall for a team that is not that far removed from winning three Stanley Cups in six years, and just one year earlier finished with the third best record in the league and the best record in the Western Conference.

There were a lot of things that went wrong for the Blackhawks in 2017-18, from the injury to starting goalie Corey Crawford, to the fact that Jonathan Toews is now a \$10 million per year second-line center (Sorry folks, it is true — at least based on his production).

One of the other big issues: General manager Stan Bowman's quest to put the championship band back together backfired in a massive way. Along with re-acquiring Patrick Sharp, the Blackhawks' big move was trading Artemi Panarin to the Columbus Blue Jackets in exchange for Saad, just two years after the Blackhawks traded him away in a salary cap-clearing move. The latest trade was a disaster for the Blackhawks. Panarin not only showed that he could carry a line on his own without having Patrick Kane on the other side of the ice, but Saad struggled through the worst season of his career and was a colossal disappointment in his second stint with the Blackhawks. He managed just 17 goals

and 35 points in 82 games, and somehow recorded just a single point in 174 minutes of power play time. It was, for lack of a better word, bad.

Given the Blackhawks' lack of scoring depth and the fact their No. 1 center is now a 50-point player they are going to need a lot more from Saad in 2018-19 if they have any hope of returning to the playoffs in a suddenly competitive Central Division. The good news is that his underlying numbers (dominant possession numbers, a low shooting percentage for himself) point to a player that should be capable of bouncing back. Now he just has to do it.

6. Kris Letang, Pittsburgh Penguins — When Letang is on his game and at his best he is one of the most impactful defenders in the league. We saw him at his best during the 2015-16 season when he was a dominant force on the Penguins' blue line on their run to winning the Stanley Cup, playing more than 28 minutes per night throughout the playoffs and scoring the Stanley Cup clinching goal, capping off a brilliant shift where he was a one-man wrecking crew.

Unfortunately for Letang another significant injury during the following year robbed him of half of the season (including the entire postseason, where the Penguins would win another Stanley Cup) and didn't allow him to get back on the ice until the start of the 2017-18 season. He was never quite the same player and struggled through one of the most inconsistent seasons of his career, highlighted by flashes of the dominance we've come to know from Letang, and stretches of play where he just didn't seem to be himself. Harsh as it is to say, if he was one of the biggest reasons they won the Stanley Cup in 2016 (and he was), his performance was perhaps one of the biggest reasons they didn't win it in 2018. Despite speculation that the Penguins could consider moving him in the offseason, he remains in Pittsburgh where the team is banking on his performance from this past season being a fluke that he can bounce back from. It is a smart bet to make because he is better than he showed this past season. If he bounces back the Penguins will once again be a force in the Eastern Conference and one of the league's top Stanley Cup contenders.

7. Dale Tallon, Florida Panthers — A lot of general managers around the NHL were responsible for the immediate success of the first-year Vegas Golden Knights. None of them played a bigger role than Dale Tallon of the Florida Panthers when he sent Reilly Smith to Vegas in exchange for a draft pick and then allowing the Golden Knights to take Jonathan Marchessault in the expansion draft, while protecting the likes of Alex Petrovic and Mark Pysyk on defense (the Panthers opted to protect four forwards and four defenders instead of five forwards and three defenders).

It was a head-scratching move at the time it was made (Marchessault was the team's top offensive player the year before, and while Smith had a down year and carried a big contract, he was still a productive player with a decent track record in the NHL) and became even worse when Marchessault and Smith helped lead Vegas to the Stanley Cup Final.

The Panthers ended up missing the playoffs by a single point following a late-season surge up the standings. Even with the addition of Evgenii Dadonov (a very good move) that one



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series of roster transactions probably kept the Panthers out of a playoff spot. This offseason the Panthers acquired Mike Hoffman after his ugly exit from Ottawa and signed Troy Brouwer to fill a bottom-six role. Will those be enough to get the Panthers back in the playoffs?

8. The Travis Hamonic–T.J. Brodie pairing — Okay maybe this is cheating to include two players in here as one entry, but hear me out on this.

On paper the Calgary Flames were supposed to have one of the best top-four defensive pairings in the NHL last season after adding Hamonic to a group that already included the perpetually underrated Mark Giordano, Brodie, and young star Dougie Hamilton.

It did not go as planned, especially when it came to the second pairing of Hamonic and Brodie, a duo that badly struggled during the season. They spent more than 1,000 minutes of 5-on-5 ice-time together where the Flames were outscored by seven goals (33-40) and controlled just a little more than 50 percent of the total shot attempts. When neither player was on the ice the Flames were a 55 percent shot attempt team were only outscored by a pair of goals (90-92).

Now Hamilton is gone (traded as part of a package for Noah Hanifan), Giordano is a year older, and the Flames are going to need these two to be significantly better to make up for all of that.

(H/T Todd Cordell and Natural Stat Trick for those numbers)

9. Brian Elliott, Philadelphia Flyers — With Claude Giroux back to being an elite scorer, an impressive young core of forwards and defenders starting to make their presence felt in the NHL, and the return of James van Riemsdyk, one of the league's top goal scoring wingers, the Philadelphia Flyers are now back to the point where their roster looks really, really impressive with one very large exception.

Stop me if you have heard this before, but ... goaltending might be the only thing that holds the Flyers back from taking another big step this season.

Elliott's career has been as unpredictable as any other goalie in the league (which is really saying something at a position that is largely defined by its unpredictability) as he has gone from leading the league in save percentage at times, to being benched and traded away. He was okay at times last season, and he is ideally just a placeholder until Carter Hart is ready to take over the job, but the Flyers have a chance to be something more than the mediocre team they have been for the past six years if they can get something that resembles even average goaltending.

10. Tuukka Rask, Boston Bruins — As an outsider, watching the city of Boston collectively eat itself alive over the performance of Tuukka Rask is a remarkably entertaining thing to watch. As an observer of the game of hockey it is also a little maddening. Honestly I wasn't even sure if I should include Rask on this ranking because he's still a pretty darn good goalie that a great team can win with.

He didn't even have a bad season a year ago.

Is he as good as he was five or six years ago? Probably not, and his personal numbers illustrate that. He is, however, still good. Really good.

But every time he doesn't single handedly win the Bruins a big game the sky falls in around him and a city of spoiled rotten sports fans and media that think it is their god-given right to win every championship, in every sport, every year lose their minds and need to find a scapegoat. Lately, that scapegoat for the Bruins is almost always Tuukka Rask. For that reason alone Rask could use a better season, just to save himself from that madness and to salvage his reputation in Boston. It is unfair, but so are sports.

Now there is even offseason talk that the addition of Jaroslav Halak could challenge Rask for playing time, or perhaps even push Rask out of town.

Which is just ... you know what? Maybe Boston deserves that.



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Who's under the most pressure for all 31 NHL teams?

By Emily Kaplan

Job pressure in hockey can come in all forms. Some is dire: Get results or you're out of work. Some is a bit more nuanced: It would be great if you preformed at or above expectations, and you can rest a little easier at night, but your job isn't necessarily on the line.

