



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 4, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes' McGinn, Williams will always be linked by a special Game 7 moment

By Chip Alexander

Brock McGinn will always be linked with Justin Williams, as hockey teammates with the Carolina Hurricanes and for a special shared moment in time.

That said, Williams' decision to step away from hockey, and the former captain's absence as a new season begins, will be felt by McGinn and the others.

"It's tough to replace a guy like that, but he's kind of showed us the way you have to play, the right way to play," McGinn said Tuesday. "If we just follow what he instilled in all of us, I think we can do it as a group."

McGinn will always have that moment from last year's Stanley Cup playoffs -- Game 7, the second overtime against the Washington Capitals. The Canes and Caps, a team so intent on winning another Cup, were locked in an intense game, a test of will and stamina.

McGinn can take it from there. The winger has been reminded and asked about the play countless times in the past few months, especially at home in Fergus, Ontario. And he has watched the replay more than a few times -- Williams centering the puck to the net, McGinn going to the net.

"I saw Willy go to the corner and he was spinning so I just took a couple of hard strides to the net there and just tried to get body position on my guy," McGinn said Tuesday after an informal workout at Raleigh Center Ice.

That "guy" being the Caps' tough guy, Tom Wilson, a 6-4, 220-pound forward who is hard to budge.

"It worked out," McGinn continued. "I just saw it coming and was able to bat it down."

Meaning the puck. McGinn batted it down and past goalie Braden Holtby and just like that, the series was over. Make it McGinn with the goal, Williams the primary assist. Capital One Arena in Washington, so loud for so long quickly became a somber place. The Canes were moving on to the second round.

"As soon as you see it cross that line I don't think anything runs through your mind," McGinn said. "You just black out and your body takes over. And then you're looking at the smiles on everybody's faces. It was awesome. A cool moment."

Williams, the man called Mr. Game 7 in the NHL, had delivered again in Game 7. The Canes were on to the second round and McGinn, who scored 10 goals in the regular season, had a Game 7 winner and the memory of a lifetime.

"All my friends back home who have little kids said they all stayed up and watched," McGinn said. "It was cool to relive it and see how excited the town was for us."

McGinn, 25, has returned to Raleigh to prepare for preseason training camp. Williams has not retired from the NHL at 37 but said Monday he would "step away" from the game for now, with a return at some point in the 2019-20 season still possible.

"He's a really good friend and I respect everything he's done in the game," McGinn said. "We don't know if he's completely done or not but you want to follow those guys who have the passion. You can see the way he led us in the playoffs and the last part of the season. He's an incredible person off the ice and a great ambassador for the game of hockey, as well."

McGinn was a restricted free agent after last season and elected to file for arbitration rather than accept the Canes' qualifying offer. But arbitration was not needed after McGinn and the team agreed July 12 on a two-year contract that will pay McGinn \$1.9 million this season and \$2.3 million in 2020-21.

Canes general manager Don Waddell said he was "relieved" to have the deal settled without arbitration, calling McGinn a "important part of what we accomplished last season."

McGinn was relieved, too, to have it done.

"I can play a little more relaxed," he said. "Just play my game and not worry about all the stuff off the ice, the negotiations and stuff. Just play hockey and play the way I can. Play with confidence."

A second-round draft pick by Carolina in 2012, McGinn has missed just two games the past two seasons. While his goal production dropped from 16 in 2017-18 to 10, he had a plus-10 rating last season, effectively killed penalties and gave the Canes a degree of physicality that has always been a part of his game. He had two goals and four assists in the playoffs.

Like Williams, McGinn has a passion for the game. Even with Williams missing, McGinn believes the



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Canes can improve on last year's 99-point finish that ended their nine-year playoff drought in the first year with Rod Brind'Amour as head coach.

"We really grew as a team last year and we added some good components to our team," McGinn said. "I think us going in this year, we have a lot of confidence. We expect a lot from our team."

THE ATHLETIC

Forecasting the Hurricanes' 2019-20 lineup without Justin Williams

By Sara Civian

Pretty much every sentence about the Hurricanes' season-to-be has come with a concession statement: "If Justin Williams returns ..."

While the captain is not yet ready to call it a career, the Hurricanes announced Monday that he will not be joining the team for training camp.

"This is the first time in my life that I've felt unsure of my aspirations with regards to hockey," Williams said in a release. "For as long as I can remember, my whole off-season until this point has been hockey and doing what was necessary to prepare for the upcoming season. Because of my current indecision, and without the type of mental and physical commitment that I'm accustomed to having, I've decided to step away from the game."

The impact of his leadership was so intense for these Canes that it was tough to think about anything else when word of his decision got out. But then you think about life without Mr. Game 7 some more and remember his impact on the ice — he was third on the team with 53 regular-season points (23 goals, 30 assists). He had a team-leading nine power play goals, and the power play was a source of concern headed into the season even if he did return. In fact, he was the only right-shot forward on the Hurricanes power play at all.

Regression was expected for an almost 38-year-old after a season like that, but the team is simply better with him than without. GM Don Waddell prepared for this, though, so there are several enticing replacement possibilities.

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At this point, RFA Saku Maenalanen must be feeling relieved. He hasn't yet re-signed with the Canes, but Williams' decision could change that considering there's more room at right wing now. He and Julien Gauthier strike me as potential competitors for a role on the right wing.

Power Play

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Justin Faulk (Doug Hamilton?)-Teuvo Teravainen (obviously not a defenseman just for formatting purposes)

We call this one "put your best bets out there and make it work."

Every decent power play in the league with the exception of the Panthers has a blend of left- and right-shot forwards on its first unit, but what are you gonna do? "Making it work" has been an unofficial team motto since Rod Brind'Amour took over, you'd just hope they would bring in a specialist and get creative.

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Ryan Dzingel-Jordan Staal-Martin Necas

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He's also a right-shot forward, just in case the first unit can't make it work. Just tossing that out there.

The Hockey News

Williams' return is no guarantee, but don't be surprised if he ends up back with Hurricanes

Unable to make a definite decision about his future, Justin Williams has chosen to "step away" from the NHL for the time being. We've seen veteran players return mid-season before, though, and Williams, 37, might be the next to make the jump back into action midway through a campaign.

By Jared Clinton

As Justin Williams spent the off-season deciding his future, the belief was the veteran winger, who had just captained the Carolina Hurricanes back to the post-season for the first time in a decade and helped guide them to the Eastern Conference final, had two options laid out in front of him.

The first option – Door No. 1 – was a return to Carolina, one more go-round with the Hurricanes in an attempt to build on what began last season. Behind Door No. 2? Retirement. A three-time Stanley Cup champion, Conn Smythe Trophy winner and veteran of more than 1,200 games, not including another 155 playoff contests, Williams has the miles on his body. Few would have been shocked to see the 37-year-old hang up his skates. What few expected, however, is that Williams was going to head through a third door, one that next to no one had on their radar: he's leaving, but he's not saying that his departure is for good.

On Monday, Williams announced that he will be "stepping away" from the NHL. "Because of my current indecision, and without the type of mental and physical commitment that I'm accustomed to having, I've decided to step away from the game," Williams said in a release. "It's important to me that the focus of attention is on the current, very talented group the Carolina Hurricanes have assembled, as they prepare to build on the momentum and growth we established last season."

To be sure, this could mean we've seen the end of Williams. Again, he's 37 and will turn 38 the day after

the Hurricanes' season opener against the Montreal Canadiens. Again, between regular season and playoff action, he's played nearly 1,400 games. And, again, he's won the ultimate prize. He captured his first Stanley Cup in 2005-06 while a member of the Hurricanes, then he added two more, his second in 2011-12 and his third in 2013-14, with the Los Angeles Kings, playing the hero during the run to the latter. While he's not a likely Hall of Famer – 312 goals and 786 points won't earn him passage through those doors – he'd be a first-ballot entrant into the Hall of Very Good. This is all to say that Williams has nothing left to prove.

As Hurricanes GM Don Waddell said in the release associated with Williams' announcement, Carolina has gone about this off-season building as though the veteran wouldn't be returning, too. That's evident in the additions the Hurricanes have made. Free agent signing Ryan Dzingel, though not near the play driver and reliable two-way talent that Williams is, was brought in to fill a middle-six scoring role. And even before the Dzingel signing, Carolina addressed another middle-six need by acquiring Erik Haula from the Vegas Golden Knights. Primarily a pivot, Haula's versatility makes him an option on the wing in a pinch. One season removed from a 29-goal, 55-point campaign, he can put up points in bunches in the right situation.

But the lack of a definite in Williams' announcement, the lingering never-say-never, leaves open the possibility of his return at some point. And it's not as though we've never seen this scenario play out before.

During the 2016-17 season, Mike Fisher, then captain of the Predators, showed the entire league there was tread left on the tires when he posted 18 goals and 42 points in 72 games as a 36-year-old. He skated top-six minutes, finished fifth in team scoring and while he failed to really contribute offensively in the post-



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season – he had four assists in 20 games – he averaged upwards of 17 minutes per game as Nashville came within two wins of the franchise’s first Stanley Cup. After the defeat, and with his contract up, Fisher took time to decide his next step. In August, more than a month after free agency opened ahead of the 2017-18 season, he announced he was retiring.

Or so everyone thought.

As you’ll recall, Fisher’s retirement spanned all of five months. By the end of January 2018, Fisher made the stunning decision to rejoin the Predators, which was followed by an entire month of getting up to speed, an official one-year, \$1-million contract signing in February and a debut in early March. He then played the final 16 games of the season, suited up in all but one of Nashville’s 13 playoff games and, once that run came to an end, called it a career for good.

