



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Goalie Petr Mrazek still the Carolina Hurricanes' wild card

By Luke DeCock

For all that is different for the Carolina Hurricanes from one year ago, and the changes over the past 12 months are multifold, everything still circles back to the same player.

Petr Mrazek.

Not to put it all on the goalie's shoulders, but some of it's unavoidable.

The difference between then and now is that the Hurricanes know Mrazek, who resurrected his career here after signing a one-year deal and carried the team into the playoffs, and aren't going into the season wondering if he can handle the workload. They know he can. But he still has to do it.

The Hurricanes are in dramatically better shape in terms of goaltending than a year ago, when they were still hoping Scott Darling would pan out, before the last-minute waiver addition of Curtis McElhinney saved the season.

There's more room for error this time around with veteran James Reimer as a sort of 1B, a backup with starting experience. But for the Hurricanes to be the best they can be, they need Mrazek to be the guy.

"He fits perfectly with what we're trying to do," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Wednesday at Hurricanes media day, "but everybody's got to prove themselves daily, and he's no different."

As good as he was in the first round against the Washington Capitals, Mrazek's struggles against the Boston Bruins in the conference finals after returning from an injury helped put the Hurricanes in a 2-0 hole on their way to getting swept, although there were many reasons for that. That led to a brief examination of other free-agent options on both sides in July, with the Hurricanes briefly pursuing Semyon Varlamov, before the team and the goalie realized there wasn't anything better out there. The Hurricanes and Mrazek ended up back together, their fates again entwined.

Even without captain Justin Williams -- "We're moving on," Brind'Amour said several times Wednesday -- the Hurricanes are in better shape across the board going into this season. They've upgraded at center (Erik Haula), added a finisher (Ryan Dzingel) and still have one of the best blue lines in the league, at least as far as the top two pairs are concerned.

The experience of winning in the playoffs will only strengthen the culture Williams and Brind'Amour built, and Brind'Amour should only be more comfortable in his second year behind the bench. Throw in the expected sophomore improvement of Andrei Svechnikov, and there's a lot more reason for optimism than there was last September.

But just as the Hurricanes labored in the playoff wilderness with substandard goaltending as they swung and missed on Eddie Lack and Darling before hitting on Mrazek and McElhinney, the success of this entire project continues to teeter on that precipice.

There's a reason Mrazek was available last summer; his game collapsed in his final years in Detroit and Philadelphia. Mrazek said Wednesday a big part of last season's success was his work with Jaromir Jagr's sports psychologist, something he started last summer, which has him in a different frame of mind now than at any point in his career.

"He was the right person I needed to talk to about hockey situations, about what to do in your head," Mrazek said. "I think that's maybe 60-80 percent of your game."

If he can back it up, and there's every reason to believe he can, the Hurricanes will be in good shape. But there's obviously some internal doubt. If there wasn't, Mrazek would have been re-signed before he reached free agency. Mrazek had something to prove here last season, and he proved it. Now he has to prove it again.



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Canes' Rod Brind'Amour counting on Ryan Dzingel to add more speed to a fast lineup

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Ryan Dzingel quickly caught Rod Brind'Amour's attention when the Carolina Hurricanes were playing the Ottawa Senators the past few seasons.

"He opened my eyes," the Canes coach said Wednesday. "Every time we played them it was like, 'Who is that guy?' As a coach when you don't really know the other team or certain players and they stand out ... he was always standing out for me."

And now Dzingel's a part of the Hurricanes. As Brind'Amour put it, "I'm hoping he has the other coaches asking that question."

When Canes owner Tom Dundon and general manager Don Waddell came to Brind'Amour this summer and asked about Dzingel being signed as a free agent, the coach quickly agreed. The forward, an unrestricted free agent after last season, agreed to a two-year contract that will pay him \$3.25 million this season and \$3.5 million in 2020-21.

Dzingel is 27, and only centers Jordan Staal and Erik Haula, another newcomer, are older among the Canes forwards. He's a former seventh-round draft pick by the Senators. Dzingel also has made the most of every opportunity in his hockey journey and career and now has another one with the Canes.

"I like being written off and finding a way," Dzingel said Wednesday. "A lot of things happened to get here, but I'm glad it worked out. It's so fresh and new to me that I'm just excited. I think the system we play is built off speed, so I'll be able to fit right in and hopefully contribute right away."

That's what Brind'Amour is counting on. Dzingel scored 22 goals in 57 games with the Senators last season before the Wheaton, Illinois, native was traded to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Feb. 23. Dzingel did his job in the Blue Jackets' late push to reach the Stanley Cup playoffs with four goals and eight assists in the last 21 games of the regular season, but was a nonfactor offensively once in the playoffs — one goal in nine games, his only point.

But in looking at his season as a whole, Dzingel had career highs in goals (26), assists (30) and points (56). He had five game-winning goals, another career best.

"We're hoping he brings that offensive speed element," Brind'Amour said. "We're going to rely on him to score some points and get on the board and play the way we want to play, which is fast and getting on the puck."

And helping the power play. The Canes have had myriad problems the past few seasons and in last season's playoffs, finishing 20th in the NHL last season at 17.8 percent, a slight dip from 2017-18. Dzingel set new career marks last season in power-play goals (five) and power-play points (11), and could help offset the departure of Justin Williams, who hasn't retired from the NHL but hasn't decided if he'll play this season.

"I obviously took strides in my game and had career highs in pretty much every category," Dzingel said. "And I got traded and I learned a lot after that. I learned what it's like to be traded and getting with a new team. Obviously, it's much different halfway through a season to have chemistry."

"To come in fresh into a new team is going to be a lot nicer. But I definitely learned a lot and think I've grown in all four years in the NHL ... and think I have a lot of room to grow. I hope I bring a lot of things, but a few things I try to do well are use my speed and my shot. That's what I rely on most. I think the system that we play is built off speed, so I'll be able to fit right in."

From afar, playing in a Canadian market, Dzingel formed a perception of Raleigh and the Hurricanes that many have had: A team in a nontraditional hockey market that struggled to fill PNC Arena, hasn't created a lot of buzz and couldn't make the playoffs. All that changed last season. The Canes became the talk of the league and reached the Eastern Conference finals in the playoffs.

"When you come in during the week [to play] you heard there wasn't the greatest fan base, but that comes with winning," he said. "That's with any sport, any city. You need to have a good product out there and you need to win for the fans."

"When we showed up, they showed up. That's awesome and we'll continue to show up and they will, too. And in the playoffs it was the loudest rink in the National Hockey League. It's good to hear, and I'm just excited. I think there's a winning culture now and everything is together."

Brind'Amour, in his first year as a head coach, quickly gained a reputation for being a players' coach, honest but fair, willing to listen but firm and fiery when he needs to be.

"He's going to demand you to work and that's how I pride myself," Dzingel said. "He's going to tell you when you don't play well and tell you when you don't work hard, and he's going to tell you when you do well. He's going to keep you accountable."

"He's a coach who communicates with you well and that's what you want. You don't want to come in the



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room and walk on eggshells. You want to know where you stand. I'm happy to play for guy like that."

And for more than two years, if everything works out. Dzingel was engaged in January to Elise Lobb, a co-host of Fox Sports' "Swing Clinic" who has had a big following on YouTube and Instagram. Both are avid golfers — Lobb a scratch player and former college

golfer, Dzingel a 5-handicap — who would enjoy staying in North Carolina.

"I like the fact that he really wants to be here," Brind'Amour said. "That's the kind of people we want to get and attract. He wants to make a difference here."



Canes Set Stage for 2019-20 Season

Media Day provides training camp prologue

by Michael Smith

Just as the Labor Day weekend signals the unofficial end of summer, so too does Media Day mark the unofficial beginning of a new hockey season.

Following an abbreviated summer, a collection of Carolina Hurricanes players -- some familiar faces and some new -- stepped in front of cameras, microphones and recorders on Wednesday to set the stage for the 2019-20 season.

It's not October just yet, but the beginning of training camp is a short week away.

Below are some highlights and noteworthy quotes from head coach Rod Brind'Amour and each player who was made available at PNC Arena.

Head Coach Rod Brind'Amour

On Justin Williams' decision to step away from the NHL: "We chatted all summer. This wasn't a surprise. Justin came to his decision. It wasn't that day. I knew a long time before that, but I was kind of hoping he would lean a different direction. He's in a real good place. That's the important thing."

On a possible return for Williams: "He's done so much in his career. It's not like he has anything left to prove. He's got to come back for the right reason. He's got to love and want to do it for himself."

On the leadership group without Williams: "You're not going to replace a Justin Williams, but somebody else will emerge and lead by their style. Willy helped create this culture, and I think we're in a good place."

On Petr Mrazek: "Everybody has to prove themselves every day. ... [Mrazek] had a good year, and we

pushed to get him signed and get him back in here. I think he fits perfectly with what we're trying to do."

On Sebastian Aho and the offer sheet saga: "We knew he was going to be a part of our group. It was just a matter of how much we were going to have to pay him. ... The business side of stuff is what it is, but we knew he was going to be a part of our group."

Ryan Dzingel

On coming to Raleigh: "I'm actually way too excited. I keep talking about it with everyone. It's a hidden gem. You don't hear too much about it. ... I'm excited to be here. I'm going to buy a house and make this my home for hopefully a long time."

On the Canes' lineup: "There are a lot of good forwards, and on paper we look really, really deep. Everyone is going to have to contribute. With the style of play we play and the fast offense, everyone is going to have their shot to produce."

Warren Foegele

On expectations: "We're just trying to build off what we did last year. That playoff run was a lot of fun. ... A lot of us are excited to get things going right now."

On Justin Williams: "I don't really think anyone can replace what Justin brought to this team. He was huge in the dressing room and on the ice, as well. The impact he brings, there aren't really words to describe it. At least the door is not completely shut. We can be optimistic about that."

On building on last season: "Not many people believed in what we did last year. We created some noise and became relevant. This group is hungry still. Once you get so far, you want more. You want more of that cake. We're looking forward to it."

Dougie Hamilton



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On Justin Williams: "For us, it's a huge loss. I think that's the biggest thing. Obviously, we would love to have him. He's such a good player, person and leader. I respect whatever he wants to do."

On expectations: "It's always hard to put too big expectations on yourself and the team. ... For us, we kind of learned last year to go day-by-day and worry about one game at a time. ... We can't really think about playoffs right now. Just worry about what's ahead of us."

Jordan Martinook

On having a short summer: "We went far, but you're still chomping at the bit to get back here. I think that just shows how much we like each other as a team. We spent all that time together, went that far -- and that brings everybody closer together -- and then you have the short summer and get back here. We picked up where we left off. Everybody is joking around."

On why the Canes are built to be a perennial playoff team: "You look at the core group of this team, even the whole team. We've got two guys over 30. When you add [Erik] Haula, who is a rocket ship, and Dzingel, who skates like the wind, that's kind of what our team was based on last year."

On Justin Williams: "If he came back, we would have been waiting with open arms. As it went further along, we were thinking it might not happen. ... Once the news broke, I reached out to him and said, 'I respect your decision and respect everything you've done. You're a hell of a player.' I learned a ton from him last year."

Brock McGinn

On signing a new contract in the summer: "It was definitely a little bit stressful during the summer, but my goal was always to be here. I really love it here. It's a great community and a great place to play. Seeing how this team really jumped last year, it's pretty exciting coming into this year."

On the legacy of his Game 7 double overtime winner: "It was a cool moment for myself and my family. You dream about that growing up. Me and my brothers played in the backyard ... and for it to actually happen in Game 7 in the Stanley Cup Playoffs is something pretty special."

On expectations: "Last year, we really raised eyebrows. Coming into this year, the expectations are really high. We don't want to take a step back. We want to keep pushing forward and try to win the Cup."

Petr Mrazek

On Justin Williams: "He's going to be missed. He's been a great teammate for us. I know we're going to miss him, but he knows what's best for him. ... I wish him good luck."

Martin Necas

On his goals heading into the season: "I want to make the team. It's up to me how I'm going to play and how I'm going to work. I want to spend the whole season here."

James Reimer

On his role with the team: "I've got a lot of confidence in what I can accomplish. I had a good summer. I'm just looking forward to coming in here, playing well and helping this team win."

On his first impressions of Raleigh: "It's awesome. People are so friendly. I think every one of our neighbors has come by to say hi and introduce themselves. The people have been awesome, and the area seems real nice."

Jordan Staal

On expectations: "Teams are going to look at you a little differently, maybe respect you a little more and know they have to give their best. That just means we have to keep raising the bar and keep pushing each other to raise our own expectations."

On Justin Williams: "He's had an amazing career, and what he's done for this team has been more than enough. He's a great friend. Whatever he decides and what he's decided so far has been the right decision for him and his family."

On a new season: "We might have had a great year last year, but it's still last year. We're going to have to prove ourselves all over again. That starts with day one of training camp."

Andrei Svechnikov

On building on last season: "We want to be better this season. We have to take one more step ... and win the Final. That's our goal."

Lucas Wallmark

On chemistry from last season: "We had a lot of fun last year on and off the ice. We like to be with each other."



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Hurricanes 'in good place' moving forward without Williams, coach says

Brind'Amour has plan to fill leadership role, doesn't rule out return by former captain

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Justin Williams' decision to take time away from the NHL has left the Carolina Hurricanes without a captain, but coach Rod Brind'Amour said he's prepared moving forward.

"I'm going to think about [the captaincy] a little more, but I do have a plan," Brind'Amour said at Hurricanes media day Wednesday. "I've talked a lot with a lot of people, and [Justin] is one of them, on how we will move forward here. We're in a better place leadershipwise because of the legacy he has left."

Williams, who will turn 38 on Oct. 4, was captain of the Hurricanes last season and helped them qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2009 and advance to the Eastern Conference Final, where they were swept by the Boston Bruins. Williams said Monday he would be taking some time away from the NHL, saying it was the first time he felt unsure of his "aspirations with regards to hockey."

Forward Jordan Staal, who last season was an alternate captain with defenseman Justin Faulk, said the Hurricanes are well stocked to make up for the loss of Williams.

"Regardless, as a core, we've got a lot of good kids and a lot of good leaders," Staal said. "Usually, as a captain, there's a lot of guys beside him that are helping him out. There were a lot of guys who showed up every day ready to work."

Brind'Amour said the Hurricanes' acquisitions of forwards Erik Haula and Ryan Dzingel this offseason

were made with the knowledge that Williams may not return. Haula was acquired in a trade with the Vegas Golden Knights on June 27 for forward Nicolas Roy and a conditional fifth-round pick in the 2021 NHL Draft. Dzingel signed a two-year, \$6.75 million contract as a free agent July 12.