As opening night of the 2018-19 season approaches, ESPN identified the figure -- whether it be player, GM, coach or group of players -- under the most pressure for the 2018-19 season:

Anaheim Ducks

The big three

Forgive us if you've heard this before, but the big three (Ryan Getzlaf, Ryan Kesler and Corey Perry) are aging and the window for this team to win is closing. For Kesler and his nagging hip injury, the situation is especially dire. He missed half of last season and his availability for the upcoming season is murky.

Arizona Coyotes

The new guys

The Coyotes were trending in the right direction by the end of last season; then for the second straight summer, they added veteran help: Alex Galchenyuk, Michael Grabner and Vinnie Hinostroza combined for 53 goals last season. Both Galchenyuk and Hinostroza want to prove to the teams that drafted them that they were wrong to let them go; Grabner likely has a sour taste after struggling with the Devils after last season's trade deadline.

Boston Bruins

Left wing Anders Bjork

The 22-year-old Notre Dame product is one of the Bruins' top young players. But after a February shoulder surgery cut his season short, the winger watched as other youngsters like Jake Debrusk, Ryan Donato and Danton Heinen basked in the spotlight. Bjork is looking to lock in a full-time role, potentially even in the top six.

Buffalo Sabres

Head coach Phil Housley

It's hard to fault Housley for posting a .378 winning percentage in his rookie season as coach. The roster he inherited was sub-par, at best. But Buffalo made big moves this summer: Subtracting Ryan O'Reilly, but adding much-needed veteran depth plus No. 1 overall pick Rasmus Dahlin, a generational talent on D. Many players have told me recently that they expect Buffalo to be a surprise team

this season. If the Sabres don't improve, ownership may get antsy.

Calgary Flames

Head coach Bill Peters

With the talent on the roster, there's no reason the Flames shouldn't be able to lock up a playoff spot in the wide-open Pacific Division. Management didn't feel Glen Gulutzan was the right man for the job -- likely swayed by a late-season collapse -- but the jury might be out on Peters, too. He was hamstrung by bad goaltending in Carolina, but the Canes never seemed to live up to their potential.

Carolina Hurricanes

Goaltender Scott Darling

Without Cam Ward on the roster for the first time in 13 years, this is firmly Darling's team now. Then again, it was supposed to be Darling's team last season, too. If the 29-year-old struggles yet again, Darling -- the former Chicago backup who was given a four-year, \$16.6 million deal last summer -- may be among the bigger free-agent busts in recent memory.

Chicago Blackhawks

Head coach Joel Quenneville

Everything spiraled out of control for the Blackhawks after Corey Crawford was lost for the season. That gave Quenneville, the league's longest-tenured coach, a pass after Chicago missed the playoffs for the first time in a decade. Quenneville will no longer get a Crawford out, even if the goaltender isn't ready to start the season. Blackhawks president John McDonough wants results. If the Hawks struggle early, Quenneville could be out by Christmas.

Colorado Avalanche

Goaltender Semyon Varlamov

Varlamov's five-year, \$29 million contract ends after this season, but his status as the Avalanche's top goaltender might expire before that. GM Joe Sakic pulled off a big trade at the draft to land the coveted Capitals backup, Philipp Grubauer. Sakic has hinted at a platoon situation, but hey, if Grubauer is significantly better (or healthier) he may well get the starting job to himself.

Columbus Blue Jackets

GM Jarmo Kekalainen

Kekalainen is a silent assassin. Heck, he orchestrated two trades involving Brandon Saad without as much as a warning



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shot. The stakes are higher now, as a tenuous contract situation with Artemi Panarin brews. And a long-term decision must be made on goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky as he enters the final year of his contract. For a team on the cusp of contending, Kekalainen must once again maneuver unemotionally.

Dallas Stars

Center Jason Spezza

The veteran's five-year tenure in Dallas has been a roller coaster, with the 2017-18 season certainly being a low point (including career worsts of eight goals and 26 points). Now onto his third coach in three years, the 35-year-old must adapt once again and hope he meshes well with Jim Montgomery's system. His NHL career may depend on it; Spezza is an unrestricted free agent after this season.

Detroit Red Wings

Head coach Jeff Blashill

This really should be Ken Holland, considering no team in the league is as hamstrung with bloated, poorly aged contracts as the Red Wings. But the GM has built a lot of equity due to past glory, and ownership kept him around with a two-year extension this spring. So now the bull's-eye is on Blashill, who has a winning percentage below .500, and just one playoff win in three seasons.

Edmonton Oilers

Head coach Todd McLellan

If this Oilers team resembles anything like last season's outfit, McLellan won't have this job for long. Edmonton can't waste any years in Connor McDavid's prime just trying to tread water. The team regressed significantly last season, especially in even-strength play.

Florida Panthers

Right wing Troy Brouwer

The winger had two years remaining on a four-year, \$18-million deal with the Flames before being bought out, but has been able to log decent minutes and produce in his early 30s. There still should be a role for Brouwer in the NHL, but if he doesn't make Florida's roster, he could be Europe-bound.

Los Angeles Kings

The old guard

There are 10 players on the roster over the age of 30, including a handful -- Ilya Kovalchuk, Dustin Brown, Jeff Carter, Jonathan Quick and Anze Kopitar -- considered essential to this team's chances of winning. The championship window is narrow for the Kings, who overperformed in 2017-18 and paid big for Kovalchuk this summer, hoping that the 35-year-old still has his scoring touch despite a five-year absence from the NHL.

Minnesota Wild

GM Paul Fenton

The first-time GM inherited a roster that is good enough to win plenty of games in the regular season, but hasn't figured

out a way to get it done in the playoffs. Zach Parise and Ryan Suter still have term on their contract, but aren't getting any younger. Parise told Greg Wyshynski he was surprised the Wild didn't make more of a splash this summer. Fenton wasn't hired to maintain the status quo, after all.

Montreal Canadiens

Everyone involved in the Max Pacioretty situation

Yes, the Habs had a deal at the draft to ship their captain to the Los Angeles Kings. No, it didn't materialize in the 11th hour. Pacioretty's new agent Allan Walsh has voiced a few thoughts on Twitter that illustrate just how deep the distrust is. Either sign Pacioretty long term or orchestrate a move and let him move on. But the longer this situation festers, the more toxic it gets.

Nashville Predators

Goaltender Pekka Rinne

Entering the final year of his contract, Rinne enters this season coming off a playoff meltdown. What's more, he knows his heir apparent, 23-year-old fellow Finn Juuse Saros, is idly waiting for a larger opportunity. Can Rinne stave off the inevitable -- and help this loaded team back to the Stanley Cup Final?

New Jersey Devils

Every forward not named Taylor Hall

It was the Hall show last season in New Jersey. Yes, the 26-year-old was exceptional, but he eked out Nathan MacKinnon for league MVP by singlehandedly carrying the offensive load, scoring 41 more points than his closest teammates. The Devils made virtually no free-agent additions, meaning others need to step up if New Jersey is going to get back to the playoffs again this season.