Now, that’s not the exact blueprint Williams is following here. After all, Fisher’s retirement seemed to be the real deal at the time. But Fisher’s game plan – the timing of his return, the contract length and even the value – during that 2017-18 campaign seems like a reasonable possibility for Williams in Carolina.

Think about it this way: it offers months for Williams to continue to rest his body, recuperate and come back fresh. It also allows the Hurricanes to bring Williams in

later in the season, or at some point when they might be in dire need of his services, at a lesser rate. If he’s only joining the club in the back half of the season, he might be more willing to take close to league minimum. And with Williams in the fold at that price, Carolina would have cap flexibility at the deadline, which will be important if they’re again right in the hunt for a playoff spot. Even if they only add Williams, though, he’s another offensive driver who is a proven contributor. If he plays bottom-six minutes, it’s a certain upgrade and mitigates the need to spend an asset to get help at the most important time of the season. Truly, it’s a scenario that seemingly works out well for both sides.

Does that mean it’s a virtual certainty Williams comes back? Not any more than it is a guarantee that he’s as good as retired. But we’ve seen veteran players depart in the past only to come back refreshed later in the campaign. Fisher followed the likes of Peter Forsberg, Brendan Shanahan and Mats Sundin, to name a notable few. And the open-endedness of Williams’ decision gives reason to believe he will be the next. And make no mistake that if or when the time comes, the Hurricanes will welcome him with open arms.

TODAY’S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/canes-now/article234686202.html>

<https://theathletic.com/1180148/2019/09/03/forecasting-the-hurricanes-2019-20-lineup-without-justin-williams/>

<https://thehockeynews.com/news/article/williams-return-is-no-guarantee-but-dont-be-the-least-bit-surprised-if-ends-up-back-with-hurricanes>



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SportScan

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

1151630 Carolina Hurricanes

With Justin Williams gone, who wears the 'C' for the Canes?

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH-The subject was being the captain of the Carolina Hurricanes, of wearing the "C" and being the acknowledged team leader.

Jordan Staal shared the "C" with Justin Faulk two seasons ago as co-captains. Last season, it was Justin Williams, alone.

For the third straight year, there will be a change. Williams on Monday announced he would "step away" from the NHL and would not be with the Hurricanes when they begin training camp this month or at the start of the 2019-2020 season. No official retirement announcement, but Williams' absence will be felt.

"I can imagine it was a tough decision because he's played a long time and done it at a high level for a long time," Faulk said Tuesday. "He had a good year and the team did well, so it probably made it pretty hard on him. If he needs more time to figure it out it's more than his right. It's his decision and however they want to do it I don't think there's any right or wrong answer.

"He's great in the room, great on the ice, off the ice, out of the room, just a good guy all around. He's a true pro. Any time someone like that leaves a locker room it's never easy to fill and never easy to replace, if it is replaceable. It's on other guys to do their thing and carry on and carry the torch and make sure everybody is doing their job."

Staal and Faulk both agreed the co-captain approach, a decision made by former coach Bill Peters, seemed a bit awkward. Williams had signed a two-year free-agent contract and returned to the team he helped lead to the 2006 Stanley Cup before winning two more Cups with the Los Angeles Kings. Williams appeared to be the likely choice in 2017-18.

But Peters did not name him captain nor have him serve as an alternate captain. No letter, an obvious slight. Rod Brind'Amour, once named Peters' replacement as head coach, quickly remedied that, making Williams the captain and having Staal and Faulk wear "A's" last season as the alternates.

"I think one (captain) is better, probably," Faulk said Tuesday. "I think one works. It has been the tradition of hockey. One makes things a little smoother and a little easier."

While Staal said having a "C" was an honor, Williams was an obvious choice given his depth of experience, success and strong personality, allowing Staal more freedom to simply go out and play, be the strong center that Brind'Amour wants him to be. The Canes, with Williams the consummate leader, qualified for

the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since 2009 and reached the Eastern Conference finals.

The Canes became relevant again in the NHL -- Williams' stated goal in coming back to Carolina in July 2017 -- and the captain made sure they had fun doing it, orchestrating the postgame Storm Surge celebrations that were zany at times but entertaining.

"Willy took a lot of stuff outside the rink on his shoulders, obviously a lot with the media and other stuff," Staal said. "I probably had a little less of that and that was nice. He took that day-to-day stuff and took it on himself. He obviously said the right things, whether it was being hard on guys or having that good feel for the room and knowing whose buttons to push and who needed a pat on the back. It was good leadership."

Williams, who will be 38 on Oct. 4, made it clear after the season that he would not make a decision to return unless he was completely committed to being back, mentally, physically and emotionally. Retirement would be mean more family time -- with his wife, Kelly, son Jaxon and daughter, Jade.

Now, Williams has both hinted at retirement while also leaving the door open to a possible return this season. The Canes appear to be on-board with that arrangement -- Williams' Wikipedia page now has his status listed as "semi-retired."

The question: who takes over as captain?

As he approaches his 31st birthday next week, Staal has played 893 regular-season games and is well-respected by everyone associated with the organization. Brind'Amour, for one, often has noted, "I don't know what more I can say about Jordan."

It could be that Brind'Amour turns to Faulk, who has played his entire career with the franchise or another, younger defenseman, Jaccob Slavin.

Sebastian Aho might be the Canes' best player but is the center ready at 22 for the "C" and could the added responsibilities affect his play?

There's veteran forward Jordan Martinook. In one year with the team he has established himself as a leader and mentor in the locker room, and his determination during the playoffs to be on the ice despite a painful injury inspired his teammates.

For Brind'Amour, making Williams the captain was a coaching no-brainer. More thought will go into this selection.

The fact the Canes made such a deep playoff run, playing until mid-May, reduced the players' recovery time in preparing for a new season.

"The hangover hung over for a while but we had so many great memories and a lot of fun," Staal said. "It was a good hangover, so to speak, and a good summer, getting away more mentally than physically."



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For Williams, playing all 82 in the regular season and the 15 in the playoffs took a toll, especially with the Canes in must-win mode down the stretch, battling the Columbus Blue Jackets and Montreal Canadiens for a wild-card playoff spot. The forward put so much into the season and his career numbers -- 1,244 regular-season games, 155 playoff games -- almost seem staggering.

Brind'Amour said late last week that the Canes have had to prepare for this season with the idea Williams would not be back as Williams pondered a decision. They have a full complement of forwards, having added Erik Haula and Ryan Dzingel in the offseason. Williams leaves a void, for sure, but Brind'Amour has options.

"We've added quality players and more importantly good people who will fit into what we're trying to do," Brind'Amour said last week. "But I think it's such a fine margin. You can have a great team and not do well. Things can happen."

News Observer LOADED: 09.04.2019

1151631 Carolina Hurricanes

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By Sara Civian Sep 3, 2019

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NO, YOUR EYES DON'T DECEIVE YOU, MARTIN NECAS SCORED TWO NEARLY IDENTICAL POWER-PLAY GOALS LAST NIGHT TO GET THE CHECKERS A BIG WIN OVER SYRACUSE! PIC.TWITTER.COM/Y0VUWSURNI

— CHARLOTTE CHECKERS (@CHECKERSHOCKEY)
MARCH 21, 2019

Go to 1:40 in the clip below:

HIGHLIGHTS: CZECHS MAKE THE QUARTER-FINALS AFTER BLANKING DENMARK 4-0 AT THE #WORLDJUNIORS.

READ MORE: [HTTPS://T.CO/CRQEOCJRS8](https://t.co/crQEocJRS8)
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— IIHF (@IIHFHOCKEY) JANUARY 1, 2019

He's also a right-shot forward, just in case the first unit can't make it work. Just tossing that out there.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.04.2019

1151684 Websites

The Athletic / Why term appears to be the major stumbling block in many of the current RFA standoffs

By Pierre LeBrun Sep 3, 2019

How little has changed in eight weeks, right?

I started my summer holiday July 3 with so many of the high-profile RFAs nowhere close to being signed.

Two months later it's Sept. 3, and Brayden Point (Tampa Bay), Matthew Tkachuk (Calgary), Mitch Marner (Toronto), Mikko Rantanen (Colorado), Patrik Laine (Winnipeg), Kyle Connor (Winnipeg), Brock Boeser (Vancouver), Zach Werenski (Columbus), Ivan Provorov (Philadelphia), Travis Konecny (Philadelphia), Charlie McAvoy (Boston) and there's more ... they all remained unsigned.

We've written for the past 12 months about how this class of high-end RFA coming out of their entry-level deals was going to overhaul the system, or at least attempt to.

Now comes crunch time. Camp is around the corner. The regular season starts next month. For these negotiations, this is go-time.

If anyone thought the offer sheet signing of Sebastian Aho matched by Carolina and the re-signing of Timo Meier in San Jose both in early July was going to help fast track any of these other RFA situations, well, they were wrong.

"It's tough to say," Toronto Maple Leafs GM Kyle Dubas said on Tuesday morning when I asked him what he extrapolated from the long list of high-end RFAs still unsigned. "Two of the restricted free agents came off the board on the first day (July 1) with Aho and Meier and since then not only the guys that are always talked about but even working way down the list, there hasn't seemed to be any activity at all. I don't know what to put that on or what to equate that with, really; other than now that we're into September and rookie tournaments are going to start this week and the business of hockey will proverbially get back and running, I think everybody hopes to see some activity.

"Because these are all excellent young players," Dubas added. "I don't think we want to see them missing camp or missing time. Not just our situation but every situation throughout the league."

There is so much media attention on the Marner situation with the Leafs, of course, and we'll delve more into that below. But again, the situation in Toronto is not a unique one. It really is crazy — even if we saw it coming — how many of these stars or stars in the making remain unsigned today.