"We picked up a couple guys we think can provide offense," said Brind'Amour, who is entering his second season as Hurricanes coach. "Somebody's going to have to step up and fill those shoes on offense. As far as the leadership side, you're not going to replace Justin Williams, but somebody else will emerge and lead by their style. [Justin] helped create this culture. I think we're in a good place."

Forward Sebastian Aho, who led the Hurricanes with 83 points (30 goals, 53 assists) in 82 games last season, is one of the players Brind'Amour would like to see round out his game.

"[Williams] was a very positive influence on [Aho], and he's going to have to step up his overall game, leadership, all that," Brind'Amour said.

Although Carolina is prepared to proceed without Williams, who was second on the Hurricanes with 23 goals last season, Brind'Amour didn't rule out him returning later in the season.

"If we're in a great battle in a playoff race and we can add a Justin Williams, then sign me up," he said. "We will leave the door open for him. Certain players earn that right, that little bit of freedom, and he's definitely one of them. But today, we're moving forward. He's not part of it."



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Canes need to fill leadership void after Williams steps away

By JOEDY McCREARY

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The Carolina Hurricanes once again are looking for leadership — and maybe another captain.

Veteran forward Justin Williams' decision to step away from the sport leaves them with questions about their captaincy heading into a season in which they will try to build upon their run to the Eastern Conference final.

That means an organization that has gone without a captain — and, for one season, used two of them — must again figure out what it will do with the “C” this year.

Coach Rod Brind'Amour says he's not in a rush to hand out a letter.

“It will be a tough hole to fill, but as of now, we're moving on from Willie as our captain,” forward Jordan Staal said Wednesday, “and we'll see where it takes us.”

One of the key questions that hung over the Hurricanes this offseason was whether Williams — a 37-year-old three-time Stanley Cup winner and unrestricted free agent — would re-sign for a 19th NHL season, or if he would retire.

Now that will linger well into the season.

He said earlier this week that he is taking a break from the NHL to start the year because of his “current indecision” about whether he has the mental and physical commitment to keep playing.

“Be perfectly clear on it: He's not part of the group. We're moving on as if he's not going to be here,” Brind'Amour said. “If he comes to us in January or February and says, ‘Maybe I want to come back,’ he'll have a month of practice but it's not going to catch us by surprise. He's earned the right to make that decision and for us to somewhat leave that door open, I guess, is a way to look at it.”

That's the latest twist for Carolina's drama-filled captaincy that dates back to the Eric Staal trade in February 2016.

The Hurricanes didn't have anyone wearing the “C” until 2017-18, when they had defenseman Justin Faulk and Staal share the job with each holding the title for half of what was coach Bill Peters' final season. After Peters left for Calgary last summer, Brind'Amour tapped his teammate from the Hurricanes' 2006 Cup-winning team to take the top leadership role and made those two alternates.

Williams thrived in that spot, with his teammates praising the way he held them accountable and engaging fans — and riling up critics — by masterminding the “Storm Surge” postgame victory celebrations on home ice. Along the way he tallied 23 goals and 30 assists while playing all 82 regular-season games and helping Carolina earn its first playoff berth since 2009.

The Hurricanes upset Washington in their first-round series — with “Mr. Game 7” assisting on the winning goal in the second overtime of Game 7 — and swept the New York Islanders before they were swept by Boston in the conference final.

This season sets up as a critical crossroads for them. They hope to prove their reconstruction project has staying power and that they weren't one-year wonders who rode a late-season hot streak into the playoffs.

And with Williams gone for an undetermined amount of time — perhaps permanently — they hope some other players have developed leadership skills that will provide a similarly positive influence over a mostly young team.

“I think as a core, as a group, we've got a lot of good kids and a lot of good leaders,” Staal said. “Usually, as a captain, there's a lot of guys beside him that are helping him out. I think Willie was a great leader, but as a core, I think there were a lot of great guys that showed up every day ready to work and came into camp (in good) shape and all the stuff that you have to do to create a team that's going to be competitive every night.”



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Media Day recap: Taking the next step

The Hurricanes' annual media event prior to training camp had a different feel this season.

By Brian LeBlanc, Andrew Ahr, and Brett Finger

RALEIGH — The questions were a bit different at this season's Carolina Hurricanes media day. Gone were the questions about ending the team's playoff drought. There was no intrigue about how a first-time head coach would handle the reins of his first season behind the bench.

Instead, the questions were of largely two themes: what the post-Justin Williams Hurricanes would look like, and how the playoff run of a season ago would change the approach to this season. There was success a year ago, to be sure, but the 2019-20 season has a different type of pressure: the pressure to turn that success into something more than fleeting.

Coach Rod Brind'Amour, who now knows what the majority of his roster will look like after Williams made his decision to step away from the game, was pragmatic as always. Without Williams, the team will need guys to step up.

"We chatted all summer. This wasn't a surprise," the coach said of his captain. "Justin came to his decision, I knew for a long time before that and I was kind of hoping he would lean in a different direction, but I think he's at a real good place. He feels good about his response to it. He's leaving it open a little bit, but as far as we're concerned, he wants us to make sure we're moving forward and he's not part of the group right now. That's how we're approaching it.

"I didn't think he wanted to be the guy that stopped playing and then two or three months later un-retired and came back," Brind'Amour continued. "That seems to be done, and overdone with a lot of guys. He didn't want that to be the case, so probably that was the best decision to say 'I'm stepping away.' If he ever comes back, that's fine, we'll leave the door open for him. Certain players earn that right to have that little bit of freedom, and he's definitely one of them."

One of those players in line for a bigger locker room role with Williams out of the picture is Jordan Martinook. But the popular forward is careful to point out that he won't be the only one dealing with heightened expectations.

"I think Willy was one of those guys that knew how to keep it light. Everyone plays me out to be this 'class clown' - and I am, I love to have fun with it, this is the best job in the world," said Martinook. "But at the end of the day I know when to get serious, and the absence of Willy is going to add a little bit more to my plate, a little more to [Jordan Staal's], and it should add a little more to everybody's.

"When you lose a guy who was a major part of turning the culture in here, every guy in this room might have to take a baby step forward."

Last season, a lot was expected from Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas. Svechnikov acquitted himself well in the NHL, and is in line for a bigger role this season, especially given the offensive production the team will need to replace with Williams' departure. Necas, after an early cup of coffee with the Hurricanes, spent the rest of the season with the Charlotte Checkers, eventually winning the Calder Cup. Noticeably bigger in his upper body this summer, he says he's ready for the challenge of proving himself as an everyday NHL player.

"I want to make the team, and it's up to me how I'm going to play, how I'm going to work," Necas said. "I want to spend the whole season here. I worked on getting stronger, getting used to those little fights along the boards and in the corner. It's a little bit different than in Europe. I kind of got used to it last season in Charlotte, and it feels better [this season]."

Perhaps more than any other player, Necas will be relied upon to help fill the void of Williams' missing 53 points, but he says he's ready for the challenge. "I've always been a player who was scoring goals and creating chances. I'd like to do that here, to help the offense, help the [power play], be helpful for the team in every way on the ice," he said.

But Brind'Amour is careful to not put too much pressure on any one player to replace the unexpectedly key contributions that Williams made on the scoresheet last year. "We picked up a couple guys that can provide offense. We knew this was a possibility. We added [Ryan] Dzingel, [Erik] Haula, and Marty Necas, a young player. Somebody's going to have to step up and fill those shoes on the offensive side of things."



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For those scoring at home, Martinook will remain "Marty" in the locker room, and Necas has been tabbed as "Junior" - although Martinook did say that he fully expects to turn around when someone is calling for Necas this season. "Everybody still calls him Marty, and I just answer to it," Martinook quipped. "People are going to get sick of me saying 'What?' But we'll figure it out."

Among the new arrivals today was James Reimer, who had just met incumbent starter Petr Mrazek yesterday, and Dzingel, who couldn't stop talking about his newly-adopted hometown.

"I'm actually way too excited," Dzingel said. "I keep talking about it with everyone, it's a hidden gem. You don't hear too much about it, in Chicago [Dzingel's hometown] I didn't know too much about North Carolina, but I'm excited to be here and buy a house and make this my home hopefully for a long time."

Brind'Amour told the media that he was excited to hear that the team had targeted Dzingel as a signing. "When I saw him in Ottawa, he'd hold my eyes. Every time we'd play them, I'd be like 'who is that guy?' As a

coach, when you don't really know the other team, certain players stand out, and he was always standing out for me. I'm hoping that he does that for us and [has] other coaches asking that question. I'm happy that he's here."

For Dzingel's part, the sales job seems to have taken well. The veteran of 24 playoff games with Ottawa and Columbus knows what he's getting himself into.

"The year [the Hurricanes] had last year was special. They want to build off that this year and keep going. Obviously I heard the fans were pretty insane and the building was the loudest one in the NHL, so I was really happy to hear about that. You need to put a good product on the ice so people will come, and that's what we're doing."

Brind'Amour agrees.

"It's easy to turn the page because you have to. What you've done in the past is kind of irrelevant. As a group I think it's good that we know that some of the things we did can work. We just have to get better and keep building."

Hurricanes sign McKeown to one-year, two-way contract

The list of Hurricanes restricted free agents continues to dwindle.

By Brian LeBlanc

Media day wasn't the only thing making news for the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday. About two hours after the festivities wrapped up at PNC Arena, the team announced that they have agreed to terms with defenseman Roland McKeown on a one-year, two-way contract worth \$700,000 in the NHL or \$70,000 in the AHL, with a guarantee of \$90,000.

McKeown spent all of 2018-19 with the AHL Charlotte Checkers after making his NHL debut in ten games with Carolina the prior season. He will again be a restricted free agent after this season, although he will have hit the threshold required to earn arbitration rights in the 2020 offseason. McKeown is likely to again spend the majority of the season in the AHL, and is on the short list of possible candidates to replace the departed Patrick Brown as Checkers captain this season.

With McKeown's signing, the Hurricanes only have one more player remaining unsigned, restricted free agent forward Saku Maenalanen, before training camp opens next Thursday at PNC Arena. The release from the team is below.

CANES RE-SIGN McKEOWN TO ONE-YEAR, TWO-WAY DEAL

Defenseman tallied 25 points in 70 AHL games last season

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has re-signed defenseman Roland McKeown to a one-year, two-way contract for the 2019-20 season. The contract will pay McKeown \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$70,000 at the AHL level with a \$90,000 guarantee.

"Roland is a reliable defenseman who is also able to contribute offensively," said Waddell. "He was a big part of Charlotte's success last season and we're excited to bring him back."

McKeown, 23, registered 25 points (4g, 21a) in 70 AHL games with the Checkers in 2018-19. The 6'1", 195-pound defenseman led the team and finished tied for seventh in the AHL in plus/minus with a plus-30 rating. McKeown also added three assists in 10 AHL playoff games as Charlotte captured their first-ever Calder Cup Championship. He has posted 60 points (12g, 48a) in 210 career AHL games. McKeown made his NHL debut on Nov. 4, 2017 at Arizona and has tallied three assists in 10 career NHL games, all during Carolina's 2017-18 season. The Listowel, Ont., native was drafted by the Los Angeles Kings in the second round, 50th overall, of the 2014 NHL Draft. He was acquired by the Hurricanes from the Kings along with a first-round pick in the 2016 NHL Draft (Julien Gauthier) in exchange for Andrej Sekera on Feb. 25, 2015.



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Media Game Recap: Team DeCock roars back to steal Connors Cup win

Rumors of newspapers' demise are greatly exaggerated if the results of the annual Jim Connors Media Cup are to be believed.

By Brian LeBlanc

RALEIGH — The obituaries of local newspapers are seemingly being written on a daily basis, but if the results of the Carolina Hurricanes' annual Jim Connors Media Cup are any indication, any entity that employs Luke DeCock should only be discounted at one's peril.

The 2019 edition of the Connors Cup saw Team DeCock storm back in the final minutes, coming from behind to top Team Armstrong 6-4 in a game hotly anticipated by combatants on both sides and by a raucous crowd of about fifteen people, most of whom were arena workers perturbed at the fact that the gaggle of media was delaying them from setting up tables on the arena floor for an event later in the night.

Hurricanes media relations manager Pace Sagester led all scorers with three points, including the game-winning goal, and Team DeCock goaltender Shane Willis sparkled in net, making infinity plus one saves according to the official scoresheet.

Things started well for the side captained by the ABC11 sports director, going up 2-0 in the first period on the strength of goals by CanesVision's Zac Miklusak and captain Mark Armstrong. But just before the intermission, Canes media relations coordinator Mike Brown pulled Team DeCock back to within one, and it took very little time into the second period for WRAL's Jared Fialko to tip home a point shot from 99.9 The Fan's Dennis Cox.

In the second period Willis' goaltending counterpart, television's Mike Maniscalco, was whistled for bear-hugging The Fan's Joe Ovies, drawing the ire of the Team Armstrong bench which was incensed by several earlier non-calls from referee Emile Hartman. Maniscalco made the save on Ovies, but from there Willis took over, stealing the spotlight from his more famous pregame co-host by repeatedly robbing media relations VP Mike Sundheim, who cursed his luck more than once and committed to drowning his sorrows in the parking lot following the game.

Team DeCock's captain, the News and Observer sports columnist, committed a holding the stick penalty midway through the third period, and the web's Michael Smith converted a nice penalty shot to put Team Armstrong back up with six minutes remaining. All that was needed was for Maniscalco to shut the door the way he had earlier in the game.

He couldn't do it.

Three unanswered goals in the span of 2:13, started by Cup invitee Brice Connors and capped off by pair of Sagester markers, the last an empty-netter with 17 seconds remaining, turned the tables and handed DeCock his third Connors Cup in history. Maniscalco, uncharacteristically curt following the game, had little to say to this reporter following the collapse that denied Armstrong the Cup in his first season as a team captain.

Canes Country was represented on Team Armstrong by senior writers Brett Finger and Andrew Ahr, neither of whom contributed much of anything to the scoresheet. Following the game, Finger admitted that Team DeCock wanted it more, while Ahr stated his desire to force a trade to the St. Louis Blues.

Following the game, competitors on both sides celebrated and/or commiserated over cups of Storm Brew beer, which to no one's surprise was nearly tapped out by the time the media had finished with it.