New York Islanders

GM Lou Lamoriello

Lamoriello can cement his legacy as the true rebuild of franchises if he can pull off a turnaround for his third GM stint. Lamoriello's initial post-John Tavares moves were uninspiring, if not confusing. Has the 75-year-old lost his touch or is this all part of a long play? After a summer of heartbreak for Islanders fans, the least Lou can do for them is show that he has a plan, and it's not just throwing darts at the board, bidding time for prospects to develop.

New York Rangers

Right wing Kevin Hayes

The winger set a career high with 25 goals in 2017-18 and has expressed a desire to stay in New York long-term -- even as New York works through a rebuild. But when management and Hayes' camp tried to avoid arbitration, all they could compromise on was a one-year deal (albeit for a pretty decent cap hit of \$5.15 million). If Hayes does want to remain a Blueshirt forever, he'll have to start hot, or he's prime trade-deadline bait.

Ottawa Senators



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GM Pierre Dorion

The team's three most talented players -- Erik Karlsson, Matt Duchene and Mark Stone -- are each in contract years. The franchise is embattled, spending the better part of the past year in headlines for off-ice drama (while floundering on the ice). Can the GM convince any of these players to stick around for a rebuild, or at least recoup some value?

Philadelphia Flyers

Left wing James van Riemsdyk

The Flyers landed arguably the most coveted free agent on the open market not named John Tavares. That single move felt like enough to catapult Philadelphia into a Stanley Cup contender. Well, van Riemsdyk, you have \$35 million now. All eyes are on you to elevate this team on your second stint in Philadelphia.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Goaltender Matt Murray

An awkward subplot of the 2017-18 season? Former Penguins goalie Marc-Andre Fleury outperforming Murray. The Penguins still probably made the right decision exposing Fleury in the expansion draft, but after an injury and tragedy-plagued season, a bounce-back season from Murray will be essential to the Penguins rebounding. Murray's .907 save percentage represented his lowest mark since he was an 18-year-old in juniors.

San Jose Sharks

GM Doug Wilson

Wilson is always going after the biggest names -- he was especially active this past calendar year -- and yet, Wilson enters the season with a very similar roster as 2017-18 after striking out on Ilya Kovalchuk, John Tavares, Erik Karlsson (so far) et al. Of course, he has bought in on Evander Kane, inking the winger to a massive extension, but in the waning years of the Joe Thornton/Joe Pavelskiera, more moves might be needed for this team to win it all.

St. Louis Blues

Goaltender Jake Allen

The Blues were perhaps the splashiest team of the offseason, including making major improvements to their forward depth via trade (Ryan O'Reilly) and free agency (Tyler Bozak, David Perron). Add in Robby Fabbri and a healthy Jaden Schwartz, and the expectation is a legitimate playoff run. However, defense remains shaky and goaltending did not improve. Jake Allen has No. 1 potential, but without the handcuff of Carter Hutton (or Brian Elliott before him), can Allen rise to the occasion?

Tampa Bay Lightning

Right wing Ryan Callahan

Look, pressure is certainly on coach Jon Cooper who guides what most in the league believe to be the NHL's most complete roster. But Callahan, 33, is coming off offseason surgery for the third time in four years. Callahan, who carries

a \$5.8 million cap hit in each of the final two years of his contract, adds tremendous value to the Lightning when he's on the ice. But he's under pressure just to get healthy -- and stay that way.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Left wing Josh Leivo

With so much attention paid to the Maple Leafs' top forward talent this summer (especially their top two centers), the bottom half of this roster features intrigue. A player like Josh Leivo, a 2011 draft pick who has yet to crack the regular lineup and appeared in only 16 games last season, is fighting for his Toronto livelihood.

Vancouver Canucks

The future captain

Without the Sedins on the roster for the first time in more than two decades (yes, before top prospect Elias Peterson was born) Vancouver will need leaders to emerge. And yes, they'll need a captain. At BioSteel camp in Toronto earlier this month, defenseman Erik Gudbranson said he doesn't feel the captaincy designation in the NHL is overrated, as some have surmised in recent years. Somebody needs to step up; Bo Horvat feels like the early favorite.

Vegas Golden Knights

Center William Karlsson

One of the more fascinating arbitration cases in recent memory ended with ... a whimper. A one-year contract felt like an anticlimactic, if not wholly appropriate, conclusion for Karlsson's dilemma. After all, how can you commit long term to a player who leaped from six goals to 43? If last season wasn't an aberration, Wild Bill will be compensated as such. If it was, well -- we'll always have the memories of that magical inaugural run for Karlsson and the Golden Knights.

Washington Capitals

Head coach Todd Reirden

The longtime assistant coach was so coveted as a head coach elsewhere that the Capitals were fine parting with Barry Trotz -- who, of course, finally won the franchise an elusive Stanley Cup. There are plenty of reasons for the Trotz/Washington divorce, so instead of relitigating that here, let's pose the more forward-looking question: Can Reirden deliver the results? Yes, the team is tired after a long playoff run, but Washington returns essentially the same roster.

Winnipeg Jets

Defenseman Jacob Trouba

The relationship between Trouba and the Jets hasn't been a soap opera -- but it hasn't been a simple one, either. After being awarded a one-year deal this summer (worth \$5.5 million) in arbitration, there's a sense of urgency for Trouba to prove he is among the elite defenseman that should be paid as such -- either in Winnipeg, or elsewhere.



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Nine players who could be named captain

Tavares, Eichel among potential candidates to fill opening on their teams

by David Satriano

With NHL training camps around the corner, there are eight teams without a captain. NHL.com looks at who could be in line to receive that honor from each team.

Arizona Coyotes

Oliver Ekman-Larsson

The 27-year-old defenseman signed an eight-year contract extension through the 2026-27 season and appears to be the favorite to be the Coyotes' first captain since Shane Doan retired following the 2016-17 season. Ekman-Larsson, who's spent all eight of his NHL seasons with the Coyotes, is ninth in franchise history in games (576), eighth in power-play goals (46) and eighth in game-winning goals (28). He was an alternate captain last season and is a leader on and off the ice in Arizona.

Other choices: Niklas Hjalmarsson, Derek Stepan

Buffalo Sabres

Jack Eichel

Although Eichel missed 15 games with an ankle injury, he led the Sabres in points (64) and tied Sam Reinhart for the team lead in goals (25) last season. The No. 2 pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, behind Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid, the 21-year-old center has 177 points (73 goals, 104 assists) in 209 games with the Sabres and was an alternate captain last season. Buffalo did not have a captain in 2017-18 after Brian Gionta, its captain from 2014-17, was not re-signed as a free agent.

Other choices: Kyle Okposo, Jason Pominville

Carolina Hurricanes

Jordan Staal

Staal was co-captain with defenseman Justin Faulk last season, but new coach Rod Brind'Amour said the Hurricanes would have one captain this season, according to the Raleigh News & Observer. The 29-year-old center, who won the Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2009, has spent the past six seasons in Carolina and is under contract through 2022-23. He's been a leader on a team with a young roster and was a finalist for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, awarded to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey, last season after missing three games following his

daughter being delivered stillborn because of a terminal birth defect.