"It's been talked about ad nauseam, really the whole year, and here we are," Flames GM Brad Treliving said on Tuesday morning. "Unique time for sure. But you just keep working away at it. That's all you do with any of these things, you keep daily picking away and hopefully find some common ground and eventually put it together."

I remember talking to Avalanche GM Joe Sakic back in June and while he was hoping to get something done earlier with his star winger, he knew back then it might play out longer and he would have to be patient with Rantanen's camp.

"It seems like a wait and see for a lot of those guys," Sakic said on Monday, referring to the long list of RFAs. "We've had dialogue and that's going to continue from our standpoint until Mikko signs. We'll see where this goes. It's probably the first time so many of these guys are RFAs and are still yet to be signed."

Yes indeed.

As I stated in one my (rare) summer tweets, the difficulty is that while there's no denying the impact all these young players have — and that the numbers strongly suggest teams should be investing more heavily in their younger core players and be more careful with players over 30 — it's not easy to overhaul the system overnight.

Sure, it's becoming evident the mid-level roster player is going to take a hit in future negotiations as the system recalibrates, but in the meantime, a lot of these teams are carrying some of those mid-level contracts that are taking up cap space. Something has to give.

But it's not just about teams who are tight against the cap like Toronto, Tampa Bay or Winnipeg.

Take Colorado. They've got loads of cap room. Now. But in a few years when Nathan MacKinnon is up again, and young Cale Makar is coming off his entry-level deal, that won't be the case. This is a young, talented team but it's going to be expensive and require a sound plan to keep all of the pieces together over time.

"Well that's just it," Sakic said. "We're OK right now (with cap room) but in a couple of years, we're not going to be. We've got to do what's right by our organization. Every team has their own internal structure as to how they do things."

The question is, are any of these situations headed for a William Nylander-like mess requiring Dec. 1 deadline drama?

GMs and agents around the league can perhaps take lessons from how that played out last season. Dubas has certainly learned from it.

"We've spoken very openly in the past about the situation with William and my own personal regrets and the amount of blame that I feel needs to be shouldered for the way that that went," said Dubas. "The fact that William missed two and a half months of the season if you want to include camp and just really wasn't set up to have a good season. This situation I think for all of these players is a little bit different because I would assume, and I know in our case, we've been working at it for a while. I took the job over in May 2018. In William's case, we only had four months before camp to be working on it. These ones here, they're 10 months past that, I would assume most of the other teams have been working on their situations and their players for the time at least. So I don't know how similar these situations are to William's.

"On both sides, the teams and the players' side, I would really say there's probably a strong incentive for everybody not to have their player miss time and for the players not to miss time," added Dubas. "I'm hopeful not just for our case but for our every case that that is the outcome. Because I don't think for the benefit of hockey in general that we need high-end players missing time."

Let's take a specific look at some of these situations:



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Mitch Marner

For what it's worth, I was talking to an agent recently who has nothing to do with the Marner negotiation, just an outsider opining, but he heard through the grapevine that "Toronto was trying the hardest at trying to get something done with Marner."

A comment which I shared with Dubas on Tuesday.

"I don't know where they would get that from necessarily," the Leafs GM said. "It's hard for me to answer that because I don't know exactly what every other team is doing or what every other team is doing with regards to their efforts to sign their players. I know how we've handled it, going back over a year ago in this case. Mitch is a spectacular, young player. He's a spectacular person. We want to have him here. We don't want to have him miss any days, period. So that's the way we've handled it and the amount of effort we've put into it."

Agent Darren Ferris has kept a low profile this offseason throughout the Marner talks and maintained that tact on Tuesday when I reached out.

"I wouldn't comment on the negotiations just for respect to the process," Ferris said.

Others sources suggest teams have talked to the Marner camp regarding an offer sheet. Frankly, if I were a team interested in Marner, I would try to trade for him instead.

And while Dubas wasn't going to get into specifics, obviously teams have phoned. But the Leafs clearly don't want to trade him.

"You know, you talk to every team about different things that come up and different things that are going on," Dubas said. "Anytime a player doesn't have a contract or has a suspected stalemate I think if the other GMs are doing their jobs and they're great at what they do, they're going to find out what's going on and whether there's a fit there."

"But that's not a real avenue that we've even remotely explored," the Leafs GM added. "It's our full intention that Mitch Marner will be a Toronto Maple Leaf for a very long time and that's everything we're working towards."

One narrative that has taken hold over the past year that I think Dubas would like to squash is this notion that while Marner might have wanted to sign a year ago, that the Leafs weren't interested because they wanted to get Nylander signed first.

Not the case, Dubas clarified.

"If we would have had the opportunity to sign Mitch or Auston or William early on to a deal that we thought would fit within the framework of what we were doing or they were willing to sign, for us there was no trying to delay it, there was no trying to push it down the road," Dubas said. "Going through all this, actually the first person once I took the job that I met with regarding any contract at all was Darren (Ferris), at the combine."

"I know that's been floated out there and said (Leafs not willing to sign Marner a year ago), but from our end of it, we don't look back and regret anything at all because we've just handled the situation as it's come."

So how does this end?

While the Leafs, I think, would much rather have Marner signed long term, I believe the idea of a three-year bridge deal has been broached by both sides. The question is, at what AAV? That's

where the problem still lies. Finding a number that works on a shorter deal.

Mikko Rantanen

In this situation, I believe both sides are further away on term rather than dollars.

Which is a theme for many of these current RFA negotiations. Just like Carolina would have wanted Aho for eight years instead of the five years they will get after matching the offer sheet from Montreal, the same is true for many of these negotiations.

"I prefer longer myself," Sakic said. "With our situation, we want to get Mikko done long term. More than the five years. We prefer long term and hopefully, we can work towards getting that accomplished that here."

On the flip side, again staying away from five years where the player walks himself into unrestricted free agency, the other solution is a shorter-term bridge deal which I think has also come up in talks between the Avs and Rantanen's agent Mike Liut. My sense is that they've exchanged offers and counter-offers but nothing close at this point.

Brayden Point

This is the one that surprises me the most. I think because of the culture established in Tampa with the contracts that Nikita Kucherov, Victor Hedman and Andrei Vasilevskiy signed, I had that feeling that Point might be the first of the high-end RFAs to ink a deal this summer.

I was wrong.

Both Tampa GM Julien BriseBois and Point's agent Gerry Johansson declined to comment on how talks were going. My sense, quite frankly, is that there haven't been that many discussions this summer between the sides. But that certainly should change now with the specter of camp around the corner.

Johansson, I'm told, is meeting with Point on Wednesday in Calgary to further strategize with his client.

Point had a hip procedure done after the season but it sounds like he's right on schedule in his recovery and should be ready for the start of the season.

Matthew Tkachuk

Again, the issue here is term. I think the Tkachuk camp led by Newport Sports would prefer five years while the Flames want to avoid that. I think there's been talk of shorter-term scenarios and also longer-term but again like most teams, avoiding five years where the players go straight to UFA is what this is about for the Flames.

And I'm not sure a whole lot has changed since the June draft when both sides met.

Therefore, I don't think it's any surprise that it's September and like many other RFAs, Tkachuk remains unsigned.

"I mean you'd certainly want everyone signed but it's not shocking, no," Treliving said on Tuesday. "And so, all you do, and it sounds boring and cliché, but you just keep working away at it. So that's what we plan on doing. These things take time. We haven't even started training camp yet. I always remain confident and positive that you'll get it put together. It's unique here with all the guys (around the NHL) that are there. But that doesn't necessarily change everyone's individual approach. You just keep working away at it."



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Patrik Laine

As I've said before, a bridge deal makes the most sense for me here. Laine, after struggling at times last season, should bet on himself with a couple of big years and come back for a mega-deal in a few seasons. The Jets could use the benefits of a bridge deal to make the cap work right now when their window to win is still open.

Both Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff and Laine's agent Liut declined to comment but it appears talks picked up last week. Which doesn't necessarily mean anything.

Brock Boeser

Like Point, I thought for whatever reason Boeser would have been done early, especially after Meier signed in San Jose. I think you can draw some comparisons between Meier and Boeser.

But it's still not done.

"We've been negotiating Brock's contract for over a year now, hopefully we can get a deal done before training camp or the start of the season," Boeser's agent Ben Hankinson wrote in an e-mail on Tuesday. "It's an exciting season ahead for Canucks fans and Brock doesn't want to miss anything."

Canucks GM Jim Benning remains hopeful.

"We've been working on this all summer and we're going to continue to work on it," Benning told me on Tuesday. "I'm hopeful that we can get something done here this next week and a half so he's here for the start of camp."

Meier signed for four years and a \$6-million AAV, he's still an RFA for one more year after his deal, although his final year salary is \$10 million which gives him a very nice qualifying offer position.

Again if I had to guess on what is holding up Boeser and the Canucks I would say mostly term. It's a theme throughout the league in these talks.

Zach Werenski

Status quo with the RFA Blue Jackets blueliner.

"No update, still confident it will get done before camp, that's all," Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen said on Tuesday.

I would have to guess term again is an issue in this one. No way the Jackets would want to let Werenski walk into his UFA status.

Judging from the way Columbus took a hard line in the past with Ryan Johansson and Josh Anderson in RFA negotiations, I can't see the Jackets giving in here.

These are only a handful of the RFAs that are still without a deal, what a month or two it's going to be on this front.

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The Athletic / NHL/NHLPA Rookie Orientation Program is an introduction to the pitfalls of being a professional athlete

By Scott Burnside Sep 3, 2019

In 2007, the NHL Players' Association and the NHL decided to help educate its young players as they transitioned from fresh-faced juniors and collegiate players to professional hockey players.