Scoring Summary

1. Armstrong - Miklusak 1 (unassisted) 3:57 1st
2. Armstrong - Armstrong 1 (Maniscalco) 13:20 1st
3. DeCock - Brown 1 (Sagester) 14:24 1st
4. DeCock - Fialko 1 (Cox, Mazur) :40 2nd
5. Armstrong - Smith 1 (unassisted) 1:48 2nd
6. DeCock - Cox 1 (unassisted) 13:55 2nd
7. Armstrong - Smith 2 (unassisted) (PS) 8:20 3rd
8. DeCock - Connors 1 (Lavalette) 12:30 3rd
9. DeCock - Sagester 1 (Brown) 13:10 3rd
10. DeCock - Sagester 2 (Willis) (EN) 14:43 3rd



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NHL Power Rankings Based On Positional Rankings

By Larry Fisher

That was a fun offseason project — ranking the NHL teams by position.

Fun and enlightening, yet challenging since the league's parity is so prevalent on paper.

There were tiers at every position that opened the door to much debate, with the slightest of margins separating several teams. That made for difficult decisions from top to bottom, especially with the forwards and defence but even extending to the goaltenders.

The end result is these power rankings based on my positional rankings. For this exercise, I simply added up those three rankings — forwards, defence and goaltenders — with the lowest totals being the best and the highest obviously being the worst.

There were a few ties, which were broken by considering the team's coaching, special teams, leadership and intangibles, as well as recent success. These power rankings don't otherwise account for any of those factors, nor the strength of schedule or quality of division, among the many elements that go into determining the true power rankings, which are being published by my THW colleague Josh Bell this season.

These power rankings don't necessarily represent my personal outlook on the season to come either. My annual preseason predictions will still be publishing on Oct. 2 — the day the puck drops on the NHL's regular season — and could look quite different in comparison once I let my gut feelings get involved.

Nevertheless, in wrapping up this four-part series, here are the power rankings based on my positional rankings — counting down from No. 31 to No. 1.

31) Ottawa Senators

Forwards: 31

Defence: 30

Goaltenders: 29

Total: 90

ANALYSIS: Long story short, it's going to be a long season for Ottawa. Everybody knows the Senators are rebuilding and they'll be clinging tightly to their

2020 first-round pick, knowing there is a good chance that will turn into Alexis Lafreniere or another highly touted lottery prospect like Lucas Raymond or Quinton Byfield. Short-term pain for long-term gain, but this will be a painful campaign in Canada's capital city.

30) Detroit Red Wings

Forwards: 30

Defence: 31

Goaltenders: 25

Total: 86

ANALYSIS: Ditto in Detroit, where Steve Yzerman will be retooling the Red Wings' roster through a slow build that should also fetch one of those elite forward prospects from the 2020 draft. That is something to look forward to for the fan base of this Original Six franchise — and Detroit has more going for it than Ottawa in the present — but there is little hope of a quick turnaround under the team's former captain turned manager.

29) Edmonton Oilers

Forwards: 19

Defence: 28

Goaltenders: 28

Total: 75

ANALYSIS: Hockey isn't basketball where one player can totally carry a team to the promise land — the Kawhi Leonard effect in Toronto, LeBron James pretty much anywhere he goes — but Connor McDavid will once again be taking the Oilers on his shoulders with hopes of lugging Edmonton back into the playoffs this season. McDavid is as close to a LeBron as there is in today's NHL, so never say never. As long as he's healthy, Edmonton has a hope — a faint hope, but a hope nonetheless. Surely, McDavid can lift the Oilers out of this lottery range in lieu of a supporting cast that is still well below average despite Ken Holland's best efforts in his first offseason on the job as GM. Outside of McDavid — and Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins — the Oilers' roster remains very mediocre.

28) Columbus Blue Jackets



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Forwards: 28

Defence: 11

Goaltenders: 31

Total: 70

ANALYSIS: Columbus lost a lot this offseason and didn't recoup much, so expect the Blue Jackets' forward momentum to come a screeching halt barring some last-minute (or in-season) miracles from Jarmo Kekalainen. Goaltending is a huge concern — at the very least a huge question mark — and it doesn't look like this team is going to outscore the opposition on too many nights. The defence is a strength, but the weaknesses certainly outnumber the strengths for Columbus heading into this season.

27) Los Angeles Kings

Forwards: 27

Defence: 27

Goaltenders: 13

Total: 67

ANALYSIS: The Kings got bumped up a bit thanks to their goaltending, but that is assuming Jonathan Quick is staying healthy this season. That is never a safe assumption — he has an elastic band for a groin these days — so if Quick goes down, then Los Angeles would need Jack Campbell and Cal Petersen to carry the load. They were surprisingly solid last season — thus that ranking remained relatively high despite Quick's injury risk — but last season was last season, and Los Angeles would likely hit the skids if Quick gets hurt again. The rest of the roster — the forwards and Drew Doughty, who seemingly stands alone on L.A.'s defence — couldn't withstand the loss of their star goalie and would likely sink into lottery status.

26) New York Islanders

Forwards: 26

Defence: 20

Goaltenders: 21

Total: 67

ANALYSIS: The Islanders' roster is nothing special, but they do have a special coach in Barry Trotz — and a special coaching staff overall that features Lane Lambert, the defence guru, and Mitch Korn, the goalie whisperer. Those three, in particular, can turn a near-lottery team on paper into a potential contender as evidenced by the Islanders' improbable playoff success last season after losing their franchise player in John Tavares without really replacing him. Much like the McDavid factor in Edmonton, the Islanders can't be counted out as long as Trotz is working his magic. It's much the same group — albeit with a

significant change in goal, where Semyon Varlamov is replacing Robin Lehner — so expect the Islanders to overachieve again based on the talent level of their roster. Reality is, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to the Islanders, which worked against them in these positional rankings.

25) Arizona Coyotes

Forwards: 24

Defence: 18

Goaltenders: 22

Total: 64

ANALYSIS: The Coyotes are gradually getting better and Phil Kessel is going to give them a real boost, but almost everything would have to go right for Arizona to make the playoffs. Even though the Pacific is still the weakest of the league's four divisions, the Coyotes aren't a top-three team on paper amongst their peers and they don't look like a wild-card club either. Arizona is still average at best — and average at everything, at every position — so expect another small step forward, only to fall short again.

24) Anaheim Ducks

Forwards: 29

Defence: 24

Goaltenders: 8

Total: 61

ANALYSIS: The Ducks are trending down — and going into rebuild mode — but John Gibson's goaltending props them up here. He can steal games and will again this season, just not enough to keep Anaheim relevant in terms of the playoff picture. This will be a transitional year under Dallas Eakins, with tempered expectations from Bob Murray. Hope for the best, brace for the worst, but expect something in the middle. Expect mediocrity.

23) Colorado Avalanche

Forwards: 10

Defence: 25

Goaltenders: 26

Total: 61

ANALYSIS: The Avs are another team that could blow this ranking out of the water. Keyword is still "could" when it comes to Colorado because the defence is going to be young — with or without Bowen Byram — and the goaltending tandem is still relatively inexperienced too. Those realities hindered the positional rankings — and ultimately this power ranking — but the Avs are absolutely trending up and capable of building on last season's playoff success.



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Colorado has plenty of firepower up front and should be able to overcome the odd defensive blunder or bad goal against. The forwards should power the Avs to the playoffs again.

22) Minnesota Wild

Forwards: 23

Defence: 16

Goaltenders: 19

Total: 58

ANALYSIS: Minnesota seems so mediocre on paper — without many big names — but looks can be deceiving and don't forget that Bruce Boudreau can work wonders. Pretty much everyone outside of Minnesota expects Colorado to be better, but Minnesota might not be bringing up the rear in that Central Division. The Wild are deep up front, still have one of the league's better top fours on defence, and can rely on Devan Dubnyk to be decent in net. Being such a late hire, Bill Guerin probably wouldn't be too upset with a top-10 pick to start his tenure — to build around for the next decade — but Boudreau probably won't let that happen. He'll get the most out of this group and perhaps push for a playoff berth.

21) Buffalo Sabres

Forwards: 18

Defence: 9

Goaltenders: 30

Total: 57

ANALYSIS: Ralph Krueger is going to maximize the potential of Buffalo's forward group — you heard it here first — and Steve Smith is going to continue grooming the Sabres' new-look blue line. Mike Bales will do his best with a goaltending tandem that leaves a lot to be desired as the weak link for this team on the rise. The Sabres are still a work in progress and Jason Botterill is going to have to deal from his position of strength on defence at some point, but he's positioned Buffalo to finally be a playoff contender this season in the daunting Atlantic.

20) New York Rangers

Forwards: 21

Defence: 23

Goaltenders: 12

Total: 56

ANALYSIS: The Rangers rebuilt overnight — well, seemingly over a single offseason — and are now ready to compete again. That was quick, right? Being a desirable place to play definitely helped accelerate that rebuild, but credit Jeff Gorton, Chris Drury and

even the newly hired John Davidson for landing the likes of Artemi Panarin and Jacob Trouba, Kaapo Kakko and Adam Fox. The list goes on for the new faces in New York's young and exciting lineup. It's been said before but bears repeating, the Rangers are going to be all kinds of fun to watch this season — regardless of the results, but don't be surprised if they make a little noise in the Metro.

19) New Jersey Devils

Forwards: 11

Defence: 17

Goaltenders: 24

Total: 52

ANALYSIS: The Devils fell back to the pack last season — falling flat on their faces without Taylor Hall in the lineup for the second half — but they also fell into Jack Hughes with the first overall pick. Ray Shero had all kinds of luck and good fortune this offseason, getting P.K. Subban from Nashville, Nikita Gusev from Vegas, and Wayne Simmonds as a free agent. Those four should get New Jersey back into the playoff mix, with Subban instantly becoming the Devils' No. 1 defenceman and the other three — Hughes, Gusev and Simmonds — potentially forming the team's second line. All in all, things are looking up for New Jersey.

18) Vancouver Canucks

Forwards: 17

Defence: 19

Goaltenders: 14

Total: 50

ANALYSIS: The Canucks are heading in the right direction too, with recently extended Jim Benning trying to fast track Vancouver's rebuild thanks to a few significant additions this offseason — namely Tyler Myers, J.T. Miller and Micheal Ferland. Those three will help shore up some holes, with the Canucks now looking solid at every position. Vancouver might not make the playoffs this season, but the future is bright for a team that continues to draft well. Benning has to stay the course from here and continue to develop that talent rather than trade it away, but his bosses — the Aquilinis — won't want to wait too much longer for a return to the postseason and the revenue that comes with it.

17) Winnipeg Jets

Forwards: 6

Defence: 26

Goaltenders: 16

Total: 48



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ANALYSIS: The Jets' defence took a big hit — losing Jacob Trouba, Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot — so that will make life tougher for Winnipeg's goaltenders. Fortunately, the Jets' forwards should be able to outscore the opposition on a lot of nights, especially if Patrik Laine is scoring consistently. Perhaps some young defenders will rise to the occasion for Winnipeg, but that position could be holding the Jets back this season.

16) Carolina Hurricanes

Forwards: 20

Defence: 3

Goaltenders: 23

Total: 46

ANALYSIS: The Hurricanes overachieved last season — can we all agree on that? — but they should be trending up for the future. It was a perfect storm for Carolina last season and Rod Brind'Amour will be doing everything in his power to keep that Storm Surge going, though losing their on-ice leader — their captain Justin Williams — could have a negative impact. The defence will be a bit younger this season, but that won't necessarily be a bad thing. The forwards will arguably be better — with the additions of Erik Haula and Ryan Dzingel — and the goaltending should be just as good with James Reimer replacing Curtis McElhinney behind Petr Mrazek. Don Waddell is benefitting from the foundation laid by Ron Francis, but Waddell was deserving of his extension for pushing this franchise forward with a few quality moves to date.

15) Calgary Flames

Forwards: 13

Defence: 6

Goaltenders: 27

Total: 46

ANALYSIS: The Flames would be higher with better goaltending — and Cam Talbot could totally rebound in Calgary — but that iffy position dropped them to the middle of the pack in these rankings. Calgary's defence remains a strength and their forward depth is impressive too. Brad Treliving is returning a quality roster without making many changes this offseason, but the Flames are going to need more saves to make any progress.

14) San Jose Sharks

Forwards: 25

Defence: 1

Goaltenders: 20

Total: 46

ANALYSIS: The Sharks still rank in the top half of the league thanks to their defence — and particularly their big three of Brent Burns, Erik Karlsson and Marc-Edouard Vlasic. It doesn't get any better than that. But San Jose's forward depth in concerning — still without Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau at the time of that ranking — and the goaltending is mediocre too. The Sharks need a return to form from Martin Jones and need a few new faces to step up in providing secondary scoring. San Jose does have some promising forward prospects, so that might not be too big of a problem — especially if Thornton and perhaps Marleau return to the fold.

13) Montreal Canadiens

Forwards: 22

Defence: 21

Goaltenders: 2

Total: 45

ANALYSIS: As long as the Canadiens have Carey Price — and that could be for a long time to come, with seven years left on his contract — they will have a chance at the playoffs. He is to Montreal what McDavid is to Edmonton — a game-stealer, the great equalizer, and a difference-maker unto himself. Price's goaltending overshadows an otherwise average — or slightly below-average roster — and was the main reason for Montreal soaring up these rankings. However, if he gets hurt, it would be doom and gloom for the Habs.

12) Pittsburgh Penguins

Forwards: 3

Defence: 22

Goaltenders: 15

Total: 40

ANALYSIS: The Penguins have tweaked their forwards a ton over the last year and should see positive results from those changes despite parting with Phil Kessel. Pittsburgh still has Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, so scoring should continue to be a strength. The defence is concerning and appears problematic on paper — certainly the position that Jim Rutherford needs to shore up next — but the goaltending should be good as long as Matt Murray stays healthy. Pittsburgh will be extra motivated this season after getting swept by the Islanders in the first round, with Crosby leading a resurgence to avenge that embarrassment.

11) Chicago Blackhawks

Forwards: 14

Defence: 14

Goaltenders: 11



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Total: 39

ANALYSIS: The Blackhawks are looking solid at every position, bringing a very balanced lineup into this season. Stan Bowman bolstered Chicago's defence — acquiring Olli Maatta and Calvin de Haan — and brought back Andrew Shaw for added character. Bowman also signed Vezina finalist Robin Lehner to form one of the league's better goaltending tandems with Corey Crawford. This roster better resembles the Chicago teams that won three Cups from 2010 to 2015. The core is older now, but they might have another run left in them for the Blackhawks.