Other choices: Faulk, Justin Williams

New York Islanders

Josh Bailey

The longest-tenured Islanders player, Bailey has played 10 seasons with New York after being selected with the No. 9 pick in the 2008 NHL Draft. Bailey, who is an alternate, could replace John Tavares, who was Islanders captain for the past six seasons before signing a seven-year, \$77 million contract with the Toronto Maple Leafs on July 1. The 28-year-old forward is respected by his teammates and had NHL career highs in goals (18) and points (71) last season, and signed a six-year contract through the 2023-24 season on Feb. 23. Forward Anders Lee, who led the team with 40 goals last season, is another option, although he could become an unrestricted free agent July 1, 2019.

Other choices: Johnny Boychuk, Lee

New York Rangers

Marc Staal

The Rangers have had 27 captains in their 91 seasons, but five since 2000 (Mark Messier, Jaromir Jagr, Chris Drury, Ryan Callahan, Ryan McDonagh). After McDonagh was traded to the Tampa Bay Lightning on Feb. 26, New York played the rest of the season without a captain and could name one this season. Staal, a 31-year-old defenseman, has been a staple on the back end for the Rangers for the past 11 seasons and has been an alternate captain since 2010. He has three seasons remaining on a six-year contract.

Other choices: Mats Zuccarello, Kevin Shattenkirk

Toronto Maple Leafs

Auston Matthews, John Tavares

The Maple Leafs have not had a captain since defenseman Dion Phaneuf, who served as captain for parts of six seasons, was traded to the Ottawa Senators on Feb. 9, 2016. It likely will be one of their top two centers. Matthews, the No. 1 pick in the 2016 NHL Draft, won the Calder Trophy as the top rookie in 2016-17 and has scored at least 34 goals in his two NHL seasons, including 40 in his rookie season. The 20-year-old is a dynamic playmaker and has helped Toronto qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs in each of the past two seasons. Tavares, the No. 1 pick in the 2009 NHL



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Draft and longtime Islanders captain, commands respect on and off the ice.

Other choices: Morgan Rielly, Jake Gardiner

Vancouver Canucks

Bo Horvat

Vancouver could begin the season without a captain after Henrik Sedin, who was captain for the past eight seasons, and twin brother Daniel Sedin (alternate) retired following the 2017-18 season. The Canucks have several veterans (Alexander Edler, Christopher Tanev) who could be in contention, although they could give it to a younger player like Horvat. The 23-year-old center, who was the No. 9 pick in the 2013 NHL Draft, scored an NHL career-high 22 goals last season and could become the new face of the franchise.

Other choices: Brock Boeser, Tanev

Vegas Golden Knights

Deryk Engelland

After rotating alternate captains in their inaugural NHL season, the Golden Knights could have a permanent one this season. If so, the top choice could be Engelland. The 36-year-old defenseman, who has lived in Las Vegas during the offseason for years, had NHL career highs in assists (18) and points (23) last season and helped the Golden Knights reach the Stanley Cup Final, where they lost to the Washington Capitals in five games. Engelland also won the Mark Messier Leadership award last season, given to the NHL player who exemplifies leadership qualities on and off the ice and who plays a leading role in his community growing the game of hockey.

Other choices: Reilly Smith, Jonathan Marchessault

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

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4 years, 2 environmental impact statements: Why KeyArena is getting built and Sodo isn't

Geoff Baker

Three years and four months ago this week, the reality of the National Hockey League coming to Seattle leapt forward in a way few appreciated at the time.

The day a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released on a proposed new arena for our city's Sodo District, then-Mayor Ed Murray warned that its proponents should switch to an "NHL-first" model. "Folks have got to come up with a plan that's viable for us to finalize this process," Murray told me.

That he'd sound that alarm the day his administration was otherwise hailing a "major milestone" FEIS should have, in hindsight, been taken far more seriously.

Fast-forward 40 months, our city last Thursday released another FEIS and this time it's not for the Sodo project, but a \$700 million overhaul of KeyArena with an NHL-first goal. The fanfare accompanying this latest

hundreds-pages-long document was virtually nonexistent, a whisper compared with the May 7, 2015, announcement on the Sodo version.

And for good reason.

By now, everybody following this saga should have realized an FEIS isn't sacred scripture by which arenas get built. An exhaustive, state-required document, sure, but no substitute for money and teams needed to get arena steel sprouting from the ground.

What doomed the Sodo project had nothing to do with its FEIS; or the subsequent Seattle City Council vote in May 2016 denying entrepreneur Chris Hansen part of Occidental Avenue South to complete his arena land requirements. No, Hansen's five-year Memorandum of Understanding with the city and county became moot 10 months before that vote when he stuck with an NBA-reliant deal for up to \$200 million in public bond funding instead of going NHL-first with more private money.

With the NHL all but pleading with groups here to make expansion bids by a July 2015 deadline, none did. Instead, the NHL chose a Las Vegas bid, which begat the Golden Knights, while keeping a spot for a 32nd team once our city got its act together.

Now, it finally has.

We are closer to an NHL team – and NBA franchise after that – than at any point the last five years.

It has nothing to do with this latest FEIS and is all about money and pursuing the NHL.



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The Los Angeles-based Oak View Group, headed by Tim Leiweke, gave the city financial guarantees he'll start construction right after the council signs off. That's expected within weeks, regardless of what happens with an NHL expansion bid by a Seattle group run by Leiweke's brother, Tod.

But that bid – crucial to KeyArena revenue streams — will be heard by the NHL executive committee Oct. 2 and then, if approved, forwarded to the board of governors for a December vote on awarding Seattle a team.

The NBA? It's still not expanding or relocating. But we should have the equivalent of a brand-new arena when it does. Say what you will about Murray – and many have since he resigned in disgrace last year – but he'd met with NBA commissioner Adam Silver and his NHL-first warnings had logic.

Silver told Murray, and later repeated, that no NBA team was likely coming before Hansen's deal expired in December 2017. Without that NBA team, Murray and others knew in 2015 the Sodo plan was dead.

But Hansen clung to his public-funding deal through the 2016 council vote, even when pressed by council members on how he'd land an NBA team, or replace the billions his former partner Steve Ballmer took with him to buy the Los Angeles Clippers in 2014.

The council didn't even want a vote, figuring it premature and that – even if it passed – Hansen was unlikely to secure the NBA team to start construction before his deal expired.

Pushed to vote, they rejected his plan. Murray and others seized the opportunity to attract KeyArena renovation bidders lurking since 2015 and willing to go the NHL-first route.

Hansen has switched to an all-private-funded Sodo venture that has gained no traction. His group still lacks financing to operate an arena without securing teams and needs Occidental Avenue South to be vacated.

More importantly, he's no longer the only game in town. The city partnered with OVG, which will revamp public-owned KeyArena right away and has shown a route to teams.

Finally, no city has attempted two concurrent, all-privately-funded arenas for NBA and NHL. Competition for concerts and additional revenue streams has long been deemed too fierce to make two such venues profitable.