How to stay out of trouble. How to make sure they made the most of their lucrative salaries. How the league works and how to make the most of their careers.

Great idea and long overdue given that for previous generations it had been sink or swim for kids showing up in the NHL.

So for the first six years of the program, league and union officials met and discussed these weighty topics on the morning of the draft.

Great idea. Maybe not the best timing.

"The kids are just sitting there shaking, nervous, there's no chance in hell that this is going to stick with them," said Mathieu Schneider, longtime NHLer and current special assistant to NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr.

So seven years ago, with the completion of the current collective bargaining agreement, the league and the players' association decided that the Rookie Orientation Program deserved more resources and time.

Just two weeks ago close to 80 top young players, some of whom had played some NHL games last season and others who are expected to be fixtures on their respective teams in the coming months, descended on Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, Va., about 45 minutes outside Washington, D.C., for the seventh iteration of the ROP.

Over the two-and-a-half days, the young players mixed in some golf and some lighthearted moments provided by a Second City comedy troupe with in-depth discussions on a diverse range of topics designed to make their transition to the NHL a smooth one.

"They have the on-ice part of it down. The off-ice stuff sometimes you get blinders on as a professional athlete and trying to break into the NHL or any pro sport and you lose sight of everything else," said Schneider. "In the meantime, whether it's finances or guys' personal lives, relationships with their girlfriends, fiancés, wives, kids, all those things are important and there's an awful lot of information that gets thrown at these guys and the hope is they pick up a couple of different things that really resonate."

So, how important could all of this be?

Given some of the presentations, it's not a stretch to suggest that if these players take to heart what was being shared with them, it could save careers, if not lives.

Certainly that is the kind of somber message delivered by longtime NHLer and current director of player development for the Montreal Canadiens, Rob Ramage.

Ramage, as he has for the past several years, shared his story of the unthinkable. He was the driver in an accident that took the life of friend and former NHL player Keith Magnuson, as they were headed to an NHL alumni event. He told the young players, most between the ages of 18 and 22, the details of his conviction for impaired driving causing death and the almost year he spent behind bars.

Part of the challenge in putting on a program like the ROP is finding a way to make the topics resonate when discussing drinking and driving, drug use, performance-enhancing drugs, and dealing with the media and social media.



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But hearing directly from a man who played more than 1,000 NHL regular season games and won a Stanley Cup in Calgary in 1989, and then walked through the doors of a prison near Kingston, Ontario, having been responsible for the death of a close friend is as personal as it gets.

"It's very special," said Canadiens prospect Ryan Poehling, who was among the attendees at this year's event. "I've known Rob for a while coming from Montreal, he's their development guy, so got real close to him and it just shows how great of a guy he is to just open up about that and own up to that.

"So, to hear what he's been through and how he wishes he'd never have done it and I think just taking little pieces of advice from him is something that everyone should do. I mean it's not a joke. And people can say, 'oh, I've heard this three or four times,' but at the end of the day you can't hear it enough. These are things that are real-life that can change your life in literally a matter of minutes, so to just know that and have that reassurance from him to let you know what to do and what not to do is something you shouldn't take for granted."

In all, 13 former NHL players, many of whom work for the NHL or NHLPA in various capacities, were on hand to share their experiences, stories, advice or just casual conversation with players at the opposite end of the career arc.

Among those presenters whose story left a deep impression was Kevin Stevens, the two-time 50-goal scorer and two-time Stanley Cup champion with the Mario Lemieux-led Pittsburgh Penguins who saw drug addiction and alcohol abuse derail his career and leave his personal life in tatters.

Stevens is now a special assignment scout with the Penguins but also regularly shares his story of recovery.

Poehling, for one, remains stunned by how someone could go from scoring 190 goals in a four-year span to losing it all.

"I can't even imagine going from that to literally having the cops knock on your door or bang on your door," Poehling said. "I mean no one can imagine that."

The former St. Cloud State star whom the Canadiens selected 25th overall in the 2017 draft and who wowed Hab fans with a hat-trick in his NHL debut at the end of last season is no different than any of his colleagues who attended the ROP.

"Everyone right now, we're all young and we're about to head into our professional careers and you feel untouched," Poehling said. "And I think those are the kinds of stories that remind you that just because you're in this state of mind right now doesn't mean this can't happen to you. It's more of a reality check, and I think I took that to heart with him in particular."

Among the former players who had a hand in the various topics covered during the retreat was George Parros, the head of player safety for the NHL, explained the league's supplemental discipline system.

Andrew Ference and Jay Harrison presented on social media and player development.

Rob Zamuner shared information during the group sessions on finances.

Kevin Westgarth weighed in on media relations, and health and safety issues, while Joe Reekie spoke on concussions and the value of second opinions.

Because the young players so clearly respond to hearing from former players, it's been a priority to include as many former players in the ROP as possible.

"It's critical," said deputy NHL commissioner Bill Daly.

It's pretty simple. To hear from those players there is an automatic element of trust, Poehling said.

"It just makes it so much easier to pay attention," he said.

Shane Doan, who retired after the 2017 season with 1,540 NHL games to his credit and is currently working with the NHL's Hockey Operations department, was part of the opening presentation.

"He still resonates with these guys to a large degree," Daly said. "Everybody sits up and listens."

Doan joked that it took him literally years to learn some of the things that were being laid for the young players in a few days at the start of their careers.

In his early days in Winnipeg, he relied on the tutelage of older players like Kris King (who now also works in the NHL's hockey ops group), Teemu Selanne, Teppo Numminen and Keith Tkachuk. Now Doan watched as young players were learning about nutrition and financial advice, sometimes in advance of their first NHL game.

These players are going to be paid handsomely, "but you don't realize how quickly it can go and how short a span you have to earn it," Doan said.

That is an important lesson to learn.

Most of these players have dreamed the NHL for years. That dream is about the game and all that comes with it. Sometimes, though, having been suddenly dropped into the middle of the milieu, young people have a difficult time staying focused on the nature of their dream.

"You can't let the game become secondary," the longtime Arizona captain said.

What was shared in a number of the sessions in Virginia was a reminder that if players take care of the game, the game takes care of them, Doan added.

This year's ROP comes with an especially sobering back story.

Eighteen of the players who attended the ROP gathering were also part of the NHLPA's annual rookie showcase, including Poehling, No.1 overall pick Jack Hughes and his brother Quinn (the seventh-overall pick in 2018).

That showcase was held at the Washington Capitals' practice facility in Arlington, Va., where NHL star Evgeny Kuznetsov has been skating in preparation for the coming season. That's assuming NHL commissioner Gary Bettman rules that the talented center can take part in training camp and regular season games after Kuznetsov tested positive for cocaine at the World Championships last May.

Kuznetsov was seen in a video taken last season in Las Vegas with a group of people and an unidentified white powder on a table. Kuznetsov insisted that he'd never done drugs when the league and the Capitals investigated the background of the video in the spring shortly before his positive test.

It's believed Kuznetsov, who voluntarily entered the jointly operated NHL/NHLPA Substance Abuse and Behavioral Health program, will be able to return to the team when camp begins in



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less than two weeks. Still, the news of his four-year ban from international hockey and required interview with the NHL commissioner would have brought another real-life element to the ROP proceedings, even if it wasn't discussed formally.

Schneider said player privacy is critical to the success of the SABH program, which is why they wouldn't have addressed the Kuznetsov issue specifically. But the Kuznetsov situation was or should have been a reminder to the young players in attendance that vigilance in terms of being aware of your surroundings and the company you're keeping, and the decisions you make vis a vis drugs and alcohol can have long-term effects on your career.

Daly said Kuznetsov's situation was discussed more indirectly than directly.

"There's a lot of that messaging about making good decisions and not putting yourself in bad positions, including with respect to the use of drugs and alcohol," Daly said. "That point is made countless times ... from different people. I don't think you needed to use a specific player's circumstance to make that point and for it to get across."

The only time Kuznetsov actually came up was in some of the media training when the young players were role-playing how to respond to difficult questions about teammates or other players in a mock media situation. As in, how would you respond if you were asked about a teammate or other player being in a similar situation?

In the seven years that the league and the players' association have been helping to educate young players on the cusp of their careers, the format and make-up of the program has evolved.

The messages have changed to reflect changes in society.

For instance, there are separate sessions on dealing with the media and social media.

In the beginning, the league felt it was more prudent for players to avoid social media as much as possible.

"We've changed our position 180 degrees on that," Daly said.

Now it's accepted that properly handled social media helps a player's brand, helps the specific team's brand and big-picture the NHL profile.

"Virtually all of these kids are on social media," Daly noted.

The league and the players' union follow up with players after ROP, gauging which sessions were well-received and how adjustments might be made moving forward.

Still, there are some core issues that remain constant as things that young players need to be aware of, like domestic violence, the resources available to players and their families and the tools players can use to help defuse potentially explosive situations.

There is always a presentation explaining the jointly operated Substance Abuse and Behavioral Health program that has been helping players and their families who struggle with drug and alcohol dependency and mental health issues.

The financial component of ROP is also an important part of the itinerary.

Listening to financial experts, as well as former players talk about their own experiences and the financial end of being a pro player is important for those young players who are mature enough to understand the finite element of being a hockey player.

"Coming from college, you make no money and all of a sudden hopefully now you're playing in the NHL and you make a lot," Poehling explained. "But you think you're rich now but you've got to look at the long-term aspects of the whole thing."

If a good career is 10 years that still puts these young men in their early 30s when done.

"I feel like when I'm done with hockey I don't want to feel like my life's over. I want to feel like there's a new beginning and you have time to adjust to that new lifestyle, so that's where the financial thing was very helpful for myself," Poehling said.