10) Vegas Golden Knights

Forwards: 4

Defence: 29

Goaltenders: 6

Total: 39

ANALYSIS: The Golden Knights weren't able to add in the offseason — and had to subtract to stay cap compliant — but Vegas is still in great shape and continues to set the bar extremely high for Seattle in terms of expansion success. Marc-Andre Fleury is one of the league's premier goaltenders and Vegas' top two forward lines rank right up there too. The Golden Knights aren't great on defence — at least not on paper — but that group gets the job done adequately in front of Fleury and there are some promising prospects on the back end. Only that defence ranking kept Vegas from being a top-five team in these power rankings.

9) Philadelphia Flyers

Forwards: 8

Defence: 10

Goaltenders: 18

Total: 36

ANALYSIS: The Flyers will be pushing forward this season thanks to the additions of Kevin Hayes, Matt Niskanen and Justin Braun. Philadelphia is a much deeper team — both at forward and on defence — with those three joining the fold. The Flyers also hired three head coaches to form their new-look staff, with Alain Vigneault leading Michel Therrien and Mike Yeo. There will be an adjustment process but that much experience behind the bench should prove beneficial. Carter Hart is now the man in goal, backed up by Brian Elliott. Hart will likely endure some growing pains as a sophomore, but he's a legit talent between the pipes. Chuck Fletcher might have turned the Flyers into a legit contender.

8) St. Louis Blues

Forwards: 12

Defence: 4

Goaltenders: 17

Total: 33

ANALYSIS: The Stanley Cup champion Blues enjoyed an improbable worst-to-first run last season and are positioned to contend again, with the potential to repeat. For that to happen, Jordan Binnington would have to repeat his heroics in goal over the course of his first full NHL season. St. Louis' defence has long been a strength and the Blues have a quality forward group, so much of their success will depend on goaltending again. As long as Binnington stays solid — and doesn't prove to be a flash in the pan like Andrew Hammond — then St. Louis should stay in the playoff mix in that stacked Central Division.

7) Florida Panthers

Forwards: 16

Defence: 12

Goaltenders: 4

Total: 32

ANALYSIS: The Panthers appear shockingly high in these power rankings since most don't see Florida as a top-10 team as of today. That could change this season, with Joel Quenneville's coaching and Sergei Bobrovsky's goaltending. That's not a knock against surefire Hall-of-Famer Roberto Luongo, but Bobrovsky is in his prime as one of the league's best netminders. Quenneville's influence and the addition of Anton Stralman should help the defence develop into a strength for the Panthers. The offence is decent despite losing out in the Artemi Panarin sweepstakes, settling for Brett Connolly as a consolation prize. With Panarin, Florida would have been a top-10 team. Without, the Panthers are probably still middle of the pack unless Quenneville makes that much of a difference, which he could.

6) Washington Capitals

Forwards: 9

Defence: 15

Goaltenders: 7

Total: 31

ANALYSIS: The 2018 champion Capitals are still a force to be reckoned with. From Alex Ovechkin to Braden Holtby to John Carlson, the key pieces are still in place at every position for at least another season. Holtby and top-line centre Nicklas Backstrom are both entering the final year of their contracts as pending unrestricted free agents next summer, so this could be the end of Washington's window to win another Cup. Losing that coaching trio of Barry Trotz,



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Lane Lambert and Mitch Korn to the Islanders was a blow to the Capitals' chances of repeating last season, but they should be ready to take another run now that they have regrouped under Todd Reirden, who was promoted from within as a rookie bench boss.

5) Dallas Stars

Forwards: 7

Defence: 13

Goaltenders: 10

Total: 30

ANALYSIS: The Stars might seem high in these power rankings, but remember this team took Stanley Cup champion St. Louis to double overtime in Game 7 before bowing out in the second round. Nobody pushed the Blues harder than Dallas. Jim Nill clearly feels the Stars are ready to win now based on his offseason moves in signing veterans Joe Pavelski, Corey Perry and Andrej Sekera to take a serious run in 2020. Dallas can make a case for a top-five forward group and Ben Bishop is capable of being a top-five goaltender when healthy, but the Stars' defence is still developing and not overly deep beyond the big three of John Klingberg, Miro Heiskanen and Esa Lindell. Nill might need to tinker a little more on the back end, but the Stars are trending towards being a legitimate top-five team.

4) Boston Bruins

Forwards: 15

Defence: 8

Goaltenders: 3

Total: 26

ANALYSIS: The Bruins were this year's runner-up, making it to the final thanks to terrific goaltending from Tuukka Rask, solid defensive play in front of him, and a top line that couldn't be stopped for most of the playoffs. Don Sweeney is returning much the same group, which should keep Boston in the contender conversations. Whenever a team's biggest concern is the third line, that typically bodes well for another successful campaign. And Bruce Cassidy arguably outcoached Mike Babcock in the playoffs, so Cassidy can now be considered more of a strength than a weakness for Boston going forward.

3) Toronto Maple Leafs

Forwards: 2

Defence: 7

Goaltenders: 9

Total: 18

ANALYSIS: The Leafs upgraded their defence — getting Tyson Barrie and Cody Ceci after previously acquiring Jake Muzzin, and with hopes of somehow still retaining Jake Gardiner — so Toronto's perceived weakness is looking more and more like a strength for this season. The offence and goaltending were already among the league's upper echelon, so Kyle Dubas managed to deliver what Mike Babcock needed and desired most. Last offseason, the Leafs' defence wouldn't have ranked in the top 15. Now, it's No. 7 — and could crack the top five if Gardiner returns.

2) Nashville Predators

Forwards: 5

Defence: 5

Goaltenders: 5

Total: 15

ANALYSIS: The Predators aren't going away despite their first-round exit. Nashville's window-to-win is still wide open with the addition of Matt Duchene and the subtraction of P.K. Subban. That was a bold swap of sorts by David Poile, but he was manoeuvring from a position of strength to address a weakness. And even with that move, Nashville's defence still ranks in the top five — down from No. 1 last year to No. 5 now — while the forwards moved up from outside the top 10 to No. 5. The goaltending is status quo and still a top-five tandem with Pekka Rinne being pushed by Juuse Saros. Turns out, Nashville is the fifth-best team across the board — at every position. The addition of Dan Lambert as an assistant coach should help spark Nashville's power play and could provide the Predators with an offensive boost in general.

1) Tampa Bay Lightning

Forwards: 1

Defence: 2

Goaltenders: 1

Total: 4

ANALYSIS: The Lightning are the class of the NHL — and, to no surprise, are topping these power rankings. Getting top honours among goaltenders might be something of a surprise, but Andrei Vasilevskiy doesn't get enough credit for his impact on Tampa Bay's success. He's overshadowed by all the forward firepower and the stellar defence, but Vasilevskiy is an all-world talent in his own right and deserving of that No. 1 ranking. Jon Cooper is one of the brightest coaching minds in the game — even if he had no answer for the momentum of John Tortorella and underdog Columbus this spring — so expect the Lightning to better pace themselves for the playoffs this season. And Julien BriseBois is doing just fine without Steve Yzerman, as evidenced by the bargain



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signings of Kevin Shattenkirk and Pat Maroon. Players want to win and Tampa seems like the place to do it. Yes, the Lightning are still the Stanley Cup favourites for 2020 — at least according to these power rankings based on my positional rankings.

Converting to Standings

If these power rankings were converted into standings, here is how the divisions and conferences would stack up, including playoff matchups and draft lottery odds.

NOTE: The number to the right of each team is their power ranking and the number in parenthesis is the total of their positional rankings.

Division Standings

Atlantic Division

- 1) Tampa Bay Lightning — 1 (4)
- 2) Toronto Maple Leafs — 3 (18)
- 3) Boston Bruins — 4 (26)
- 4) Florida Panthers — 7 (32)
- 5) Montreal Canadiens — 13 (45)
- 6) Buffalo Sabres — 21 (57)
- 7) Detroit Red Wings — 30 (86)
- 8) Ottawa Senators — 31 (90)

Metropolitan Division

- 1) Washington Capitals — 6 (31)
- 2) Philadelphia Flyers — 9 (36)
- 3) Pittsburgh Penguins — 12 (40)
- 4) Carolina Hurricanes — 16 (46)
- 5) New Jersey Devils — 19 (52)
- 6) New York Rangers — 20 (56)
- 7) New York Islanders — 26 (67)
- 8) Columbus Blue Jackets — 28 (70)

Central Division

- 1) Nashville Predators — 2 (15)
- 2) Dallas Stars — 5 (30)
- 3) St. Louis Blues — 8 (33)
- 4) Chicago Blackhawks — 11 (39)
- 5) Winnipeg Jets — 17 (48)
- 6) Minnesota Wild — 22 (58)
- 7) Colorado Avalanche — 23 (61)

Pacific Division

- 1) Vegas Golden Knights — 10 (39)
- 2) San Jose Sharks — 14 (46)
- 3) Calgary Flames — 15 (46)
- 4) Vancouver Canucks — 18 (50)
- 5) Anaheim Ducks — 24 (61)
- 6) Arizona Coyotes — 25 (64)
- 7) Los Angeles Kings — 27 (67)
- 8) Edmonton Oilers — 29 (75)

Conference Standings

Eastern Conference

- 1) Tampa Bay Lightning — 1 (4)
- 2) Toronto Maple Leafs — 3 (18)
- 3) Boston Bruins — 4 (26)
- 4) Washington Capitals — 6 (31)
- 5) Florida Panthers — 7 (32)
- 6) Philadelphia Flyers — 9 (36)
- 7) Pittsburgh Penguins — 12 (40)
- 8) Montreal Canadiens — 13 (45)
- 9) Carolina Hurricanes — 16 (46)
- 10) New Jersey Devils — 19 (52)
- 11) New York Rangers — 20 (56)
- 12) Buffalo Sabres — 21 (57)
- 13) New York Islanders — 26 (67)
- 14) Columbus Blue Jackets — 28 (70)
- 15) Detroit Red Wings — 30 (86)
- 16) Ottawa Senators — 31 (90)

Western Conference

- 1) Nashville Predators — 2 (15)
- 2) Dallas Stars — 5 (30)
- 3) St. Louis Blues — 8 (33)
- 4) Vegas Golden Knights — 10 (39)
- 5) Chicago Blackhawks — 11 (39)
- 6) San Jose Sharks — 14 (46)
- 7) Calgary Flames — 15 (46)
- 8) Winnipeg Jets — 17 (48)
- 9) Vancouver Canucks — 18 (50)
- 10) Minnesota Wild — 22 (58)
- 11) Colorado Avalanche — 23 (61)



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12) Anaheim Ducks — 24 (61)

13) Arizona Coyotes — 25 (64)

14) Los Angeles Kings — 27 (67)

15) Edmonton Oilers — 29 (75)

Playoff Picture

Eastern Conference

A1) Tampa Bay Lightning vs. WC2) Montreal Canadiens

A2) Toronto Maple Leafs vs. A3) Boston Bruins

M1) Washington Capitals vs. WC1) Florida Panthers

M2) Philadelphia Flyers vs. M3) Pittsburgh Penguins

Western Conference

C1) Nashville Predators vs. WC2) Winnipeg Jets

C2) Dallas Stars vs. C3) St. Louis Blues

P1) Vegas Golden Knights vs. WC1) Chicago Blackhawks

P2) San Jose Sharks vs. P3) Calgary Flames

Draft Lottery Odds

1) Ottawa Senators — 31 (90)

2) Detroit Red Wings — 30 (86)

3) Edmonton Oilers — 29 (75)

4) Columbus Blue Jackets — 28 (70)

5) Los Angeles Kings — 27 (67)

6) New York Islanders — 26 (67)

7) Arizona Coyotes — 25 (64)

8) Anaheim Ducks — 24 (61)

9) Colorado Avalanche — 23 (61)

10) Minnesota Wild — 22 (58)

11) Buffalo Sabres — 21 (57)

12) New York Rangers — 20 (56)

13) New Jersey Devils — 19 (52)

14) Vancouver Canucks — 18 (50)

15) Carolina Hurricanes — 16 (46)



Canes Re-Sign Roland McKeown To One-Year Deal

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Hurricanes locked up one of their remaining restricted free agents Wednesday, signing Roland McKeown to a one-year, two-way deal.

McKeown, 23, set career highs with 21 assists and 25 points last season, the latter of which ranked third among team blue liners, and led the team with a +30 rating – the third best single-season plus-minus rating in franchise history. He also added three assists in 10

playoff games as a member of Charlotte's Calder Cup-winning club.

Originally a second-round pick by Los Angeles in 2014, McKeown has logged 60 points (12g, 48a), 108 penalty minutes and a +57 rating over 210 games for Charlotte over his three-year pro career. The Ontario native has also appeared in 10 NHL games, all during the 2017-18 season.



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Canes are ready to build on postseason success

By Mark Armstrong

RALEIGH, N.C. (WTVD) -- While Justin Williams' announcement that he was "stepping away" from the NHL, perhaps permanently, caught some by surprise earlier this week, Rod Brind'Amour was not among them.

The Hurricanes second-year head coach had made it abundantly clear following last year's playoff run that he hoped his buddy and team captain would be back for one more go this year, but admitted today that he's known for a while this summer that wasn't going to happen.

Even a recent golf outing wasn't so much an effort to sway Williams, rather perhaps one last check-in to make sure Williams was still in the same place mentally.

Replacing the leadership, and scoring of Williams is certainly no easy feat, but Jordan Staal said Wednesday that while Williams was certainly the captain for a reason, he was far from the only leader in the room.

There are obvious candidates to step up in Justin's absence. Jordan himself maybe first among them. When I pressed him about the failure that was the two-captain system with he and Justin Faulk two seasons ago, Staal said winning makes a lot of things better. He wouldn't admit to laboring in that system, even if both he and Faulk even more so seemed happy to be free of the burden last year. Names like Slavin, Martinook and even Aho can't be ignored either.

For his part, Brind'Amour said a two-captain system won't be under consideration. He's not sure which direction he's headed and said he'll take his time before making a decision.

To no one's surprise, there is great optimism coming

back after last year's return to the playoffs and subsequent run to the conference finals. When I asked Martinook why this team in his opinion was built to maintain success rather than flash in the pan as previous Canes teams have done, he looked almost incredulous.

"Look at our whole team -- we've got two guys over 30? When you add (Erik) Haula, who's a rocketship and (Ryan) Dzingel, who can skate like the wind, that's kind of what our team was based on last year...then just transitioning and bringing what we learned and gained from last year, it's built for success for many years."

On paper, it's hard to disagree. Goaltending is always a mystery, though there is certainly much more belief in Petr Mrazek now than there was last year. Brind'Amour said last year was essentially a dice roll that turned out. Now they think they know what they've got in Mrazek and to a lesser extent, veteran backup James Reimer.