As for that FEIS, it offers mitigation solutions and expert guesswork on how traffic and infrastructure might look with an upgraded KeyArena. Just like the Sodo FEIS predicted how a new venue might impact Port of Seattle freight transportation.

They both may be right. Or not.

The Sodo FEIS contained a serious omission: dismissing the possibility, despite contrary new evidence, that KeyArena could be renovated without impacting a roof destined for historical protection.

This KeyArena FEIS also isn't perfect. The NHL Seattle group has said 40 percent of those making 33,000 season-ticket deposits live within four miles of the venue.

And yet, the KeyArena FEIS doesn't make use of that late-breaking information. It stuck with a prior draft model from last April that predicted future commute patterns based off the residences of those attending a college basketball game and charity tennis match.

Like I said, an FEIS isn't scripture.

When the council votes to finalize KeyArena transaction documents, it will want to know two main things: Can OVG pay? And can it get teams?

The council has been shown the money. And the NHL has gone as far as it can to convince everyone a team is coming.

Otherwise, OVG wouldn't be committing more than \$700 million and the city wouldn't be wasting its time on another arena plan not happening.

This one is. And it has everything to do with the NHL and what's happened – and hasn't – since the last time an FEIS got local sports fans' hopes up.

Seattle Times LOADED: 09.04.2018

1103493 Websites

The Athletic / The Top 25 at 25: The Avalanche are young, and this is why they plan to stay that way

By Ryan Clark Sep 3, 2018

Gabriel Landeskog is more than just the Avalanche's captain. At 25, he's also the only member of the team's current homegrown youth movement old enough to rent a car without paying a penalty.

Yes. The Avs really are that young. More than half of the team's current 23-man roster is 25 or younger, and that's been by design. Former star center turned front office brass Joe Sakic became Colorado's executive vice president of hockey operations in 2013. He was formally named general manager in 2014 and has since worked to construct a team around the principles of speed and youth.

What Sakic watched his team achieve in 2017-18 is viewed as a sign of things to come. The Avalanche reached the playoffs for the first time in three years. Superstar center Nathan MacKinnon, who turned 23 on Sept. 1, finished fifth in the NHL with 97 points and was second in Hart Trophy voting behind Devils winger Taylor Hall.

A year ago? The Avs were not favored to reach the playoffs. These days? It's possible they could pull off a second consecutive postseason appearance for the first time in more than a decade while competing in a challenging Western Conference landscape.

Colorado's approach is multilayered. It goes beyond the likes of Landeskog, MacKinnon and everyone else who has reached the NHL. The Avalanche's front office is also focused on adding to that future by drafting and developing prospects in key areas who could play for the club within the next few years.

If that's not enough, the Avs also have two first-round picks in the upcoming draft. And if things break their way, they could wind up with the No. 1 pick.

How did the Avs get here?

Take the first line. Landeskog was the team's first-round pick in 2011. Sakic's first draft saw the Avs take MacKinnon with the first pick in 2013. Two years later, winger Mikko Rantanen fell to them at 10. That line combined to score 243 points last season and provided the Avalanche with a foundation from which to grow. Landeskog has three years left on his contract, while MacKinnon has five. Rantanen is in the final year of his entry-level deal and is a restricted free agent.

Second-year forwards Alexander Kerfoot and Tyson Jost are expected to duel at second-line center. Kerfoot was a Devils draft pick whom the Avalanche signed as a college free agent after four years at Harvard. The 24-year-old put up 43 points in his rookie year. Jost, 20, the team's first-round pick in 2016, spent a year at North Dakota before scoring 22 points in 65 games.

Forward J.T. Compher and defenseman Nikita Zadorov came over as prospects in the Ryan O'Reilly trade with the Sabres in 2015. Colorado also received a high second-round pick in the O'Reilly deal it flipped to San Jose and drafted prospect left winger A.J. Greer, who will compete for a spot during camp. Compher, 23, played three years at Michigan before he established himself last year by scoring 23 points in 69 games. Zadorov, also 23, is coming off his strongest NHL season with 20 points in 77 games.



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Next to drafting MacKinnon, the Matt Duchene trade might be the best move of Sakic's career as an executive. He moved Duchene for a bevy of assets and players in a three-team deal involving the Predators and Senators. One of those players in the deal was defenseman Samuel Girard. An offensive-minded threat, the 20-year-old featured in 73 games while scoring 23 points as a rookie.

Altogether that's eight players younger than Cartoon Network who combined to score 148 – or 58 percent – of the team's 255 goals last season.

Who can help Colorado stay young, if not get younger?

The Duchene trade brought more than just Girard. It also has two of the five players who could be with the Avalanche within the next two years, if not sooner.

One is forward Vladislav Kamenev. Colorado could use him as a fourth-line center but given his offensive track record in the AHL, he might be better suited at left wing, which is a bit thin. The Avs need size and Kamenev fits that bill at 6-foot-2. His weight, depending upon the source, is between 194 and 204 pounds. Either way, he'd be the tallest left wing on the team and one the heavier players on the roster if the figure is closer to 204. Between his two-way ability, large frame and his prolific 104 points in 144 AHL games, Kamenev would check a few boxes as a top-nine forward for the Avs.

Conor Timmins would be next. The right-handed shooting defenseman signed a three-year entry-level deal with Colorado in the spring. He's expected to begin the year with in the AHL with the Colorado Eagles in Loveland. But there's a good chance Timmins, who turns 20 on Sept. 18, could be called up at some point in the year. Timmins is a point-producing, puck mover who has an ability to come through in big moments. He scored 26 points in 34 OHL playoff games over the last two seasons and has 115 points in 163 regular-season games.

Spring would be the earliest anyone would see Cale Makar in an Avalanche sweater. The 19-year-old defenseman is one of the top prospects in the game and could be in for a big season at the University of Massachusetts. Makar is another right-handed shot who possesses several attributes. He's an explosive yet smooth skater who can quarterback a power play and also maintains a strong amount of awareness. Both he and Timmins were part of the Canadian side that won the U-20 World Junior Championships earlier this year.

Another prospect who came over in the Duchene trade is center Shane Bowers. He was Ottawa's first-rounder in 2017 and was someone who already had Colorado's attention leading up to the draft. Some project Bowers will be a second- or third-line center in the NHL. The Boston University center turned 19 in late July and, similar to Makar, he's expected to spend one more year in Hockey East before signing with Colorado. Bowers is a speedy skater whose offense continues to improve with each season going back to when he played in the USHL. He scored 32 points in 40 games with the Terriers as a true freshman and could see those numbers rise in what might be his final collegiate campaign.

The final prospect who could debut before or by 2020 is winger Martin Kaut. Colorado drafted Kaut in the first round a few months ago. Kaut told reporters he wants to work on building up his strength and add more to his 6-2 and 176-pound frame. He will spend the upcoming season with the Eagles and won't turn 19 until October.

Who's No. 1?

Again. The Duchene deal could be the sort of move that impacts the Avalanche for nearly a decade.

Colorado obtained a conditional 2018 or 2019 first-round pick from Ottawa. The Senators opted to keep the 2018 pick and they drafted winger Brady Tkachuk, meaning the 2019 selection goes to the Avalanche. And there's a chance the Avs could have the first pick.