The ROP isn't the only forum in which players are exposed to this kind of information. Presumably players and their families have been searching out answers to the kinds of questions posed at ROP for some time now.

Many player agents, especially those who are part of larger organizations, offer similar expertise as part of off-season camps and get-togethers.

But the ROP ensures that players from all teams are exposed to what is critical information.

Each team submits a list of two to three players, and the league assembles the list of invitees from that list. Barring special circumstances, the expectation is that an invitation means the player will attend ROP.

The event is "just one touchpoint," Schneider said.

"We need to continually repeat the messaging when we get a chance, when we get in front of these guys."

At the end of the day, it's always difficult to put a quantitative element on whether something like the ROP works.

"It's not one plus two equals three kind of math," Daly acknowledged.

But there is a way of assessing the NHL landscape and then asking whether for the most part the players in a league that is getting consistently and persistently younger and younger is functioning the way owners, general managers, coaches and the players themselves would like it to function in terms of being seen as a positive entity.

"We've always been fortunate, very fortunate with the sport," Daly said. "Our guys are really good. Really good in their communities, really good with their teams and their teammates, really good with their behavior as a general manner. You hope that continues. You hope that they get the right messages and take away the right information and continue to represent the sport and the league and their teams in a first-class manner. And certainly the messages they get here can help contribute to that."

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Ten intriguing CBA ideas the NHL could borrow from other sports (but probably won't)

By Sean McIndoe Sep 3, 2019

The NHL's CBA is making headlines again and for a change, the news might actually be good. The league announced last week



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that they'll decline their option to reopen the agreement next year, and there's a chance that the NHLPA will decide to do the same. If so, what had seemed like an inevitable 2020 lockout would be avoided, or at least pushed back until 2022.

But whether the next CBA comes in a year or down the road, it probably won't represent a radical change in the way the league does business. The 2005 deal that ushered in a hard cap was quite literally a game-changer, one that reshaped just about everything about how the league operated. But the 2013 deal didn't change all that much. And even as both sides eye each other warily and stake out their PR ground, there doesn't seem to be much appetite to make major changes to a system that seems to be working reasonably well.

That's almost certainly a good thing, at least from the perspective of fans who just want to see a new deal get done without yet another lockout. But it's always possible that one side (or both) might decide to ask for bigger changes. And they wouldn't have to look far for inspiration, because the three largest North American pro leagues could all offer up some ideas from their current agreements.

Today, let's imagine a world where the current CBA needed more than minor tinkering. Here are ten CBA ideas that the NHL could borrow from the NBA, NFL and MLB, and how they'd impact the sport.

We'll start with the big one ...

No guaranteed contracts

Borrowed from: NFL

How it works: The NFL is the only major league where contracts aren't guaranteed, so teams can essentially walk away from a deal whenever they want. If a big star signs a five-year extension for mega-dollars and then doesn't live up to the deal through the first year, his team can just cut him and move on. (It's a little more complicated than that, but we'll stay out of the weeds here.)

What it would mean for the NHL: Armageddon, probably. Whenever you talk about worst-case scenarios for NHL labor talks, this is the one demand the league could make that could lead to another 2004-05 type of shutdown. The players would have no choice but to push back as hard as possible. Most CBA demands that either side could make would be the equivalent of face washes in a scrum; this one would empty both benches.

But let's pretend it happened. What would a new NHL without guaranteed contracts look like? Not necessarily like you think it would, because many fans don't really understand how the NFL system works.

While it's true that NFL contracts aren't guaranteed, that doesn't mean that terminating them is painless. NFL players (and their agents) know that they don't have long-term security, so they make sure to get as much of their total as possible through signing bonuses and other guaranteed money. It's not unusual for most of the money in a big NFL contract to be guaranteed on day one. NHL players would demand the same security.

Most of the money isn't all of the money, and the NFL's system still tilts heavily in favor of the teams over the players – especially the ones who aren't big stars and can't insist on huge bonuses. But cutting a player on a long-term deal can have serious cap implications, often creating big chunks of immediate dead money. Hockey fans dreaming of a world where their favorite team could just painlessly wash their hands of all of its worst signings won't find the answer in the NFL's system.

And remember, nonguaranteed contracts can cut both ways. The NHL's ironclad deals mean that, for example, Connor McDavid is locked into his current eight-year contract, even as inferior players eventually blow by him with better deals. If contracts weren't guaranteed, he could eventually demand that the Oilers tear up his deal and give him something better, the way that many NFL stars do. Back before the 2005 CBA, the NHL used to see big-name holdouts with some frequency, but they were essentially eliminated once contracts couldn't be renegotiated by either side.

Will we ever see it?: Let's hope not. Even though the NFL offers more security than you might think and empowers their biggest stars, its system is still stacked against the majority of players. Given everything we know about risks to players' long-term health, nobody should be rooting for a massive work stoppage just to take away more of their security.

That covers the elephant in the room. But there are other ideas that the NHL could borrow from the competition ...

Contracts with option years

Borrowed from: MLB, NFL and NBA

How it works: A player's contract can include an additional year at an agreed-on price that only triggers if the team or player decides to activate it.

All of the big three leagues feature options in some form. In the NFL, every first-round pick gets a four-year deal with a team option for a fifth that must be picked up after the third season. NBA contracts can feature both player and team options; star player like Kawhi Leonard and Kevin Durant became free agents by declining their player options this summer. MLB contracts can feature either player or team options, with team options typically including a buyout paid to the player if a team doesn't pick it up. (MLB deals have also seen mutual options, which are weird but could occasionally make sense for both sides.)

What it would mean for the NHL: More flexibility for both sides. Team options could reduce the risk of certain signings, while player options could give players more control of their future. That works both ways; team options mean less security for players, and player options can create headaches for their teams. And you could add a layer of complexity by allowing options that become guaranteed based on a player's performance.

Will we ever see it?: We used to. The NHL used to have had option years, back before the 2005 CBA. But they were eliminated in that deal, making the league an outlier among North American pro sports. It's not unthinkable that we could see them return, although it's not a subject that seems to come up often these days.

Larry Bird exception

Borrowed from: The NBA. I'm guessing the name might have been a hint.

How it works: It's complicated and comes in different flavors, but basically Bird Rights allows teams to go over the salary cap to re-sign their own players. It's a way to promote continuity and encourage star players to stick around. Teams can also offer their own players more money than they could get in free agency, where the max contract system limits how much the biggest stars can sign for.

What it would mean for the NHL: Fewer cap headaches, for one. If the NHL had something like Bird Rights, a team like the



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Lightning could go over the salary cap to re-sign Brayden Point. The rule would help the best teams stay together, and lessen (but not eliminate) the pressure on Cup-winning teams like the Blackhawks or Penguins to dismantle their rosters.

(In theory, an NHL version of the rule could also follow the NBA model by allowing teams to exceed the maximum 20 percent cap hit on their own players. But since nobody gets close to that in today's league, it wouldn't really matter.)

Will we ever see it?: Fans seem to like the idea; nobody wants to see their favorite players leave town because of cap constraints. The problem is that this sort of rule moves your system from a hard cap to a softer version, and the NHL has never shown any inclination to head in that direction. Unless that changes, the additional year teams are currently allowed to offer their own players is probably as close as we'll get.

Draft pick compensation for free agents

Borrowed from: We're looking at the MLB system, although the NFL has a version as well.

How it works: Up until a few years ago, teams that lost UFAs who'd received qualifying offers were eligible for draft pick compensation up to a first-round pick from the team that signed the player away. The players didn't like that, because it depressed the market – teams weren't willing to offer as much to a free agent if they knew they'd also lose a high draft pick. The 2017 CBA changed the system, with teams now receiving picks from the league in a special round between the first and second, while the signing teams surrender lower picks than they previously had. Still, the basic concept remains – lose a star free agent, get a draft pick as compensation.

What it would mean for the NHL: Potentially, more players hitting the free-agent market. These days, not many top players hit the open market, although that's been changing. Part of that is because teams are so reluctant to let players walk for nothing. But if a team knew they'd get a decent pick as compensation, they may be more willing to let players walk. In theory, that could open up the market and make July 1 more interesting.

Of course, that would also mean less action at the trade deadline. Teams wouldn't feel as much pressure to rent out their expiring deals, and we'd probably see more bubble teams take a Blue Jackets-style approach and hold onto their assets.

Will we ever see it?: Longtime readers know that I'm all in on conjuring up drafts picks to juice a sagging market. I don't get the sense that the NHL feels the same, although this is one of the few entries on our list that would make a GM's job easier, so there's at least a chance they could push for it someday.

Then again, maybe you don't want to see more star players hitting the free-agent market. If not, there's an option for that too ...

The franchise tag

Borrowed from: The NFL

How it works: It gets a little complicated, but the simplified explanation is that NFL teams can designate one pending UFA as their franchise player, retaining their rights on a one-year contract that pays the player the average of the five highest salaries at his position.

What it would mean for the NHL: A team like the Blue Jackets could have kept Artemi Panarin or Sergei Bobrovsky away from the UFA market. The Islanders could have kept John Tavares.

And the Senators wouldn't have been under as much pressure to trade Erik Karlsson or Mark Stone, because they would have had a way to ensure one of them had to stay.

Will we ever see it?: Doubtful. NFL players hate it, and we've recently seen star players sit out entire seasons rather than play under the franchise tag. This feels like it would be a non-starter for the players, and given how lukewarm the UFA market already is, it's hard to imagine the league pushing hard for it.

Compensation-free offer sheets

Borrowed from: The NBA

How it works: At a high level, NBA offer sheets work a lot like the NHL version, with one major difference: There's no compensation. If another team targets your RFA, you have the right to match. But if you don't, they walk, and you don't get any picks in return.