Part of the continued evolution of the team will of course be the development of its youth. Andrei Svechnikov said he worked on everything during his summer, firm in the belief that he has room to improve in every facet of his game. With that attitude and his skill set, a massive leap forward is not to hard to imagine. Svechnikov said he's taken boxing lessons the last few years. When I asked who he believed to be the best pound for pound boxer in the world, he deadpanned "Ovi".

The Russian was also visibly struggling with the return to Raleigh humidity. Even inside the bowels of PNC Arena, he was sweating pretty profusely.

One other funny moment -- Jordan Martinook reflecting on the "lower-body injury" that had him barely functional during last year's playoff run. Martinook said Wednesday that he's had his "downstairs" fixed. We can all only hope to have fully functioning "downstairs".



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<https://abc11.com/sports/canes-are-ready-to-build-on-postseason-success/5516865/>

SportScan

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

1151715 Carolina Hurricanes

Goalie Petr Mrazek still the Carolina Hurricanes' wild card

BY LUKE DECOCK

RALEIGH—For all that is different for the Carolina Hurricanes from one year ago, and the changes over the past 12 months are multifold, everything still circles back to the same player.

Petr Mrazek.

Not to put it all on the goalie's shoulders, but some of it's unavoidable.

The difference between then and now is that the Hurricanes know Mrazek, who resurrected his career here after signing a one-year deal and carried the team into the playoffs, and aren't going into the season wondering if he can handle the workload. They know he can. But he still has to do it.

The Hurricanes are in dramatically better shape in terms of goaltending than a year ago, when they were still hoping Scott Darling would pan out, before the last-minute waiver addition of Curtis McElhinney saved the season.

There's more room for error this time around with veteran James Reimer as a sort of 1B, a backup with starting experience. But for the Hurricanes to be the best they can be, they need Mrazek to be the guy.

"He fits perfectly with what we're trying to do," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Wednesday at Hurricanes media day, "but everybody's got to prove themselves daily, and he's no different."

As good as he was in the first round against the Washington Capitals, Mrazek's struggles against the Boston Bruins in the conference finals after returning from an injury helped put the Hurricanes in a 2-0 hole on their way to getting swept, although there were many reasons for that. That led to a brief examination of other free-agent options on both sides in July, with the Hurricanes briefly pursuing Semyon Varlamov, before the team and the goalie realized there wasn't anything better out there. The Hurricanes and Mrazek ended up back together, their fates again entwined.

Even without captain Justin Williams -- "We're moving on," Brind'Amour said several times Wednesday -- the Hurricanes are in better shape across the board going into this season. They've upgraded at center (Erik Haula), added a finisher (Ryan Dzingel) and still have one of the best blue lines in the league, at least as far as the top two pairs are concerned.

The experience of winning in the playoffs will only strengthen the culture Williams and Brind'Amour built, and Brind'Amour should only be more comfortable in his second year behind the bench. Throw in the expected sophomore improvement of Andrei Svechnikov, and there's a lot more reason for optimism than there was last September.

But just as the Hurricanes labored in the playoff wilderness with substandard goaltending as they swung and missed on Eddie Lack and Darling before hitting on Mrazek and McElhinney, the success of this entire project continues to teeter on that precipice.



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There's a reason Mrazek was available last summer; his game collapsed in his final years in Detroit and Philadelphia. Mrazek said Wednesday a big part of last season's success was his work with Jaromir Jagr's sports psychologist, something he started last summer, which has him in a different frame of mind now than at any point in his career.

"He was the right person I needed to talk to about hockey situations, about what to do in your head," Mrazek said. "I think that's maybe 60-80 percent of your game."

If he can back it up, and there's every reason to believe he can, the Hurricanes will be in good shape. But there's obviously some internal doubt. If there wasn't, Mrazek would have been re-signed before he reached free agency. Mrazek had something to prove here last season, and he proved it. Now he has to prove it again.

News Observer LOADED: 09.05.2019

1151716 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Rod Brind'Amour counting on Ryan Dzingel to add more speed to a fast lineup

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH-Ryan Dzingel quickly caught Rod Brind'Amour's attention when the Carolina Hurricanes were playing the Ottawa Senators the past few seasons.

"He opened my eyes," the Canes coach said Wednesday. "Every time we played them it was like, 'Who is that guy?' As a coach when you don't really know the other team or certain players and they stand out ... he was always standing out for me."

And now Dzingel's a part of the Hurricanes. As Brind'Amour put it, "I'm hoping he has the other coaches asking that question."

When Canes owner Tom Dundon and general manager Don Waddell came to Brind'Amour this summer and asked about Dzingel being signed as a free agent, the coach quickly agreed. The forward, an unrestricted free agent after last season, agreed to a two-year contract that will pay him \$3.25 million this season and \$3.5 million in 2020-21.

Dzingel is 27, and only centers Jordan Staal and Erik Haula, another newcomer, are older among the Canes forwards. He's a former seventh-round draft pick by the Senators. Dzingel also has made the most of every opportunity in his hockey journey and career and now has another one with the Canes.

"I like being written off and finding a way," Dzingel said Wednesday. "A lot of things happened to get here, but I'm glad it worked out. It's so fresh and new to me that I'm just excited. I think the system we play is built off speed, so I'll be able to fit right in and hopefully contribute right away."

That's what Brind'Amour is counting on. Dzingel scored 22 goals in 57 games with the Senators last season before the Wheaton, Illinois, native was traded to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Feb. 23. Dzingel did his job in the Blue Jackets'

late push to reach the Stanley Cup playoffs with four goals and eight assists in the last 21 games of the regular season, but was a nonfactor offensively once in the playoffs — one goal in nine games, his only point.

But in looking at his season as a whole, Dzingel had career highs in goals (26), assists (30) and points (56). He had five game-winning goals, another career best.

Columbus Blue Jackets center Ryan Dzingel, left, reacts with left wing Nick Foligno (71) after scoring a goal against the New York Rangers during the third period of an NHL hockey game, Friday, April 5, 2019, in New York. The Blue Jackets won 3-2 in a shootout. Julio Cortez AP

"We're hoping he brings that offensive speed element," Brind'Amour said. "We're going to rely on him to score some points and get on the board and play the way we want to play, which is fast and getting on the puck."

And helping the power play. The Canes have had myriad problems the past few seasons and in last season's playoffs, finishing 20th in the NHL last season at 17.8 percent, a slight dip from 2017-18. Dzingel set new career marks last season in power-play goals (five) and power-play points (11), and could help offset the departure of Justin Williams, who hasn't retired from the NHL but hasn't decided if he'll play this season.

"I obviously took strides in my game and had career highs in pretty much every category," Dzingel said. "And I got traded and I learned a lot after that. I learned what it's like to be traded and getting with a new team. Obviously, it's much different halfway through a season to have chemistry."

"To come in fresh into a new team is going to be a lot nicer. But I definitely learned a lot and think I've grown in all four years in the NHL ... and think I have a lot of room to grow. I hope I bring a lot of things, but a few things I try to do well are use my speed and my shot. That's what I rely on most. I think the system that we play is built off speed, so I'll be able to fit right in."

From afar, playing in a Canadian market, Dzingel formed a perception of Raleigh and the Hurricanes that many have had: A team in a nontraditional hockey market that struggled to fill PNC Arena, hasn't created a lot of buzz and couldn't make the playoffs. All that changed last season. The Canes became the talk of the league and reached the Eastern Conference finals in the playoffs.

"When you come in during the week [to play] you heard there wasn't the greatest fan base, but that comes with winning," he said. "That's with any sport, any city. You need to have a good product out there and you need to win for the fans."

"When we showed up, they showed up. That's awesome and we'll continue to show up and they will, too. And in the playoffs it was the loudest rink in the National Hockey League. It's good to hear, and I'm just excited. I think there's a winning culture now and everything is together."

Brind'Amour, in his first year as a head coach, quickly gained a reputation for being a players' coach, honest but fair, willing to listen but firm and fiery when he needs to be.

"He's going to demand you to work and that's how I pride myself," Dzingel said. "He's going to tell you when you don't play well and tell you when you don't work hard, and he's



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going to tell you when you do well. He's going to keep you accountable.

"He's a coach who communicates with you well and that's what you want. You don't want to come in the room and walk on eggshells. You want to know where you stand. I'm happy to play for guy like that."

And for more than two years, if everything works out. Dzingel was engaged in January to Elise Lobb, a co-host of Fox Sports' "Swing Clinic" who has had a big following on YouTube and Instagram. Both are avid golfers — Lobb a scratch player and former college golfer, Dzingel a 5-handicap — who would enjoy staying in North Carolina.

"I like the fact that he really wants to be here," Brind'Amour said. "That's the kind of people we want to get and attract. He wants to make a difference here."

News Observer LOADED: 09.05.2019

1151717 Carolina Hurricanes

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.

McGinn also was a central figure in one of the more memorable Storm Surge postgame celebrations with his Thor-like hammer strike at center ice. Canes fans loved it.

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



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"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."

1151789 Websites

The Athletic / NHL players' respect for tennis on display at the U.S. Open

By Daniel Kaplan

Sep 5, 2019

Ash Barty, the world's second-ranked women's tennis player (she will rise to No. 1 on Monday), batted balls back and forth on a hot U.S. Open practice court last week, her hitting partner wearing a white baseball cap and holding his own over the hour. He occasionally talked to doubles specialist Henri Kontinen on the adjacent court.

Why is this notable out of the hundreds of other practice sessions since the tournament begin Aug. 26? The man in blue shorts, white shirt and cap was Dominic Moore, a long time NHL player.

An advanced tennis player who recently lost in the semifinals of a national tournament in his age group, Moore is perhaps the most extreme example of an undercurrent at the Open annually: NHL players love the sport and the event.

"Hockey's a very international sport, just like tennis, you know, a lot of Europeans," Moore said. "There's also an appreciation for the high skill. Both sports are incredibly high skill sports. And I think there's an appreciation there, of the hockey players, of what the tennis guys are doing and, you know, clearly guys like Roger [Federer]."

"There's very few athletes out there that, you know, they call it a sports crush, or something like that, where ... another athlete would be inspired or just want to be like someone else, and Roger's kind of that guy."

Dominic Moore on the court with Ash Barty. (The Athletic)

Other athletes have received a lot of attention for attending the Open this year, including Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant and Colin Kaepernick. But they are more the outliers from their sports. Hockey players are out in numbers, just more anonymously. Past and current NHL players who have attended so far include Artemi Panarin, Henrik Lundqvist, Tuukka Rask, David Pastrnak, Charlie McAvoy, Leo Komarov, Jakub Zboril, Dennis Seidenberg, Martin Havlat, Pavel Buchnevich, Vladislav Namestnikov and Mika Zibanejad.

In fact, the NHL Network even sent a crew to U.S. Open media day on Aug. 23, the only league sports network to ever do that, the U.S. Tennis Association confirmed. The network interviewed Simona Halep, Coco Gauff, Daniil Medvedev and John Isner for its celebrity show and gifted the Wimbledon champ, Halep, a Las Vegas Golden Knights jersey.

"Yeah, the Europeans seem to really like the tennis a lot," said Matt Nicholson, vice president of production, creative

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development at the NHL, on the general interest of the racket sport in hockey.

The timing also works for NHL players to attend the Open, with the event scheduled shortly before most training camps open. So many of the Europeans are back from overseas in time.

Seidenberg, who is unsigned after a long career including a playoff appearance with the New York Islanders last season, said he almost chose to play tennis over hockey. He expressed jealousy when he heard Moore would be a hitting partner.

"It's very common that we talk about tennis in the locker rooms, especially with the Europeans," he said while seated at the Open's food court last week before attending a match for Dominik Koepfer, who grew up near Seidenberg in Germany. Seidenberg had come with his 7-year-old son, and friend Thomas Hipp, the tennis coach at Flagler University in Florida.

"Every team has guys that are pretty decent at tennis," he said. "It's funny how many times you bump into a fellow hockey player when you are around the grounds."

Dennis Seidenberg at the food court at the U.S. Open. (The Athletic)

Moore has many memories of sitting in the stands of Arthur Ashe Stadium and spotting hockey players in the suites or elsewhere in the stadium. This summer he attended Wimbledon and bumped into P.K. Subban.

"I remember being with the Rangers at one of the [Open] matches, it was a night match and looking up and just seeing some of the other Rangers in one of the boxes," Moore recalled. "You know like a handful of guys that kind of come separately from different contacts."

Tomas Plekanec, who currently plays in a European league after a lengthy career in the NHL, said he grew up playing tennis and still uses it as part of his training. Core training and reading a play are similar attributes that hockey players benefit from when playing tennis, he said.

Seidenberg said trends in hockey only make tennis more useful.

"It's definitely getting more agility dominant, which means that the guys are getting a little smaller, a little shorter, and faster and quicker," he explained. "In tennis it is amazing how fast and quickly they get to balls and how quick they move. So it is definitely something you want to be as quick as possible, as agile as possible. So it's the same kind of training."

Retired player Martin Havlat didn't get to warm up a player like Moore at the Open this year, but he did hit with Wimbledon semi finalist Barbora Strycova's coach, Lukas Dlouhy.

"So I hit with him for 45 minutes before she had to practice so that was amazing to be on the U.S. Open court," Havlat said. "He offered. So I jumped on it very quickly."



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The USTA knew Moore because of his tennis skills displayed in tournaments, and helped him make the connection with Barty who needed someone to hit with that day. Barty did not reply to an email on how Moore fared.

Asked if she made any comment to him, Moore said no. "I was nervous because I have a healthy respect for these athletes preparing for their competition and I didn't want to screw it up," he said.

But he jokingly added he must have done well as she won her next match. Moore did not get asked to hit again with her, and she lost the following round.

Texted that she should have brought him back, he replied via text, "Seriously. If it ain't broke."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.05.2019

1151790 Websites

The Athletic / Brendan Gallagher has spent a lifetime turning obstacles into opportunities

Arpon Basu

Sep 5, 2019

TSAWWASSEN, B.C. – Josh Nicholls looks like a man ready to vent a little.

Nicholls knows just about everything there is to know about Brendan Gallagher. The two started playing on the same line in peewee and remained linemates through minor hockey. They lived a few houses apart growing up in Tsawwassen, just outside Vancouver. They went to school together. They still work out together in the summer.

So Nicholls has stories, but they all revolve around one thing, the defining characteristic that makes Gallagher who he is.