That all depends on a few things. Ottawa is in a state of uncertainty and the club is expected to have a mass exodus from which Colorado stands to benefit. Duchene, franchise defenseman Erik Karlsson and star right winger Mark Stone are one of nine unrestricted free agents the team might be forced to get something in return. Or they could run the risk of trying to re-sign them only to see them walk with nothing coming back in return.

If it all plays out that way and the Senators fall down the standings, this gives the Avalanche a really strong chance at winning the draft lottery. The Avs chose MacKinnon the last time they were No. 1 and it's turned into him having one of the best starts of any NHL player before they turned 23.

So who would the Avs (or any team) take with the first pick? Meet Jack Hughes.

Jack Eichel. Patrick Kane. Auston Matthews.

Those are some of the best players the United States, as a nation, has ever produced, and there's a growing feeling Hughes could be the next. He's considered by many to be a "generational talent" and has drawn the sort of buzz as being the unanimous No. 1 pick much in the same way Rasmus Dahlin did a year ago.

Landing Hughes is big for any team. Adding Hughes to an organization that already has Girard, Jost, Kerfoot, Landeskog, MacKinnon, Makar, Rantanen and Timmins would essentially be the kind of cheat code that could make Colorado a serious threat for a the Stanley Cup in the near future.

Say Colorado does not get the first pick but it drafts second. Picking up winger Kaapo Kakko is hardly a consolation prize.

Kakko could join Patrik Laine and Rantanen as the next star Finnish winger who could take the league by storm with his strong array of skills.

He's considered to be the top European skater, according to NHL Central Scouting. Kakko, who turns 18 in February, played last season in his nation's top junior league. The 6-foot-1, 187-pounder will play for TPS in the SM-Liiga, the top professional league in Finland. TPS is also the same club that produced Rantanen.

Drafting first would only be the start of what could be a memorable weekend for the Avs next summer in Vancouver. As of now, they enter the draft with two first-round picks and have five within the first three rounds.

What's the end game?

For every franchise, the goal is to win the Stanley Cup at least once.

It's possible the Avalanche's trajectory could mirror that of the Blackhawks, Capitals or Lightning.

Chicago, in a manner of speaking, is a pie-in-the-sky dream with what it achieved in 2010. That year, the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup with a team largely built through the draft with players such as Troy Brouwer, Dustin Byfuglien, Niklas Hjalmarsson, Kane, Duncan Keith, Jonathan Toews and Brent Seabrook. Chicago added players in free agency such as winger Marian Hossa, yet much of the team's core was homegrown en route to winning two more Cups in 2013 and 2015.

Washington's path was different. The Capitals drafted cornerstone players in Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin but waited more than a decade before winning the elusive trophy in 2018. Like the Blackhawks, the Capitals dipped into free agency by getting players like T.J. Oshie but used in-house talents such as Andre Burakovsky, John Carlson, Braden Holtby, Evgeny Kuznetsov, Dmitri Orlov and Tom Wilson to beat the Golden Knights.

Tampa Bay has not won a championship with its current team but appears to be close. It drafted four franchise players in Victor Hedman, Nikita Kucherov, Steven Stamkos and Andrei Vasilevskiy. Alex Killorn, Ondrej Palat and Brayden Point supplemented what was already



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established. They took chances on undrafted free agents Yanni Gourde and Tyler Johnson, who became success stories, while having the assets needed to move for Ryan McDonagh, J.T. Miller and Mikhail Sergachev.

Sakic and the organization have constructed the sort of homegrown roster that gives the appearance any one of these three outcomes might be possible. Part of that future leverages on how their prospects develop and who they are able to draft next summer. Another facet also depends on if they're willing to use free agency to fill specific needs.

No matter what happens along Colorado's ride, at least Landeskog is old enough to drive the car.

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The Athletic / 2018-19 NHL Season Preview: New York Islanders

By Dom Luszczyszyn Sep 3, 2018

Read this to learn more about how these projections work and this to understand the uncertainty each projection carries.

It was an interesting summer in Brooklyn, to say the least. The team made a lot of strides off the ice in hiring two experienced hockey men to lead the management team and man the bench, taking positive steps away from the gong show circus that previously plagued the front office. Lou Lamoriello did an excellent job curing blue-and-white disease in Toronto, while Barry Trotz is fresh off a Stanley Cup victory in a city that genuinely seemed cursed. Finally, in Brooklyn, there's stability.

On the ice though, it's very difficult to say the Islanders are a better team now than they were at the end of last season. That's not just because they lost one of their best players, but also because of who they brought in. Despite being a worse team on paper, there's still a decent chance the team improves on its 80-point finish from a year ago.

I'd peg the team's chances of doing that at 70 per cent, and some Trotz magic in the defensive zone may push that up even further. That may be difficult to believe for some, but last year was a season where a lot went wrong, so natural regression for a number of players should be expected, as well as some internal growth from a few of the younger players, too. There are many out there who believe this is a bottom-five team, and while it's certainly possible 28 per cent of the time, I think there's enough talent that New York won't be in that range. There are worse teams than this one.

The Trotz factor can't be ignored either. His impact isn't reflected in projections, but he has a knack for getting the best out of a roster and that could be helpful for a team that underachieved greatly last season. It wasn't long ago that the Washington Capitals looked to be in a similar situation – though there's obviously no Alex Ovechkin in New York. Still, he'll have his work cut out for him as the team is far off from competing for a playoff spot with an average projection of 84.9 points. The Islanders believes they can get there, especially after a very active off-season, but at 20 per cent the odds aren't in their favour.

Whether the postseason should be the goal is the big question facing the team, however. The Islanders are starting to build a decent foundation and have a very strong prospect pool, but it wouldn't hurt to add another core piece to that stockpile after a season where it's unlikely they can seriously contend for a playoff spot. Being stuck in no man's land between the playoffs and the bottom five would be far from ideal, but looks like the likeliest place New York lands this season. There's a 63 per cent chance the team earns somewhere between 78 and 92 points this season. For a team that's still pretty far from entering a contending window, it's not exactly a best case scenario as the Islanders will be less

likely to add an elite piece at the draft and likely won't get valuable playoff experience out of this season, either.

The team needs to pick a direction. With John Tavares, it was clear that playoffs were the goal and they were close, but not close enough. Without him, the Islanders are stuck in the middle between rebuilding and contending for a playoff spot – a place few teams want to be. The varying ages of some of the team's key players don't help matters either.

The first thing that'll jump out at you is that the Islanders' defence group ranks 10th. To put your mind at ease, no I do not think it's that good. What's happening here is that there's a big emphasis on taking shots and blocking them and all six of New York's defenders put up big numbers in both categories. That'll artificially inflate their value, despite nearly all of them projected to have a negative contribution to possession at 5-on-5. The other reason is that shot quality and penalty killing aren't explicitly taken into account, leaving the goalies to take much of the blame in those two areas even if it was partially the defence's fault.