What it would mean for the NHL: I've made the argument in the past that the problem with the NHL's offer sheet market is that the compensation levels are too low, not too high. But dropping them to zero would almost certainly mean more offer sheets being signed. Granted, that's a low bar, but it's fair to expect we'd see more than one every few years if the league borrowed the NBA's system. And while you might assume that every offer sheet would be instantly matched if teams knew there was no compensation coming the other way, that isn't the case in the NBA.

Will we ever see it?: It doesn't feel as impossible as it would have a few years ago. Back then, we would have said that the RFA system was working exactly the way the NHL and its teams wanted it to, by artificially holding down the salaries of players in their prime. But that's not really the case anymore. Would the NHL want to open the door to more RFA movement? Probably not. Would it be willing to offer that if it meant a concession from the players somewhere else? We might find out.

Sliding scale for rookie salaries

Borrowed from: NBA and NFL (and sort of MLB)

How it works: Like the NHL, the NBA and NFL have limits on how much a rookie can be paid. But unlike the NHL, those limits come from a sliding scale based on where the player was drafted.

Meanwhile, baseball doesn't have quite the same concept because players rarely go straight from the draft to the majors, so salary isn't immediately an issue. But signing bonuses are, and those are largely based on draft position.

What it would mean for the NHL: Players like McDavid and Auston Matthews and (presumably) Jack Hughes would go from being ridiculous bargains in the early years of their deal to merely great bargains.

Will we ever see it?: To some extent, the NHL already covers this through the rookie bonus system, which makes sure that elite young players can make more than the near-minimum that most rookies get. Would they go further? I'm not sure they'd need to, and the NHLPA is typically more focused on veterans than on incoming rookies who technically aren't members yet. The NFL only added its system in 2011 after rookie deals started getting out of control, which is hardly the case in hockey. (And it's worth pointing out that some see the NFL system as an overcorrection.)

10-day contracts



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Borrowed from: NBA

How it works: Pretty much how it sounds. NBA teams can use 10-day deals to either plug a short-term roster hole or give a player a tryout and see if he fits in the lineup.

What it would mean for the NHL: You know those PTOs we see during training camp? A lot like that, but during the season.

Will we ever see it?: The NHL wouldn't necessarily need these sorts of deals since unlike the NBA, they have minor league teams they can use to plug temporary roster issues. They can sign players to two-way deals to address short-term needs, at least as long as the waiver wire cooperates. Still, some veteran players might prefer to sign short deals without committing to a full season that might include AHL time, so some variation on the concept could be plausible someday.

Cap hits that can vary year-to-year

Borrowed from: The NFL

How it works: In the NHL, a player's cap hit will almost always be the same each year of his contract. (The exceptions include rookie and veteran contracts that include bonuses, players who sign during a season and a rare case involving players over 40 that's no longer in the CBA and now only applies to Zdeno Chara.) That's true even if his actual salary and bonuses rise and fall over the life of the deal, as is usually the case.

But in the NFL, a player's cap hit can fluctuate wildly because they're based on what a player earns in that given year, and how the cap hit for their bonuses have been allocated. Combined with the ability to renegotiate non-guaranteed deals, that gives NFL teams the ability to massage their cap situation by shifting charges and reworking contracts to create more space.

What it would mean for the NHL: A lot more flexibility for teams, especially those up against the cap. Is that a good thing?

It depends on your perspective. As a fan, you'd probably like it, at least when your team was the one benefitting. But the league might argue that a less flexible cap makes teams accountable for their decisions and prevents them from buying their way out of mistake (or making a bad situation worse by kicking the can down the road).

Will we ever see it?: I wouldn't be surprised. The league has had a hard cap for 14 years now and compared to the NFL and NBA, the NHL's system seems almost simplistic. At some point, you have to figure we'll see some season-to-season variance, even if that doesn't look exactly like the NFL's system. Would it let teams skirt the hard cap more than the league would like? Maybe, but they already do that using various LTIR loopholes and shady trades. Maybe some NFL-style flexibility would be simpler.

A luxury tax

Borrowed from: The NBA and MLB

How it works: The league sets a limit on how much teams can spend. But rather than that being a hard cap, it's simply a threshold that triggers increasing penalties for teams that exceed it. It's up to the franchise to decide whether they're willing to pay the price to overspend and for how long.

What it would mean for the NHL: The big markets would be able to spend past the cap, at least occasionally. In theory that's a competitive advantage, one that could shift us back towards the pre-2005 days when richer franchises could hoard talent. Those big markets tend to also be the ones that generate the most

revenue, so seeing them succeed could mean a healthier league overall. But fans of smaller market teams would be left wondering if they really had a chance to compete with the big spenders.

Will we ever see it?: Not according to the NHL, which has made it clear that it wants to be a hard cap league. There are a lot of strong arguments in favor of a soft cap/luxury tax model and many smart people have made that case. But when it comes to the NHL, those conversations feel entirely theoretical. For now, at least, the league loves its cost certainty and doesn't seem to have any interest in anything other than a hard cap.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.04.2019

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Kyle Dubas on Marner talks: 'I'm very optimistic'

Luke Fox | September 3, 2019

Refreshed from a family summer vacation to Hawaii, Kyle Dubas exemplified Tuesday's post-Labour Day, back-to-work spirit.

As he made the media rounds and appeared in lengthy sit-downs with both national sports networks, the Toronto Maple Leafs GM sounded enthusiastic about the upcoming campaign — save for that "one outstanding item" on what began as a rather cumbersome off-season to-do list.

In listening to more than an hour's worth of question-fielding, the main takeaway we glean is that the bridge deal is the most likely path for Mitch Marner and the Maple Leafs to escape the troubled waters separating the partners from a deal.

"I'm hopeful that we're closer by virtue that they know where we're at, and we know where they stand," Dubas said on Tim and Sid, reminding that the goal is not only to get his restricted free agent into the opening-night lineup but on next Thursday's charter to St. John's, where the Leafs kick off training camp.

"I'm very optimistic. That's 100 per cent our hope."

Dubas explained that the difference between Marner's stalemate as opposed to William Nylander's at this time last September was that Nylander was dead set on a long-term contract.

Nylander became "entrenched" in long-term security, according to Dubas, whereas Marner's situation is different.

A nice raise now. Knock the next one out of the park once Toronto's cap flexibility improves and the league ceiling is raised by gambling revenue and the next U.S. network windfall.

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Dubas says most term lengths are on the table from the Leafs' perspective. So it may be simpler for the sides to find their common ground on a two- or three-year bridge.

Some more reasons for optimism: Despite obvious fatigue with this unsolved issue — the GM mentioned multiple times that he first broached extension talks with Marner's agent, Darren Ferris, way back at the 2018 Combine — Dubas took the high road in



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praising Marner the person, stressing Toronto's position has always been to hold on to the player for the duration of his NHL life.

Ever consider a trade during this summer of uncertainty?

"It's certainly not something we want to explore, and we haven't," Dubas said.

Sure, "a few" opposing managers called to kick tires, but it was more along the lines of, "Would you ever consider moving him?" And: "Well, if you ever get to that point..." Nothing serious.

Dubas also said he has gotten no sense from Ferris that Marner wants to be moved and would be "shocked" if a few of these elite RFAs haven't put pen to paper by this time next week.

While the hard numbers being offered back and forth remain a guessing game, Dubas was wise to tackle the elephant in the room head-on Tuesday (and Ferris wise, too, to steer clear of reporters' requests), getting the jump on training camp speculation.

If there was any shade thrown, it was at the notion, explored by Camp Marner, that the Leafs' leading scorer is considering training over in Switzerland instead.

"I don't worry about that," Dubas said. "I don't think we're going to be moved by the Zurich Lions, frankly. No offence to the Zurich Lions."

The time for playing games is almost up.

Soon, there will games to be played.

Here are some more takeaways from Dubas's media tour on Tuesday.

- More than three-and-a-half years have passed since the Maple Leafs had a captain. That could change this season.

"We'll see. I think a lot about it," Dubas said. "I'm a lot more close to saying yes now than a year ago on that front."

The heat endured by the club's most recent captain, Dion Phaneuf, has cautioned the current regime into ensuring it makes the right choice. Dubas stressed he's looking for "someone calm and stoic and ready at all times." Someone prepared to face the daily wall of media in a demanding market.

To these ears, that description aligns most with the two alternate captains remaining from 2018-19: Morgan Rielly, 25, or John Tavares, 28. The latter served as the Islanders' captain prior to joining the Leafs last season and has the longest contract on the team.

"We're fortunate," said Dubas, trying to not tip his hand. "We do have a number of guys who can fill that role now or in time."

- In wooing free agent Jason Spezza to a one-year, league-minimum contract, Dubas was careful not to promise the veteran too large of an on-ice role. The Leafs were up-front about getting Spezza to buy in to the role of fourth-line centre, with the flexibility to slide up the lineup in case of injury (and, presumably, keeping William Nylander on the wing) or in special situations.

- Dubas did not anticipate the swirl of suspicion that surrounded his non-guarantee of head coach Mike Babcock's return on locker cleanout day. The GM suggested that, in the future, he might choose to simply not answer the question. It's Dubas's philosophy that it is reckless to make such impactful decisions when the wound of losing is so fresh. With time to reflect, Dubas believes that although the end result was the same in '18 and '19

— a seven-game Round 1 loss to Boston — Babcock's Leafs did take a step and were much closer to winning that series the second time around.

- The GM's conservative estimate is that roster players Travis Dermott (shoulder) and Zach Hyman (knee) will both miss October as they rehabilitate from surgery. Despite the obvious lineup holes those injuries create, the Maple Leafs will not risk re-injury. April is the month that matters. As a result of Dermott's rehab, Dubas is calling for a "heck of a battle" for the fifth, sixth and seventh D-man slots on opening night.