"He's the most competitive person I've ever met," Nicholls said. "Whether it's golfing, whether it's mini-sticks when we were younger, whether it's ping-pong ..."

Nicholls remembers when a game of mini-sticks turned into a full-blown meltdown. He told Gallagher he would never be invited over again, but he invited him over the very next day. He remembers when Gallagher bought a condo on a golf course because he was so determined to beat everyone in their circle of friends in golf.

And he remembers that one ping-pong match when he beat Gallagher.

"There's a bunch of people over watching it, so obviously he's pissed that people witnessed him lose," Nicholls said. "So I go to everyone, I'm done for the day. I'm going to live in this moment. ... So he had just got a signed Hulk Hogan heavyweight championship belt. Like, a real one. Signed. So we're all playing with it before. Like, this is sick. So we're all standing around in the ping-pong room, there's like 10 of us, and we're riding high after I win."

"He goes, 'I have a proposal. I'll give you the belt if you beat me this next game. Right now.' So everyone was like, you can't play him again, but as soon as he said that, it was, 'You need that belt.' He wouldn't have been able to sleep. I played him again and he started off 10-0 or something. He was in another world. You couldn't talk to him. So everyone was kind of let down. I stormed back and I think the final score was something like 21-15 for him. But to start the game, he won't even talk to you, he's just riding the momentum of being in a zone."

How old was Gallagher when this happened?

"It was two nights ago," Nicholls said. "It's never-ending."

Gallagher's competitive nature has helped make him one of the best 5-on-5 forwards in the NHL. That might appear like hyperbole, but facts are facts, as The Athletic's Marc Dumont very clearly spelled out earlier this summer.

"He gets in those zones where he's just got to compete," Nicholls said. "The grind of the year really takes a toll on him because that's the mentality basically every day going into a game. So it's both that you love to hate it about him, but it's also what makes him great at what he does."

But beyond his competitive nature, what makes Gallagher unusual is the one thing he cannot change.

His height.

It has defined Gallagher as a player his entire life. It has led most everyone to say he beat the odds to become an NHL star. But the reality is that nearly every aspect of Gallagher's life – including, and perhaps especially, that one defining trait – has paved his path.

In so many ways, Gallagher was born to do this.

That might sound ridiculous since his single greatest obstacle, his size, is also something he has always had to live with.

He was the first son and second of four children to Ian and Della Gallagher, who proved to be a huge boost to his hockey-playing fortunes.

Ian Gallagher's hockey playing career never amounted to a whole lot – though he played a year of Junior-A, which is more than most people can say. But he played lacrosse at a very high level and his competitiveness fueled his success.

It is no surprise that he passed on this quality to his son, but Ian says that has more to do with Brendan than it does with his parenting.

"There are innate tendencies in individuals," Ian said. "Obviously, there's a genetic component, but I don't think the environmental thing is as strong for him as that disposition to enjoy competition. That's just in Brendan."

"Too much can be placed on environment sometimes. This was an environment that allowed him to express that innate ability."

Here is a glimpse of that environment.

Scott Bonner has known the Gallagher family since Brendan was a child. Bonner is godfather to Brendan's younger brother, Nolan. Bonner is the one who gave Ian an opportunity to enter the world of elite hockey when he hired him as a scout for the Tri-City Americans of the WHL. He later brought Ian with him when he was named the first



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general manager of the Vancouver Giants. Bonner also drafted Brendan in the ninth round of the 2007 WHL bantam draft.

"He was always intense," said Bonner, who now works for Brendan's agent, Gerry Johannson. "So he was, say, 5ish and they had a soccer net in their backyard. I'm there and I'm just hitting the ball lightly toward the kid and Ian comes out and says, 'No, don't treat him like that.' Then he just starts bombing them at him, and the kid loved it. He was just a competitive guy. ... It's sort of that drive, you can't teach that to a kid."

Ian began coaching youth hockey right out of university in the late 1980s, but he stopped when he and Della had their first child, daughter Erin. That's when Bonner hired Ian to scout Northern Alberta for Tri-City. Brendan was born in 1992, and it wasn't long before he would be tagging along with his dad.

After Ian was hired by the Giants to be their strength and conditioning coordinator – and "de-facto assistant GM" according to Bonner – the Gallagher family left Sherwood Park, Alberta, and moved to Tsawwassen in 2004. This is where Brendan went from tagging along on scouting trips to seeing what actually went into becoming a great hockey player. He saw his dad put Giants players through hours of work in the gym as they prepared to compete at the highest level.

"I think it helped a lot with belief and processes," Ian said. "I think he really understood there's a process associated with being a hockey player and that's a lot of the things that are done away from what the public would know about."

It was the ultimate crash course on how to become a hockey player.

"For me to get to where I am, I've had a lot of people help me out," Brendan said after a late June workout with his dad. "I don't think I've had a coach that hasn't helped me along the way, and that includes my dad. This is what he excels at. We started doing it at maybe 13 or 14 years old and we've been doing the same program every single year. Little tweaks here and there, but it's pretty much been the same structure to it through the years. I continue to see results and I continue to believe in it."

Brendan and Ian Gallagher look over that day's schedule prior to a workout in late June. (Arpon Basu / For The Athletic)

Brendan's "we" is a group of guys he has worked out with for years that includes his good buddy Nicholls but also a pretty representative cross-section of the hockey world. There's a player from the KHL (Nicholls, who played for Kunlun Red Star last season), an NHL first-round pick (defenceman Ty Smith of the New Jersey Devils, who lives with Brendan in the offseason), a former NHL player trying to get back in the league (Lance Bouma, Brendan's teammate with the Giants who signed a pro tryout with the L.A. Kings), some AHL guys, some European pro guys, some junior guys.

Out of the group of a dozen or so players, all of them excellent at hockey, Brendan is the only one living the dream of being an NHL star.

"You see how hard he works every day," Nicholls said. "For us, it's a motivator. You're seeing him go to another level each day and some days you want to take it easy, but then you see that. He's at the peak of what you want to be and

he's still putting in that work. So he's a good role model for all of us to see the things you need to do to get to that level and compete at that level on a daily basis."

Gallagher's good friend Josh Nicholls. (Arpon Basu/For The Athletic)

The workout itself is nothing groundbreaking. But it's not easy. There is a power phase, which is where they were in late June, a strength phase and an endurance phase. All of it is laid out in extreme detail.

This day, a Monday morning in June, consists of some sprints, stretches, box jumps and weight training. At one point, Brendan is getting ready to deadlift more than 500 pounds when he decides that's not enough. He yells over to Smith, who has three, 15-pound weight vests on.

"Hey Ty, gimme those weight jackets," Brendan says.

"Why?" Smith asks.

"Just give 'em to me."

Brendan Gallagher, with Ian checking his form, deadlifts more than 500 pounds with 45 pounds worth of weight jackets on, for some reason. (Arpon Basu / For The Athletic)

He said after completing the lifts that the vests didn't make much of a difference. But that's not the point. The vests were a way for him to push himself. That's what Nicholls was referring to.

"This is just kind of the typical week," Brendan said. "It's the same group of guys that we've generally had since we were 13 or 14. We come back and everyone has their own little goals. What I love about it is we're all very competitive guys, so we push each other. Once you start running, you want to win the race. Once you start lifting, you want to lift more than you did before, but also more than the guy beside you."

Seeing this at such a young age, how it benefitted the players his dad worked with, was obviously an advantage for Gallagher. But that one disadvantage, the one no amount of hard work in the gym would overcome, plagued and fueled Gallagher.

"I had to really work to make teams," Gallagher said. "Then, once you're on the team, you eventually become one of the more relied-upon players. But I kind of had to earn it every single year, and that was probably good for me."

Take, for example, Gallagher's first year of midget hockey. There was a new coach that year, and in tryouts he had the players play three scrimmages, after which there was a round of "carding" where players who would be making the team would be identified. Gallagher scored 10 goals – not a typo – in the three scrimmages and wasn't immediately carded. He eventually made the team, but it was only because the initial disappointment after those scrimmages did not bring Gallagher down.

That's not how he reacts to disappointment. He didn't then. He doesn't now.

"It was just kind of a thing where instead of folding or going into a shell and making excuses, I was just trying to show him I can be a useful player and, in the end, I wound up earning his trust," Gallagher said. "You have two options when you're kind of faced with a little bit of adversity: you can fold and try to make excuses for yourself, or you can try and work harder."



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"At that point, I had some doubt of whether I would make the team or not, but you just keep playing and try to show him you can be a useful player and help him win games."

Be a useful player and help him win games. Gallagher says those words a lot. It is his mission statement.

One way Gallagher learned how to be useful at a very early age was to show a willingness to go to areas of the ice that some bigger players were more reluctant to visit. Gallagher not only visited those areas, he set up permanent residence.

"I grew up as an Edmonton Oiler fan and the person who had the most success in that regard was Glenn Anderson," Ian said. "He was somebody that really understood what going to the far post was. It just so happens that the goalie is in between you and the far post. So if you teach that route and you practice that route, that becomes part of their way of playing. So that particular type of play, I think that was taught. That's using that mentality and understanding there's a way you can be successful through that sort of net drive.

"There's always road maps for all players. For him, I watched Theoren Fleury in Calgary, I watched Glenn Anderson with the Oilers, and those two players played the game in a way that he himself could have success playing."

Nicholls saw those lessons at work as soon as he began playing on a line with Gallagher in peewee.

"Kelowna was one of our big rivals, and I'll never forget it because it's just a funny visual," Nicholls said. "So he does the same thing he always did, goes in there, runs over their goalie. It was a big playoff game or something, so he gets a penalty. He's like 5 feet tall at this point, his jersey's down to his knees and we've got parents in the crowd just cursing at him.

"I always think of that and it's just hilarious because he's the smallest kid, playing so hard and he's just driving people nuts no matter what. It always carries through and it's the same thing now. You watch games now and he's going to the net, falling over goalies and you just think to yourself, it's the same thing."

Gallagher wasn't selected until the ninth round of the WHL bantam draft. There was one team that wanted to take him earlier, but there was an obstacle.

"It probably had something to do with my dad," Gallagher surmised.

Ian's role as the strength and conditioning coach with the Vancouver Giants served as a double deterrent for WHL teams who might have considered drafting Brendan. On the one hand, all the teams aside from the Giants wanted to avoid drafting father and son as a tandem.

"You see me? You see what I look like? People think I'm pretty, uhhh ... combative," Ian said. "I think there was some sort of fear that with Brendan, came Ian."

But the GM of the Giants was Scott Bonner. He had known Brendan practically his entire life and knew he would be a perfect fit. But again, Ian stood in the way.

"I made them very aware of the fact that they should not feel obligated to draft him," Ian said. "In fact, the scout who insisted on drafting him was Scott's father, Terry Bonner. The head scout pulled me aside after and said, 'Ian, I just want to let you know that I did not want to draft your son. But Terry sort of insisted on it.'"

Remember that whole thing about Ian being, uhhh ... combative? That was definitely a factor here.

"At the time, Ian, because of his role with us, said, 'Let him play somewhere else.' He didn't want it to look like nepotism," Bonner said. "But it got to a point where it was, 'Look, Ian, sorry.' We had watched him forever, our scouting staff wanted him. Ian's an intense guy, but we don't care, we're taking (Brendan), we'll deal with Ian."

Bonner's willingness to ignore Ian's wishes and draft Gallagher proved to be a stroke of good fortune.

On a personal front, he was able to stay home and, for a kid who was an admitted picky eater, that helped.

From a hockey perspective, Gallagher met Giants head coach Don Hay, a hockey lifer who ran a meritocracy, no matter where a player was drafted.

During the first half of Gallagher's first junior season, Hay used him sparingly. Gallagher remembers being a healthy scratch 15 times before Christmas that year. But Hay had a message for all his players, and he found a receptive audience in Gallagher.

"Don had been talking about practice habits all year, that if you didn't compete on Thursday in practice you might not get to play Friday," Gallagher said. "It just kind of clicked with me as a 16-year-old that if I wanted to play, I had to be a great practice player, so I've got to learn these practice habits and these little details in the game. That's something he really instilled in your DNA, how important it was to not only compete in games, but to do it in practice the day before.

"I wasn't scratched again after Christmas for the rest of the year."

Gallagher scored 126 goals over his next three seasons with the Giants and won a bronze medal at the 2012 World Junior Championships for Canada.

A photo of Gallagher playing for the Canadian junior team on display at the Ladner Leisure Centre, his minor hockey home rink in Delta, B.C. (Arpon Basu / For The Athletic)

"Nobody in the history of the Giants to date has ever taken the beatings Brendan took," Bonner said. "He took beating after beating after beating. ... I don't know if there's many guys I've seen who had a harder road getting to where he's got to."

The beatings he took and the 41 goals he scored for Vancouver in his NHL draft year did not seem to impress many scouts, who seemed blinded by Gallagher's height. But there was one, Canadiens scout Vaughn Karpan, who believed Gallagher's game could translate well to the NHL.

"I learned something about small players when Brian Gionta was in the draft," said Karpan, now the Vegas Golden Knights' director of player personnel. "They're kind of the things you learn as a scout from mistakes you made along the way. I made the mistake of thinking Brian Gionta was too small. I see him at Boston College two years later and say, 'Somebody made a mistake there.' Well, it was me."

Other NHL teams did not have the benefit of that wisdom. The Chicago Blackhawks kept regular tabs on Gallagher through phone calls to Bonner that year and there was a belief in some circles that the Toronto Maple Leafs might have also had some interest. But the only scout who



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bothered to speak to Gallagher for any significant amount of time was Karpan, and he waited until the very end of the season to do it.

Karpan never spoke to Bonner about him, he never spoke to Hay either. He only spoke to Gallagher and he did so at the Tsawwassen White Spot, a five-minute drive from Gallagher's house, because Gallagher wanted a good burger that day.

The Tsawwassen White Spot, where Vaughn Karpan took Gallagher out for lunch in 2010. (Arpon Basu / For The Athletic)

The Canadiens had only five picks in the 2010 draft and after moving up to take Jarred Tinordi with the No. 22 pick in the first round, they didn't pick again until the fourth.

Karpan began making his case for Gallagher at the Canadiens' draft table that day and amateur scouting director Trevor Timmins and general manager Pierre Gauthier supported him. But they were willing to gamble Gallagher would be available in the fifth round, so they used their two fourth-round picks on centre Mark MacMillan and defenceman Morgan Ellis.

"He looked you in the eye and he was firm in his convictions," Karpan said of Gallagher. "He wasn't telling me something that he thought I wanted to hear. He was honest. He was the same then as he is today. He was just a mature, committed athlete who knew where he was going. He just knew it.