Having said that, I do think the Islanders defence as a whole isn't as bad as it's made out to be. There's no doubt that last year was rough, but they've been collectively stronger in the past and there were systemic issues at play, too. There's talent and it's something Trotz can definitely work with. Don't be surprised if this is one area where the Islanders are better than expected. At the very least, the team does have six cromulent players back there, which is more than some teams can say.

That also undersells Nick Leddy, who should bounce back after a horrific 2017-18, and Ryan Pullock who could be a saviour on this backend. His value surprised me too, but no Isles blueliner influenced shot rates more last season, and he did it at both ends of the ice. He's expected to quarterback the Islanders top power-play unit this season too, which could see him put up 45 to 50 points. The team could use his heavy shot there and he's not afraid to let it go either. He's projected to be among the league leaders in shots among defencemen next season (though that tidbit might reflect that he is perhaps rated a bit too high).

In any sense, this group needs to do a much better job of protecting their netminder. New York was one of the most porous teams in the league last season with the number of shots allowed on a nightly basis becoming a subject of mockery. Things need to tighten up back there or this team isn't going anywhere.

It didn't help that the team's goaltending was brutal on top of the shot barrage. The team is hoping Robin Lehner is an upgrade over Jaroslav Halak in that regard. He is by raw save percentage (.917 vs. .912 over the last three seasons), he isn't after taking quality into effect (minus-0.32 vs. plus-0.56 delta save percentage). That could be an issue on a defensively suspect team. Thomas Greiss will also need to find his game again. He was one of the more underrated goalies in the previous two seasons but completely fell off the map last year with an .892 save percentage. That's far from good enough.

We all know the defence is a weak spot on this team, but the forward depth isn't great either. Aside from the first line. That the Islanders have a legit first line is the biggest factor helping their chances.

Mathew Barzal was electric last season, Jordan Eberle complemented him well and Anthony Beauvillier rounded out one of the league's best lines. On a team that struggled to keep possession and outscore its opponents, this trio managed a 53 per cent Corsi and was plus-12 in goals (63 per cent share) at 5-on-5 in 363 minutes together. Without those three on the ice, the Islanders were at 44 per cent Corsi and were outscored by 15 (46 per cent share). A stark contrast. That line was the second unit last season behind Tavares and co. It'll be interesting to see how it fares now that all the attention will be on them. They may regress slightly as a result.

In that regard, all eyes will be on Barzal this year as he enters his second full season. A sophomore slump would crush any Islanders playoff hopes. He's one of the main reasons why the team is rated this high. I don't expect a dip, though, even against tougher competition. This kid is the real deal. He's one of the fastest players in the league and an



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incredible playmaker, leading to some of the most impressive micro-stats profiles I've ever seen. He's in the 99th or 100th percentile across the board.

He had 85 points last year and while I expect some regression, I also expect a bump in ice-time and age-related growth to offset that. His 3.5 points per 60 in all situations last year ranked ninth in the league. If he pushes 20 minutes per game this season — he played less than 18 last year — I don't have much doubt he can stay in the point-per-game range. Repeating last year's totals isn't out of the question and neither is being a top-10 point scorer if he can handle the pressure of being the top dog now that Tavares is gone.

That's where my model has him and it's why Barzal is one of the top projected centres going into the season. It may be too early to expect this much out of him — one season is a small sample — but it's extremely rare for a player his age to play at the level he did. In the salary cap era, Barzal is one of just seven players to eclipse a point-per-game in an under-20 season. When that list consists of Connor McDavid, Sidney Crosby, Alex Ovechkin, Evgeni Malkin, Steven Stamkos and Auston Matthews then you might see why Barzal is being held in such high regard. That he also posted a plus-eight per cent relative Corsi (that data isn't available for Crosby, Ovechkin and Malkin, but it was more than McDavid, Stamkos and Matthews) is the icing on the cake.

Eberle was terrific in his first year as an Islander scoring 59 points, and with Tavares gone, he might be able to build on that with more ice time on the first power-play unit this season and in general — he only played 16 minutes per game last season. As for Beauvillier, he should get more ice time too and playing a full season with Barzal and Eberle could mean a breakout year is on the horizon. His 5-on-5 points per 60 was a monstrous 2.3 with Barzal, and just 1.35 otherwise. Considering he was getting bottom six minutes, that shouldn't be a surprise as the Islanders didn't exactly have any player he could excel with.

That likely won't change this season despite an influx of off-season activity. In fact, it might be even worse than last year. Lamoriello immediately put his stamp on the team, bringing in a number of players to patch up the bottom six, the only issue is that none of them bring any positive value.

Leo Komarov lost a major step on defence last season, making it impossible to ignore how disastrous he was on offence. He could help fix a terrible Islanders penalty kill, but I'm not sure it's worth what he gives back at 5-on-5. Add Casey Cizikas and Cal Clutterbuck to the mix and you get the worst-ranked line in the league according to my model.

Valtteri Filppula might be an even worse bet than Komarov, as the Islanders likely expect him to contribute. But at this stage in his career, I don't think he can. He might be one of the most inefficient players in the league, which is further exacerbated by the fact he'll likely get a decent amount of playing time in New York. He doesn't shoot at all, he produces at a fourth-line rate and his on-ice shot impact is significantly negative at both ends of the ice. The third line isn't terrible with whatever's left in Andrew Ladd's tank and KHL-import Jan Kovar, but Filppula's output likely pushes them down to fourth-line territory as a whole. Having two fourth lines kind of offsets having a good first line.

Other Lamoriello adds include Matt Martin and Tom Kuhnhackl and they fall in the same boat as Komarov and Filppula: marginal NHL talent. What hurts the most here is that all that bottom of the lineup clutter likely blocks skilled youngsters like Josh Ho-Sang and Kieffer Bellows from making the team. Lord knows this team could use some skill.

The second line is the big wild-card as the team looks like it'll be placing Brock Nelson in between Tavares's former two wingers. It will be fascinating to see how much of Anders Lee's 40-goal season and Josh Bailey's near point-per-game season were a product of the man in the middle, and how much were their own talents. My model expects them to earn 55 to 60 points each, but even that may be tough with Nelson who will be a stark contrast to Tavares. He's really struggled to push play offensively the last two seasons and his scoring rates took a dip last year.

What also hurts is that no one on this line looks capable of entering the offensive zone with control. Tavares is one of the league's best and did a lot of the heavy lifting in that area. He had more entries with possession than Lee and Bailey combined last year and his carry-in percentage of 76 was one of the league's best marks. The other two were at 43 and 36 per cent respectively, while Nelson managed a slightly more respectable 52 per cent. That could further limit this line's offensive potential.

If Lee and Bailey regress more than expected without Tavares, then this team is in even bigger trouble than most already anticipate. The top six is fine, especially the top line, but they're not getting much support from the bottom six, and if those two falter the Islanders can quickly turn into a one-line team. Their defence and goaltending likely won't save them either.

All that paints a grim picture of the Islanders upcoming season and it's why many think the team will be among league's worst despite some optimism from the fanbase. New York has some very good players that can take this team further than they deserve and there are some good young players that can develop further, but as a whole, it's difficult to see this team as currently constructed put together a winning season.