- As fun as it is for fans and media types to debate the length of the Maple Leafs' window to realistically vie for a Cup, Dubas maintained there is never any discussion internally about the length of that window.

"It's so hard to predict," said Dubas, citing the seven-year gap between the Crosby-era Penguins' championships and the delayed breakthroughs of Washington and St. Louis.

The GM is building toward "as many chances as possible to contend," and with the unconventional likelihood of tying up more than \$30 million annually on just three forwards, the onus falls on Dubas to continually fill out his roster with affordable veterans (Spezza), under-the-radar steals (Tyler Ennis), European imports (Yegor Korshkov) and develop entry-level studs through the Marlies system (Rasmus Sandin).

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.04.2019

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TSN.CA / Rielly: 'We want Mitch here'

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Nine days before the official opening of NHL training camps, more than a dozen Maple Leafs' regulars marked the unofficial end of summer at the team's informal skates on Tuesday.

While unsigned restricted free agent Mitch Marner wasn't among them, his presence – or lack thereof – loomed over those eager to see his situation resolved.

"We want Mitch here. We want him to be a part of camp. We want him to be involved," said Morgan Rielly at the Leafs' practice facility. "But he's doing what he thinks he has to do, and it is what it is. All we can do is just worry about training camp. We all have confidence that he's going to be here at some point, but for now we're just going to work hard to get ready."

It's been more than four months since Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas declared that the completion of a new Marner deal was the team's "top priority" heading into another long off-season.

To that end, Dubas has maintained a constant dialogue with Marner's agent Darren Ferris throughout the summer, including conversations late last month that TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger reported as "productive," but Toronto's top point-getter the last two seasons remains on the outside looking in.

Rielly said he's spoken with Marner "a little bit" since Toronto was ousted from the postseason, but kept their interactions light.



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"You just want to support him, just let him know you're there," Rielly said. "[See if] he has any questions. It's more or less just a friendship, talking and catching up; it's not really about business all the time."

Like many of his teammates, Rielly is an old pro at fielding questions about an RFA stalemate. This time last year, it was William Nylander on his way to not being signed by the start of training camp. The impasse between player and team lasted until minutes before the Dec. 1 deadline, when they agreed on a six-year, \$45 million pact.

Missing all of camp and then two months of the season significantly impacted Nylander and he spent the rest of the season shuffling between linemates en route to a 27-point showing in 54 outings. The Leafs could face a similar outcome with Marner should a deal not be reached quickly.

"I think it's different every time," Rielly said of parallels between the two wingers' situations. "But [Marner's] not the only guy doing it. All we can really worry about is getting ready for camp and being prepared."

Marner is one of a number of prominent RFAs yet to come to terms on a new contract, a list that includes Patrik Laine, Kyle Connor, Mikko Rantanen, Brayden Point, Brock Boeser and Charlie McAvoy. Not unlike those other players, Marner, 22, has been a backbone to his team's success recently, posting 163 points (48 goals, 115 assists) in 164 games for Toronto since the start of the 2017 season.

"I don't care what all those other guys are doing. I care about Mitch," shrugged Rielly. "He's a teammate and we want him to get that done and there's confidence that he will," Rielly said. "But it's interesting that this [lack of signings] is happening because it hasn't happened like this in the past. But it's not anything that I can control or anyone else can."

Seeing Marner's negotiations stretch into September (and possibly beyond) though has been a much less shocking development for most than the fact that Jake Gardiner remains unsigned. The unrestricted free agent defenceman projected to be a hot commodity on the open market when free agency began in July, but after spending the entirety of his eight-year career thus far with the Leafs, he hasn't found a new home.

"[I'm] pretty surprised," admitted Rielly, who was not only Gardiner's roommate in Toronto for years but also a groomsman at his wedding last summer. "It's not the way I saw it unfolding, but it is what it is. I'm sure he'll get something done. But that's all I have. I don't have any information. You just want the best for him."

Dubas didn't shut the door completely on Gardiner possibly rejoining the Leafs when he spoke with TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie on Tuesday. But given the team's limited cap space is mostly allocated for Marner, a reunion may not make sense.

"I wouldn't say it's a zero per cent chance," Dubas said. "And I don't mean to put this on anything else, but until we have a solution to the situation with Mitch...I think at that point we would go back to Pat [Brisson, Gardiner's agent] and Jake and say, perhaps, here's what we have. And it may be enticing, it may not be."

As it is, Rielly has several new teammates to get acquainted with on the blueline. He was paired with newcomer Cody Ceci at Tuesday's skate, who was traded from Ottawa for Nikita Zaitsev on July 1. Tyson Barrie, acquired via trade from Colorado for Nazem Kadri that same day, skated with Jake Muzzin.

Rielly and Ceci have played together before, for Team Canada at the U-18 in 2011, and the Leafs' veteran is hoping the next few days leading up to training camp gives the entire new-look defence a chance to start gelling.

"It's exciting to see new faces," Rielly said. "We have a lot of confidence in the group that we have and having new faces is good. There's a good energy and guys are excited. We're looking forward to it."

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TSN.CA / Kyle Dubas: Toronto Maple Leafs hopeful, continuing dialogue with Mitch Marner camp

7-8 minutes

With training camp a week away, TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie went one-on-one with Toronto Maple Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas to discuss the latest with restricted free agent Mitch Marner, the team captaincy and whether or not Mike Babcock enters the season on a short leash. Here are a few parts of the conversation that stood out.

What is the latest on Mitch Marner and the negotiations? That's all Leafs fans want to know.

"Yeah, we've continued to have dialogue with Darren [Ferris, Marner's agent] as recently as last week. I think I would feel a little more anxious or perhaps look back and wonder whether we should have done anything different, but I think everybody in the league with these types of restricted free agents are in the exact same spot. The guys who are mentioned all the time, but even if you peel it back a level below and even the guys who aren't mentioned all the time, they aren't signed either.

There really hasn't been a lot of movement in that market since July 1 when [Timo] Meier signed and when [Sebastian] Aho came off the board, so I don't know how it will play out here. I would expect – in looking at it and looking at the history of these things – that some of it will start to shake loose and we're certainly hopeful and we'll continue to work towards having [Marner] be one of those players that signs in the coming week here."

Training camp opens on Sept. 13. Do you think Mitch Marner will be signed and in St. John's?

"It's certainly our hope and our goal. I don't think we want anybody to miss any day or training camp, period. So we'll continue to work towards that and remain hopeful. As I've said throughout, I'm optimistic about it and we lived through it last year. We saw the effect of a player who missed training camp, missed exhibition, missed the first two months of the season and it's tough. It's tough to expect that player is just going to jump back in and be at the level that we expect – especially at the pay that they've previously earned from their previous seasons. And then when that doesn't work well, then criticism flows in and it makes it even tougher.

So that's our hope and our goal and I'm sure every team in the league with these types of players is in that same spot. You want your whole team there for training camp. We're going to have some guys missing from injury, which we knew from before and



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you can plan for that and be ready for that, but we hope everybody else is there.”

Will there be a captain for the Toronto Maple Leafs this season?

“We’ll see. I think it’s always something that I have been very patient about and I think some people would say slow or too slow to do because the Toronto Maple Leafs need a captain. And I think last year, going through the year in this position rather than in the assistant GM position, it really allowed me to see the different qualities that are going to be needed in that role – how the person conducts themselves every day and really the fact that the person really needs to be present and ready every day to deal with the things that come along with it.

It’s not to say that [being the captain] in other markets carries less prestige, I just think that it’s different here in that the player goes out and serves as the voice of the team to a strong media contingent pretty much day in and day out. They can’t take any days off from it, they can’t hide from it. And I think just needing somebody who is calm and stoic and ready at all times. We’ve got some great candidates in there and I think that’s the second part of it. Once accepting that you do want to have a captain of the team to serve as the central figure, we’re fortunate that we have a few players that can fill that void and then it’s trying to determine what’s best for the future of those players and for the group.”

At the end of the season there was a little bit of a delayed vote of confidence that fed into the narrative that you didn’t hire Mike Babcock and he’s not your guy. As you go into this season there’s all sorts of talk about Leaf fans saying ‘He’s got to be on a short leash.’ And quite aside from whatever the dynamic might be between the general manager and the head coach, the mere fact that the team’s lost in back-to-back first rounds against Boston that there’s a sense that this is the year that the coach needs to make something happen. What’s your reaction to all that kind of talk?

“I think in the future I just won’t answer at the press conference in terms of a day after the season ends and I still feel that same way. I hadn’t had a review from Brendan [Shanahan] and from our owners about the job that I had done, so I’m more patient and don’t like to give anything one way or the other the day after something is fresh.

I just think it’s a poor way to give – it’s a poor way to evaluate anything is to do it right when the event is just ended and not reflect on it, not have time to go back through the year. So I understand why it maybe created some of the action that it did, but it wasn’t my intention by any stretch of the imagination and you go back through the year and you look at it and we’ve had back-to-back 100 point seasons and last year we got off to a great start to the season and in the second half of the year we faced our challenges. But I think if you look at the two playoff series, I know we lost in seven games in both of them. I think they were very different series.

I thought the year before, you know the first two games in Boston and then even the fifth game which we won, we were badly outplayed at times in the series. I think this year, if you want to evaluate it solely on how the season ended in both years, you can look at the point total which was a little bit less, [but] you can look at the way that we played in that series against Boston and I thought we were much better this season. We had the chance coming home to win the series and got the lead early and just couldn’t stick with it and Game 7 we didn’t play overly well, but I thought overall it was a better series than the year before just in terms of how close we were to them and whether we were the

better team in a certain number of games or not. It was a series between two very close teams.”