"So you bet on those people."

The 2010 draft was in Los Angeles. Gallagher was in Tsawwassen, watching on television.

"Brendan was sitting right here," his mother, Della, said, pointing to the head of the dining room table.

Della Gallagher in her dining room, where her son watched the 2010 draft. (Arpon Basu / For The Athletic)

"They went to commercial, and they didn't show when Brendan was drafted," Della said. "So Brendan was having soup and a grilled cheese and his phone rang, and it was Gerry Johansson, who was at the draft, and he said, 'Brendan, you just got taken by Montreal.' And he was like, 'What?'"

That's right. Gallagher was selected with the 147th pick. During a commercial break. All he's done since is score the fifth-most goals of anyone taken in that draft.

Gallagher's arrival in professional hockey coincided with the 2012 lockout, the first of several fortuitous opportunities that led to him becoming an NHL star. He was a standout player for Hamilton in the AHL in a year where the level of competition was heightened due to the influx of locked-out NHL talent forced to play in the minors.

The Canadiens were coming off a disastrous season, one that cost Pierre Gauthier his job as general manager and Randy Cunneynworth his as interim head coach.

In came Marc Bergevin and Michel Therrien, two men seeking to change the team culture to one based on character, hard work and relentless effort.

In other words, one based on Brendan Gallagher.

"If they would have had a good year, they might not have been looking at making all these changes, so me and Chucky (Alex Galchenyuk) got a shot that year," Gallagher said. "Obviously, you've got to take advantage of your opportunities, but I also know I'm pretty fortunate to get these chances."

That chance didn't come right away.

Galchenyuk was in the lineup on opening night but Gallagher was not, wearing a suit behind the bench and waving at a Bell Centre crowd that barely knew him.

"I talk about being fortunate and being happy to be there, but I was also pissed off," Gallagher said. "As a competitor, you want to play. I remember sitting there, watching the game and just thinking: 'I don't want to do this again.' It's not as fun watching."

The next day at practice, Gallagher set about putting his thoughts from that night into action.

Remember that stuff about being a good practice player?

"I remember doing a 1-on-1 drill in front of the net the next day at the Bell Centre and I ended up going against Lars (Eller)," Gallagher said. "It was just a battle. He's a big, strong guy and he was in the lineup already, so I took it more seriously than him. It was little puck battles, so I think I won three in a row and scored every time.

"I don't know this for sure, but I started that practice on the healthy scratch line. The next day, I was in the lineup. We played Florida at home, that's when Chucky scored his first goal, I got my first point, we won the game. We were on a line with Prusty (Brandon Prust) and we were a pretty decent line. It's little things like that where I don't know what would have happened if I didn't get to play that game. We played well, got to stay in the lineup. You need to take advantage of every opportunity you're given."

Brendan Gallagher has never been a healthy scratch since that opening night, Jan. 19, 2013.

Josh Gorges was 28 and had just been named an alternate captain when Gallagher arrived in Montreal. Brian Gionta was the captain. Being exposed to Gorges and Gionta was another opportunity that helped Gallagher along the path to NHL success.

Gorges and his wife, Maggie, took Gallagher in to live with them near the Canadiens' suburban practice facility, which was a great comfort to Gallagher, but perhaps more so to his mother, who was living clear across the country.

"When Brendan first made the NHL, Josh and Maggie took him in ... they totally mentored him," Della said. "Once a week, Brendan had to cook for them, so he would be Facetimeing me for recipes. He wanted to show big. He made lasagna and meatballs and Maggie said it turned out well. So he really loved his experience there."

Yeah, about that lasagna.

It did not turn out well.

The rule of Gallagher cooking dinner once a week lasted all of two weeks.

"We still make fun of him for that," Maggie said. "Every time we make lasagna, we take a picture and send it to him."



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So maybe Josh and Maggie Gorges didn't help Gallagher learn how to cook, but they taught him something far more important.

He was a 20-year-old playing for the Montreal Canadiens with a city full of people dying to be his friend. Few knew the potential pitfalls of that better than Josh Gorges.

"I don't think he gives himself enough credit. He didn't really need us," Maggie said. "I think it was convenient and it was nice for a young guy not to have to make meals for himself and not to be alone in the Montreal market and maybe get steered the wrong way. We really kept him from that part of it because we were always at home, or if we went out somewhere and we came home early, he would come with us. So we kind of helped steer him that way.

"But he's a smart kid, very mature and he's very serious about hockey."

Over those early years, Gallagher sat next to Gionta in the dressing room. This, of course, was no accident.

Gionta had a surprised look on his face when he learned he was the one who changed Vaughn Karpan's mind on smaller players. But then that look of surprise was replaced by a satisfied smile.

"It's exciting for me," Gionta said. "It was a much different game back then. But to just change people's mindsets – you look around the league and you've got three or four undersized guys on each team now, whereas before you could only have one and that was it. You wanted a bigger, stronger, faster team. So it's nice to see all these guys coming in the league, (Cam) Atkinson, (Johnny) Gaudreau, Gally, guys like that who have success just because they know how to play the game. They're not worried about the size anymore."

Gionta was a role model and sounding board for Gallagher. He was also someone he could pattern himself after, a consummate pro and a smaller player who made his living in the difficult areas of the ice.

"My first two years, obviously I've talked a lot about how important Gorgie was to me – and he definitely was – but Gio was almost equally as important," Gallagher said. "He was a champion. He was the captain of our team. He was so good about taking me aside and giving me little pointers, but at the same time being someone I could just watch and learn from."

Today, Gionta lives in Buffalo where he coaches youth hockey and his son Adam, another undersized player.

"My oldest, he's 14, and he still has a Gallagher sticker on his bedroom door," Gionta said. "Since we moved to Buffalo, he's had that sticker on his bedroom door.

"Like, that's the guy I want my kids to grow up watching."

For all the various episodes of good fortune Gallagher has had in his hockey life, there were two outlandishly unfortunate things that very nearly derailed it all.

How many players have had the same hand broken not only by two separate slap shots, but two slap shots from two of the hardest shooters in the league?

Gallagher is in a class of his own. But there was also some luck shining down on him.

His mom, a physiotherapist, was visiting Montreal the night her son took a Johnny Boychuk slap shot off his left hand in the first period against the Islanders on Nov. 22, 2015. He left the ice in severe pain. When the second period began, he was not on the ice.

"I get a phone call, and it's Brendan from the dressing room," Della said. "I said, 'Your hand.' He says, 'It's broken, can you come down?' So someone came and got me and I went right into the room and Dr. (Paul) Martineau was there. Brendan was sitting there with his hand like this and he looked like he was going to cry. They already took an X-ray and they showed me that it was smashed."

Not too many mothers could look at an X-ray of her son's shattered hand and think this was good news. But Della immediately knew the worst had been avoided because the fractures were largely limited to between Gallagher's two knuckles and avoided the tips of his fingers, which would have complicated things.

"How lucky was that? As a physiotherapist, with hand fractures, it always extends to the (top of the) finger," she said. "But the joints were involved, the fracture went into the joints and that's serious. That means surgery."

Della accompanied Brendan to the hospital that night to get a CT scan before surgery first thing the next morning.

"By then it's 11 o'clock, it's pretty dead there where the CT scanner is, and he lost it," Della said. "He just realized that he couldn't play anymore."

The benefits of Della being present were only beginning. She was able to use her expertise in the early days. She got him off opioid painkillers as soon as possible, less than a week after the surgery. And eventually, when Gallagher returned home for Christmas, she managed the final push of his rehab, the one that allowed him to play in the 2016 Winter Classic at Gillette Stadium against the Boston Bruins less than six weeks after his surgery.

"It was right down to the wire," she said. "That was really fun, really rewarding."

But Della's presence in Montreal also allowed her to see another side of her son.

Three days after his surgery, the two went to the Shriners Hospital to visit patients, something Gallagher does regularly, though not usually with his mother. Della got to see her son interact with a young girl, Annabelle, who was very shy and reserved. Brendan offered to sign her cast on the condition that she sign his, and a new fan was born.

"Those are the things that make me most proud," Della said, "it's how he interacts with people."

VIEW THIS POST ON INSTAGRAM

I WANT EVERYBODY TO MEET ANNABELLE. I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO MEET HER YESTERDAY AT THE SHRINERS HOSPITAL AND SHE MADE ME A DEAL. SHE LET ME SIGN HER CAST IF SHE COULD SIGN MINE, AND JUST LIKE THAT WE BECAME BEST FRIENDS. SO IF ANYBODY HAS A PROBLEM WITH ME YOU CAN TAKE IT UP WITH MY NEW BEST FRIEND ANNABELLE!

A POST SHARED BY BRENDAN GALLAGHER (@BGALLY.11) ON NOV 27, 2015 AT 10:50AM PST



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The visit, as great as it was for the kids, was equally therapeutic to Gallagher.

"I think it changed maybe my attitude about working to get back," he said. "The hardest thing sometimes, for us, is you're away from the team, your mood is probably low and you're not all that motivated to work and do the things you need to do to get back.

"But when you see these kids have that positive attitude, there's really no reason for you to not have that positive attitude."

If there is one thing that has led Gallagher to where he is today, it is a positive attitude. He used it to combat the preconceptions people had about players his size, to persevere when people tried to write him off, to put in the necessary offseason work to prepare himself physically for his style of game and to continuously improve on his primary weaknesses as a player, his skating and his shot, to the point where they can no longer be called weaknesses.

He has become far more than the useful player who helps his team win games that he always strived to be. He has become one of the best players in the world, a role model to kids who are constantly being needlessly limited and a lesson to the hockey world that a player's size means little when that same player would put a signed Hulk Hogan championship belt on the line just to avenge a loss in ping-pong.

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Five coaches and five GMs who absolutely won't get fired this year, maybe

By Sean McIndoe

Sep 5, 2019

The NHL season is almost here, which means it won't be long before we start hearing about all the hot seats around the league. Is Mike Babcock in trouble in Toronto? Does John Chayka need to make the playoffs in Arizona? Would Minnesota's Bill Guerin prefer his own guy to Bruce Boudreau? Can Jason Botterill afford another miserable season in Buffalo?

But while the hot seat conversation is standard issue in pro sports, it always feels a bit awkward. We're talking about people's livelihoods here. We have to cover this stuff, but it's not a pleasant topic.

So let's turn it around and stay positive: Who's on the cold seat? In other words, which NHL coaches and GMs are all but assured of still being on the job one full year from now?

It's a tougher question than you might think. Everyone in the NHL is hired to be fired eventually, and just about everyone's job security is one bad losing streak from coming into question. I wanted to come up with 10 names, and honestly, that might be too many. But we'll do it anyway, because half the fun of doing this sort of list is so that when one (or more)

of these guys inevitably gets fired in a few months, you can all come back here to point and laugh at me. It's OK, I'm used to it by now.

Before we start, there's one important ground rule: No picking any recent hires who've been on the job for less than one full year. That's too easy. With apologies to Paul Fenton, even the worst coaches and GM usually get at least a year or two on the job in the NHL, so picking a brand-new hire is cheating. You won't be seeing slam dunk names like Joel Quenneville or Steve Yzerman on the list, which increase the degree of difficulty.

We'll try to come up with five coaches and five GMs. And we'll start in the front office, where the job tends to be a little bit more secure.

General managers

Doug Armstrong

We might as well lead off with the one name on the list that feels like a genuine sure thing. Armstrong is the reigning Cup winner, and getting fired after a championship is just about impossible. (Sorry, Al MacNeil.) And even if the Blues got off to an absolutely terrible start, well, they did that last year too and things worked out OK.

Armstrong is a well-respected GM with plenty of experience and doesn't seem like he'd want to leave on his own anytime soon, so barring some sort of scandal or falling out with ownership, he's just about as safe as anyone could possibly be. Which isn't completely safe, because this is still the NHL. But it's pretty safe.

Doug Wilson

We're two names in, and this one already feels at least a little risky. But only a little. I think Wilson is the very best GM in the league today, and the Sharks should be a very good team. It's hard to imagine them having a bad year unless they run into major injury problems, which GMs usually escape the blame for. With 16 years on the job and counting, this is Wilson's team, and it's a very good one.

That doesn't mean it couldn't all blow up in his face. We thought it already had a few years ago, when the Sharks were missing the playoffs and the franchise player was telling Wilson to shut his mouth. The GM survived that, so he should be able to weather any unexpected hurdles this year throws at him. If the aging Sharks hit a wall and miss the playoffs, could ownership decide that it's time for a new direction and a fresh set of eyes? Nothing's impossible, but it would take a total disaster.

Kyle Dubas

In one sense, Dubas is already on the hot seat because every GM in a market like Toronto is on the hot seat the moment he clocks in on his first day. But in terms of job security, Dubas feels like he should be safe for another year at least. He's still new, having only formally held the title for one season. By all accounts, he has the full support of Brendan Shanahan, who chose him for the job at the expense of Lou Lamoriello and Mark Hunter. And he's done a reasonably good job so far, landing John Tavares, making some aggressive trades and getting Auston Matthews locked up on a long-term deal.

Could it all go bad in Toronto? Absolutely. The drawn-out Mitch Marner saga still hangs over everything and another first-round exit would have fans calling for heads, especially



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if it came against the Bruins. But even if that happened, the betting here is that it would be Babcock who walked the plank first. The moment that happens, the GM becomes the next guy in line. But unless things completely fall apart, the worst-case scenario this time next year is that Dubas has a new coach and a ton of new pressure, but still has his job.

Jeff Gorton

I like what Gorton's done in New York, and I'm guessing his bosses do too. He made his biggest move as GM this summer by luring Artemi Panarin, and his team is clearly moving past their rebuild mode and into a win-now mentality. But while that will translate to higher expectations of a playoff spot sometime soon, you don't get the sense that it absolutely has to be this year. As long as the Rangers improve, and they almost have to, they'll be looking to stay the course. At some point Gorton sold ownership on a roadmap; there's little reason to think they'd change course now.

Ray Shero

I don't feel great about this pick. The Devils seem likely to miss the playoffs again this year, which would be the fourth time in Shero's five seasons. Plenty of GMs with that sort of track record have been wished well in their future endeavors. But he's coming off a fantastic offseason and has assembled a very good young core (with some help from the lottery ping pong balls). The Devils are clearly heading in the right direction.

If the season was an absolute debacle – a scenario which could include Taylor Hall bolting as a free agent – then Shero might be on shaky ground. But that seems like a long shot, and unlike most of the other names on this list he still has a Stanley Cup ring he can flash to try to buy some extra patience.