What Other Models Say

Emmanuel Perry, Corsica: 79.8 points, 26th

Rob Pizzola, Semi-Professional Sports Bettor: 82.8 points, 24th

Andy MacNeil, Vegas Stats & Information Network: 83.3 points, 27th

Over/Under Point Total, Bodog: 83.5 points, 24th

Again, many of the models are on the same page projecting the Islanders to finish just outside the bottom five with 80 to 85 points with Perry on the low end and my model on the high end.

What Fans Expect

Public Sample: 1,956

Fan Sample: 331

Compared to the public, Islanders fans are incredibly optimistic about their team's chances this season with the 11-point difference the highest in the league. I'd have to side with the fans on this one, even if 31 per cent of them somehow have the team making the playoffs. I don't see the Isles being as terrible as many expect. People tend to overrate the impact of losing a single player (and overrate that single player, if we're being honest) and underrate what the team still has. Many players won't be as bad as they were last season and Trotz should be able to get more out of this roster than previous coaching regimes could.

What The Athletic Insider Thinks

Arthur Staple: Despite the general perception that the Isles are doomed without Tavares, I agree with Dom that the addition of Trotz is not only good in the short term but adds a real layer of respectability to a roster that's now a bit older and possibly wiser when it comes to playing without the puck.

The Islanders will need a lot to go right this season to make the playoffs — declining players reversing trends, guys on expiring deals playing over their heads — and that's a lot to ask. However, this team needed a lot to go wrong last season to finish where it did, so perhaps there's more here than meets the eye.

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Sportsnet.ca / Subban ready to show Maple Leafs he's better: 'You expect to win'



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 4, 2018

Luke Fox | August 31, 2018

TORONTO – Maria Subban was the second happiest person in the room when the youngest of her three NHL draftees signed with the hometown Toronto Maple Leafs on Canada Day.

"She was probably the most excited — other than me," the Toronto-born Jordan Subban says. "My mom was a huge Leafs fan growing up. My dad was a Habs fan."

Even with Norris-winning P.K. capturing hearts in Montreal and reaching a Stanley Cup final in Nashville, even with next-up Malcolm getting drafted by Boston and playing some stellar goal last season for the expansion wonder Golden Knights, Maria has always been a Leafs fan at heart.

Ditto, Jordan. And his big brothers knew it.

"I don't want to say jealousy, but they were excited for me to have the opportunity to play here," says Jordan, punctuating every interview response with a wide grin.

"I always loved the Leafs. I think if you ask any guy who I played with in the past or in the American League, 'What do you think of Jordan signing with Toronto?' they'd say, 'Ah! He's always wanted to play there anyway.' I love the Leafs. I love being able to play at home."

I only love my bed and my momma, I'm sorry...

Like Drake, Jordan's favourite recording artist, the 23-year-old defence prospect could be categorized both as a bit of a momma's boy and a T.O. flag-waver.

So when new Leafs GM Kyle Dubas contacted him shortly after the AHL Marlies Calder Cup championship and right as NHL free agency opened, Subban's one-year, two-way, \$650,000 deal was finalized in rapid fashion.

"I wanted to take advantage of it," Subban explains. "It's one of the best if not the best organization."

"You expect to win. Marlies have a track record of it, and obviously the Leafs are on the up-rise. They're both good teams. Having the opportunity to play at home and win is huge."

The hard truth is, a big-league opportunity of any kind is critical at this stage in Subban's development. In 52 AHL contests in 2017-18, his penalty minutes shot up (to a career-worst 66) and his production dipped (to a career-worst 13 points).

Toronto represents Subban's third shot. Better be the charm.

How many prospects get a legit shot to break into the bigs with a fourth franchise?

The fourth-rounder was drafted back in 2013 by the Vancouver Canucks. Despite consecutive 36-point campaigns for AHL Utica and being named the farm system's all-star in 2017, however, he never could crack an NHL lineup we'd be hard-pressed to describe as crammed with speedy, skilled, playmaking D-men.

Vancouver flipped Subban (for centre Nic Dowd) to Los Angeles last season, but after posting a combined minus-29 rating over his first three pro seasons, the restricted free agent was left unqualified, thrusting him onto the open market without a single NHL appearance to his name.

You won't catch Jordan, ever the optimist, uttering a bad word about his time in the Canucks organization. "Vancouver, it was great when I was there," he insists.

But no doubt, Jordan says, he wants a night like the one P.K. and Malcolm shared with father Karl in Vegas last winter. He's played against Malcolm in the A — "That was awesome!" — and regularly shoots on his

goaltending brother during summer training sessions under BioSteel's Matt Nichol, but still dreams of elevating his sibling rivalries to the highest level, Maria likely decked out in blue and white.

"Watching that game, seeing them have that moment with my dad was pretty special. It was cool. I just wish P.K. got to shoot in the shootout. That woulda been fun," Jordan says.

A cool family moment:

P.K. & Malcolm Subban meet up with their father ahead of their first game against each other.

<https://t.co/8vzKn1IMFn> pic.twitter.com/n1DHINGBml

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) December 9, 2017

Instead of flying to the desert in June with the rest of the Subban crew to root on Malcolm's Knights in the Cup final, Jordan set right back to work.

Jordan has devoted his summer to sharpening his defensive work against established NHLers such as Tyler Seguin, Devante Smith-Pelly and Brett Connolly. He's been picking Darnell Nurse's brain about tactics and positioning. He's been regularly asking San Jose Sharks assistant coach (and former Marlies bench boss) Steve Spott for pointers.

Once a week, he meets up with Leafs skating guru Barb Underhill for 45 minutes to work on his stride.

"I love working with her," Jordan says. "I try to take advantage of the time I have with her because she's so good at what she does."

And last week at Toronto's MasterCard Centre, Jordan had a positive first quick meeting with Mike Babcock, the man who will decide if and when he's ready.

But, really, the onus is on Subban, an undersized right-hand shot with wheels.

The Jeff Blair Show

Jordan Subban still a bit in shock he's with Maple Leafs organization

August 27 2018

Audio Player

It's no secret the Leafs are thin on right D, and with Roman Polak moving on to Dallas this summer, the Leafs need young righties to step up. Nikita Zaitsev, 26, must start justifying his \$31.5-million contract. Connor Carrick, 24, was re-signed. Justin Holl, 26, appears primed to make a roster push. Timothy Liljegren, 19, has been tabbed as the next golden boy, but he's likely another year away.

Subban won't allow himself to believe his handedness gives him any help in climbing the depth chart.

"My goal is to go in and play well and don't think about any of that and give myself the best opportunity to make the team," he says.

Watching him scrimmage this week alongside Nurse, Connor McDavid, and Max Domi, Subban can hang with their pace. A few dangles and scoring-chance setups catch your eye. He's comfortable with the puck on his tape.

But the NHL is an altogether angrier animal. Not all 5-foot-9 fourth-rounders get four chances, regardless of the name on their back.

"I feel ready to go into camp in a couple weeks here," says Subban, flashing another smile.

"I can't wait to show what I can do."

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