Here is the full sitdown interview:

Dubas discusses the Marnier negotiations, summer changes, and much more

Maple Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas sits down with Bob McKenzie to chat about the ongoing Mitch Marnier contract negotiations, pressure on head coach Mike Babcock, his excitement heading into training camp, and much more.

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1151690 Websites

TSN.CA / Pressure building in Winnipeg after quiet summer

Travis Yost

At the end of the 2018-19 season, the Winnipeg Jets turned their attention to what general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff called the busiest off-season of his tenure.

Yet no team – for now, anyway – has had a quieter summer than the Jets.

It’s a fascinating situation in Winnipeg right now. The Jets have every reason to focus their efforts internally – taking care of the eight restricted free agents alone (including Patrik Laine, Kyle Connor, Andrew Copp, Jacob Trouba (traded), Nathan Beaulieu, Joe Morrow, Laurent Brossoit and Eric Comrie) is a mountain of work.

But the two biggest names in Laine and Connor are still without contracts, and, at least in Laine’s case, everything is quiet. The last we heard from Laine, he seemed prepared for anything – including the mounting possibility of a trade to another team.

In many ways, the Laine contract negotiation represents the real summer of 2019 for Winnipeg. Laine is a tremendously talented player, but the on-ice results just weren’t there in the 2018-19 season. There are serious reservations about where his defensive game is right now and how much of that limits the team’s overarching performance. This is a 21-year-old with three consecutive 30-plus goal seasons to start his NHL career on a competitive team, yet there is a legitimate question about the prospect of a trade and whether or not it would make Winnipeg better.

Despite the gory defensive numbers last year, I’m still quite bullish on Laine as a player. It’s just extremely difficult to find players who can shoot the puck as well as he can, and his comparables in this area include names like Steven Stamkos, Ilya Kovalchuk, and Alexander Ovechkin.

The question I have, though: if the Jets just extend the rest of their restricted free agents (including the aforementioned Laine and Connor) and remain inactive elsewhere, is that a satisfactory summer?

I think patience is a virtue when it comes to roster building. But we are talking about a Winnipeg team who inexplicably cratered last year. By the time the playoffs rolled around, they hardly felt like a challenge for any other playoff team, let alone the likes of the St. Louis Blues. With no significant personnel changes and



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head coach Paul Maurice coming back for his seventh season, is that enough?

It's important to underscore just how bad things turned last season for Winnipeg, especially in the context of their summer run-it-back strategy. Consider a 20-game average of their underlying performance over the last three seasons, and pay specific attention to the back-half of last year:

You expect slight bounce in performance over the course of a regular season – even elite teams like the Tampa Bay Lightning can go through stretches where play slips, and the team starts either struggling offensively or bleeding goals defensively, or a combination of the two. (Tampa Bay had one heck of a first-round series in last season's playoffs to prove this!)

The problem with Winnipeg though is their slide lasted the majority of the season. At some point you have to lower expectations and accept that performance is the new norm.

We talked about Winnipeg as a possible Stanley Cup contender in 2017-18, and there was still some belief the team could compete in that realm last season. But it's a real problem when you are only turning 45 per cent of the shots in your favour. When you adjust for shot quality by way of expected goals, Winnipeg actually looked worse than the shot numbers would indicate.

So without a major – or really even minor – player acquisition and no change to the coaching staff, where should Winnipeg fans place their hope? The starting point is that normal roster attrition (like letting Tyler Myers walk in favour of some younger talent on the blueline) will have a positive impact. That would also include the growth and development of the team's younger players whose peak performance years are still ahead, led by the likes of Laine, Connor, Jack Roslovic, Nikolaj Ehlers, et al.

But the one critical area that Winnipeg needs to address immediately? Their top units – the team's first two lines and top blueline pairing – need to return to form. Last year, most of Winnipeg's problems were actually at the top of the lineup. The depth of the Winnipeg lineup outplayed their weaker competition for the majority of the year; the same cannot be said for the Mark Scheifele or Bryan Little lines:

Not only was the majority of the playing roster last year in the red, some of the most notable deviations were from the team's best players. The team's impact forwards – including Blake Wheeler, Scheifele, Connor, Laine, and Little – were all in the red, and in some cases considerably so. Add that to an entire blueline that was treading water for most of the year, and you have a real problem.

Winnipeg still has a very formidable roster and the Central Division, though extremely competitive, isn't as daunting as it once was. That might be why the Jets front office felt comfortable giving this lineup one more shot. It's pretty uncommon to see such a talented lineup with a track record of producing fall completely off the wayside, and I don't think that it's unreasonable to make one more bet on the core of this group to drive Winnipeg back to the top of the Central.

That said, the pressure is on – for both the players and the coaching staff. If the opening of the 2019-20 regular season looks like the last 60 games of 2018-19, heads are going to roll. Expectations are high and this team needs to deliver.

Data via Natural Stat Trick

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YAHOO SPORTS / John Tortorella 'really pissed' with the free agents that left Blue Jackets this summer

Stan Temming

The Columbus Blue Jackets quickly became one of the biggest stories in hockey last season.

After making a number of deals at the trade deadline in February and going 7-3-0 down the stretch to nab the second wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference, the Jackets found themselves facing a mighty foe in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. The fact the Tampa Bay Lightning had put together one of the best regular seasons in recent memory didn't cause the Blue Jackets to shudder, though.

If anything, Columbus embraced it on its way to a shocking sweep of the Presidents' Trophy winners. While they'd go on to fall in six games to the Boston Bruins in the second round, the Blue Jackets proved they're capable of beating just about anyone with that roster.

And that's the rub for head coach John Tortorella. After leading the team to its first playoff-series win in franchise history, Torts watched as several of his star players marched out the door this summer once free agency opened up.

"I respect them all," he said in a recent interview with Aaron Portzline of The Athletic. "But I don't want to hear 'I want to win' when it's right f---ing here. I respect them, but I'm really pissed. It was right there, where we were really progressing... I think the players respect them, respect the rights they had to do what they did. But I'm pissed, too, just like the players. I'm saying, 'Hell with them, we want to be here, let's get it together and get going.'"

It's an understandable reaction from a man known for his passion and emotion.

In just a few hours, Torts lost his team's top regular season point producer (Artemi Panarin), starting goaltender (two-time Vezina Trophy winner Sergei Bobrovsky) and second-best playoff scorer (Matt Duchene). On top of that, Ryan Dzingel — a solid secondary scorer — inked a new deal with the Carolina Hurricanes less than two weeks after the previous three joined their new organizations.

The departures have left a number of gigantic holes in Tortorella's lineup that simply cannot be ignored. There will be plenty of questions up front and between the pipes as the upcoming campaign approaches. However, there shouldn't be any questions about what will be fuelling his squad in 2019-20.

"We still made a step in the right direction (last season). That doesn't change because we lose some players," he said. "They're really good players, but that doesn't change our mindset as far as how we feel about ourselves..."

"I think as we enter the season here we need to have the right amount of strut, but also a sense of camaraderie, and a chip on our shoulders as the guys who want to be here."

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YAHOO SPORTS / Tomas Hertl, Logan Couture snubbed from 'NHL 20' top 50 overall list

Alex Didion

Tomas Hertl, Logan Couture snubbed from 'NHL 20' top 50 overall list
Tomas Hertl, Logan Couture snubbed from 'NHL 20' top 50 overall list

Ah yes, those controversial video game ratings are back.

EA Sports has released its top 50 individual ratings for "NHL 20," and Sharks fans will see a few familiar faces among the game's elite.

It's official. Here are the Top 50 Players in #NHL20.

Who got snubbed? □ pic.twitter.com/ATOZuOXbCR

— #NHL20 (@EASPORTSNHL) September 2, 2019

Checking in at No. 21 and No. 24 respectively are San Jose's pair of elite defenders, Erik Karlsson and Brent Burns. It's a pretty easy decision, with the two being commonly regarded as two of the best defensemen in the NHL.

A magician on the backend, @ErikKarlsson65 leads all defensemen with a 95 rating in Deking, Passing and Puck Control! Karlsson is easily the top offensive option on any blueline. #NHL20Top50 @SanJoseSharks
pic.twitter.com/SrzyW8kAJX

— #NHL20 (@EASPORTSNHL) August 29, 2019

Fear the Beard. @Burnzie88 highlights a stacked blueline for the @SanJoseSharks! With over a point-per-game last season, the

sky is the limit in #NHL20 for the offensive defenseman. #NHL20Top50 pic.twitter.com/ghD3BdcIHi

— #NHL20 (@EASPORTSNHL) August 29, 2019

However, there are a few other Sharks who seem like somewhat questionable omissions from this list.

Tomáš Hertl, for example, blew his career highs out of the water in 2018-19, as he finished with 35 assists and 39 goals. His 74 total points was a full 28 points higher than he put up in 2017-18, despite playing two more games that season.

Hertl was an 83 in "NHL 19", but at just 25 years old, he most certainly deserves at least a few more points after the season he just put together.

30-year-old Logan Couture is another snub by the "NHL 20" ratings committee. Couture also produced a personal-best in points, as he pumped out 70 in leading the Sharks to the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

What a postseason Couture had, as he led all players with 14 goals, despite missing the final championship round after the Sharks were eliminated in the Western Conference Finals.

Couture was an 85 in "NHL 19," but after a playoff performance like that, you'd think he might get enough of a bump to climb into that illustrious Top 50.

Even so, the Sharks will still likely be one of the best teams in "NHL 20" after just missing the Stanley Cup Final, and I wouldn't be surprised if we see either Couture or Hertl find themselves in the top-50 by season's end.

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