But hey, what about ...

Remember, we said we're looking for guys who'll still be on the job in a year, which isn't the same as picking guys who won't be fired. It's hard to imagine David Poile getting a pink slip, but he's old enough that at some point retirement – or at least a "promotion" to make room for a successor – could come into play. That's the same reason I'm not including Lou Lamoriello on the list, even after he worked a miracle for the Islanders, or Jim Rutherford in Pittsburgh.

Jim Benning's recent extension should mean that he's safe for at least a year, but a disastrous Canucks' season could change that. Julien BriseBois can't make the list because he just narrowly misses our one-year cutoff. And Don Sweeney was a close sixth, where my only concern is that at five years on the job with a contending team he's right in that sweet spot of having been around long enough that the pressure is on to deliver a title, but not so long that he's got the security of being a lifer. But you could swap him in for Gorton, Dubas or Shero without much of a complaint from me.

And then there's maybe the most obvious candidate you might be thinking of: George McPhee. He pulled off the unheard of feat of turning an expansion team into an immediate Cup contender, building a 100-point powerhouse completely from scratch. There's a very good case to be made that he's done the best job of anyone in the league over the last two seasons. But there's one problem: Technically, he's not the GM in Vegas anymore. That's Kelly McCrimmon now, at least in title, even as McPhee is still

running the show. So if you're thinking that any current NHL GM is a sure thing to still hold the job a year from now, remember how much of a lock McPhee would have felt like this time last year.

Coaches

Gerard Gallant

While we couldn't use his boss in the GM category, we can certainly include Gallant in the coaching section. His stint with the Panthers didn't exactly end well, but he's been fantastic in Las Vegas. In two years he's won the Jack Adams, gone to a Cup final and made the playoffs twice. What more could you ask for? OK, sure, maybe a little better penalty killing on five-minute majors. But other than that, he's a lock.

And while we're pumping the tires of recent Jack Adams coaches, we might as well go with last year's runaway winner ...

Barry Trotz

All Trotz did in Year 1 with the Islanders was take a team that just about everyone had pegged as a laughingstock and turn them into a 100-point Cup contender. That earned him his second Jack Adams in four years and cemented his reputation as one of the very best coaches in the league. He's dead certain to stick around, as long as he doesn't have any sneaky contract options and/or the Islanders don't completely implode.

That implosion isn't completely out of the question, if only because Trotz saw half of his Jennings-winning goaltending combination leave in free agency. If the Mitch Korn magic wears off, it's not hard to imagine the Islanders having to fight for a playoff spot, and maybe even missing all together. That adds just a little bit of uncertainty to Trotz's story, because he works for a GM with a habit of making stunning late-season coaching changes. That keeps Trotz's security from the 100 percent certainty level. Let's nudge it all the way down to 99.9 percent.

Bill Peters

Peters is five years into his NHL coaching career and has made the playoffs once. Luckily for him, timing is everything and that one appearance came last year. His debut season with the Flames saw them make a surprise jump from also-rans all the way to the top of the Pacific Division. That's the sort of year that buys you some patience.

There are at least few warning lights on the Flames' dashboard heading into this season, including an uncertain goaltending situation. But Peters managed to survive four playoff misses in Carolina and still leave on his own terms, so even a freefall down the standings this year shouldn't be fatal to his status in Calgary.

Bruce Cassidy

A lot of us were underwhelmed when the Bruins made the midseason switch from Claude Julien to Cassidy back in 2017. But he's done a great job ever since, and got the Bruins to within a Game 7 of a Cup. The red flag here is that he's only got one year left on his contract, so in theory he could head somewhere else a free agent next summer. The Bruins say they're going to work on an extension, and everyone expects that deal to get done. But it hasn't yet, and until that happens this long-term marriage isn't quite ironclad.



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But it is close enough to make our list, because man, is it ever tough to find five coaches you feel really good about in today's NHL. I mean that. I'm running out of names. I'm OK with the four that we've got so far, but I'm seriously thinking of just cutting it off here and hoping that nobody on the internet reads closely enough to keep track.

Todd Reirden, I guess?

It came down to him or David Quinn in New York. Quinn is Gorton's guy, but he's also an inexperienced NHL coach with heightened expectations in a division that could be tough, and if the Rangers fall out of the playoff race right out of the gate it won't play well in a big media market. Also, he has a new Russian star on the roster, and hockey tradition means I have to refer to those guys as enigmatic coach killers.

I still think Quinn is reasonably safe. But since we already picked a Ranger in the GM section, I'll spread the risk around and go with Reirden instead. He had the unenviable task of replacing Trotz after a Cup win, and while he couldn't lead the Caps to a repeat, he did guide them to basically the same record. That should buy him some time, especially since he was Brian MacLellan's first traditional coaching hire, meaning the GM would have to eat some crow if he made a change too quickly.

Is it possible that the Caps could have another solid season followed by a disappointing first-round exit and decide to make a change back to a Trotz-like veteran in an attempt to win another Cup while the Alexander Ovechkin window is still open? Actually, when you spell it out like that, it seems kind of reasonable. Plus Ovechkin is also an enigmatic coach killer. You know what, let's just wrap this up before I change my mind.

But hey, what about...

Jon Cooper is the longest-serving coach in the league and one of the best, but he's under pressure to make noise in the playoffs and has a GM who didn't hire him, so he doesn't make the cut. Peter Laviolette and Paul Maurice are both still looking for Cups with their current team heading into their sixth full seasons, so you can hear at least a bit of a clock ticking in both Nashville and Winnipeg. Jim Montgomery is only a year into the job in Dallas but management there doesn't always seem entirely stable so I'm not comfortable listing him. And reigning Cup champ Craig Berube is a lock, but misses our one-year cutoff.

As for Rod Brind'Amour, yeah, he should probably be on this list. He's just one year into his head coaching career in Carolina, got his team back into the postseason and pulled off two playoff upsets. He's also a beloved franchise figure from his playing days, which never hurts. But the thing is ... well, Tom Dundon is just weird, right? This is a guy who didn't think his own GM needed a contract. Are we really completely sure that he wouldn't fire his coach for losing five in a row or missing the playoffs or having his sideburns too long? I'm not, so Brind'Amour misses the cut.

So there's my list. Given my track record with predictions, apologies in advance to these 10 guys for probably dooming them.

If you want to yell at me in the comments about leaving somebody from your favorite team off the list, go ahead. But do me one favor: Post your own 10 names too, so we can see how it holds up. Then we all meet back here one year

from now, pick through the ashes and laugh at how crazy this league can be.

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The Athletic / Most intriguing NHL prospect to watch at camp for every team, 2019-20 edition

By Corey Pronman

Sep 4, 2019

With NHL rookie camps set to open this weekend, I'm going to discuss the most interesting prospects heading into the camp process.

This isn't a list of each team's best prospect, or who is most likely to make the team and produce in the NHL; rather this is simply identifying a prospect in each system who I think is the most interesting heading into NHL camp.

Anaheim: Maxime Comtois, LW

Comtois made the Ducks out of camp last season and pretty much scored wherever he went. Seven points in 10 NHL games. Ten points in 16 AHL games. Six points in five World Junior games. Sixty-three points in 41 QMJHL games with a heavy tilt toward goals. He's a player on the upswing. Comtois may not be a flashy player, but scouts love his sense, shot and compete level. The question is whether he can show up at camp and run away with a top-nine forward job in the NHL. One could argue that's even a reasonable expectation.

Arizona: Victor Soderstrom, D

The Coyotes made noise at the 2019 draft by trading up to get Soderstrom at 11th overall. He was a tough player to evaluate last season because he barely played in international games and spent most of the year as a 17-year-old in the SHL. The Coyotes clearly believe in him a lot, and it will be interesting to see how close to the league he looks already. Some scouts believe in the player a lot and think he could get a long look at camp; whereas others don't see high-end upside and think he's years away.

Boston: Jakub Zboril, D and Zach Senyshyn, RW

I'm sure Bruins fans are tired of hearing about the first round of the 2015 draft, especially given how great Jake DeBrusk and Brandon Carlo became out of that draft. However, top-15 picks Zboril and Senyshyn still have a lot of scouts watching their progression. They are entering their third pro seasons in the Bruins organization. With both 22 years old, if they are going to be NHLers, this is their time to show it. I don't think it's realistic to expect them to make the Bruins, but at least show they are close and progressing because to date the progression has not been anything to write home about.

Buffalo: Rasmus Asplund, C

The 21-year-old Asplund will be entering his fourth season since being drafted 33rd overall by the Sabres. He's been



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good but not amazing at the SHL and AHL levels. There doesn't seem to be a clearing for him to break camp as a center, but with Dylan Cozens also on the way, I think it's an important camp for Asplund to show he can play against NHLers and he's a part of the Sabres' future.

Calgary: Dillon Dube, C

Dube made the Flames last season, and he spent a lot of time in the NHL before being sent down to the AHL, where he was excellent. Dube was technically a graduate when I did the Flames' prospect ranking, but realistically he's a player who is coming into camp with something to prove to try and win an NHL job. Scouts would not describe Dube as a high-end skill or flashy type, but he's an excellent skater, he has a well-rounded game and he scores wherever he goes.

Carolina: Morgan Geekie, C

The Hurricanes have several forwards vying for NHL time. Martin Necas is an elite prospect right on the doorstep, Janne Kuokkanen has been excellent in the AHL and earned NHL games, and Julien Gauthier is a first-round pick who had a solid second pro season. Geekie though is the one I'm most curious to see how he fares. He was awesome in the AHL playoffs and had a great rookie pro season. He has the size and skill for the NHL, but the big thing to watch is whether he can skate at that level. It'll be the factor between him being just a great AHL player and a future top-nine forward for the Hurricanes. I don't expect him to make it, but I'm curious if he can make those other candidates sweat.

Chicago: Kirby Dach, C and Alexander Nylander, RW

Dach and Nylander have both generated a lot of discussions this summer. Dach for being the third-overall pick and, while immensely talented, he is a bit divisive among scouts. Many Chicago fans were up in arms over the trade of Nylander for Henri Jokiharju. There are a lot of expectations on Nylander to show he's a legit NHL player and someone who could help the team soon. For Dach, there is a path for him to make the team, but even if he gets sent to junior, just looking the part of a third-overall pick would make Chicago fans very happy.

Colorado: Conor Timmins, D

Timmins missed an entire season due to a concussion. Prior to the concussion he was a promising junior player. I wouldn't have called him a high-end prospect at the time, but he looked like a player on the NHL track due to his great hockey sense and two-way play. He looks healthy right now, but there is a question mark of whether he can pick up where he left off and what happens if he takes a high hit. You hope the best for his career and safety.

Columbus: Emil Bemstrom, RW

Columbus has taken it on the chin in public discourse due to its all-in push last season, leaving it without draft picks and minus two core players a season later. With that said, the Blue Jackets made some smart mid-round picks to keep their system out of the gutter. Bemstrom is one example of that, as he was fantastic in the SHL last season. If he can show up at NHL camp, make the team and show he can be a top-nine-quality player, he can give Columbus a much deeper forward group.

Dallas: Ty Dellandrea, C

Dellandrea is a very talented player. Tools-wise he seems to have everything you want for a future NHL player and it's why he was a top 15 pick. With that said, he has yet to produce at any meaningful level in the OHL. Defenders of him will be very quick to point out the team around him. It's a fair point, he didn't have a supporting staff in Flint. So in an NHL camp this is his time to shine, to show he's a true top prospect and someone who is at least close to the NHL level.

Detroit: Moritz Seider, D

The Wings made noise early at the draft by selecting Seider sixth overall. They weren't alone in the NHL world in thinking he was that good, but it was a minority opinion. It's expected Seider won't make the team and will spend a year in the AHL or Germany, but he still is clearly the most interesting player going to camp. As someone who didn't get much ice time last season, a lot of scouts and fans want to see what exactly Seider can bring at an NHL camp. His skating is clearly at NHL level, but his puck-game will be closely monitored.

Edmonton: Tyler Benson, LW

Benson had an awesome rookie pro season, as a top player at the AHL level. The Oilers don't have depth on the wing, especially after the departure of Jesse Puljujarvi. There is a path for Benson to make the team and be an important player for them. The biggest test will be his skating. He has the skill and hockey sense for the NHL, but he will need to show he can play at the speed of the top level during camp.

Florida: Brady Keeper, D

Florida is expected to have competition from young forwards soon, but its pipeline is bare at defense. That is what makes college free agent Keeper interesting. He looked good in his NHL game late last season and is talented enough to make a push for the roster. Even if he doesn't make the team, if he can push for a spot, it could provide Florida with some much needed depth on defense should injury or performance issues arise.

Los Angeles: Arthur Kaliyev, RW

Kaliyev, a 50-goal, 100-point man in the OHL was a divisive prospect all last season entering the draft, and he ended up being an early second-round pick by the Kings. There were teams that were big believers because of his elite brain and shot, but many more who had no time for him due to his play off the puck and average quickness. He's likely not an NHL candidate this season, but this camp, like the previous world juniors camp where he was great, is an opportunity for Kaliyev to silence critics, or potentially provide more evidence for them that he can't play at an NHL pace.

Minnesota: Nico Sturm, C

The Wild's top prospects are all still some time away from making a dent at camp, but Sturm is the top guy in the next group of talent in their farm system. Sturm was a top collegiate free agent and looked fine in two NHL games he played last year. The question for the 24-year-old is if he can step into camp and steal someone's job on the fourth line. He's got ability but he's not a dynamic player.

Montreal: Josh Brook, D

A look at the Habs' depth at defense doesn't instill confidence. For that reason, Brook is the most interesting prospect for the Habs going into camp even if forwards Nick



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Suzuki and Ryan Poehling are better players. Even as a right-handed shot, there's a real opportunity here for Brook, who looked excellent last season in the WHL. I would personally lean to giving him some AHL time, but if he looks good enough, he may force the Habs' hand.

Nashville: Eeli Tolvanen, RW

The highly skilled Tolvanen came into last camp with a lot of expectations. He didn't overly impress, was sent down, and was up and down in the AHL. He's only 20 years old, but this upcoming camp is an important time for him to show he's made strides over the summer in terms of his speed and game off the puck. Even if he doesn't make the team, having a great camp and making it a tough decision would be a positive development for him.

New Jersey: Jesper Boqvist, LW

Boqvist is a prospect who inspires a bit of debate in scouting circles. Some scouts really believe in him, and others don't see a great player there. He's had a good career to date in Sweden and is a very quick and skilled player even if at times inconsistent. The Devils have a good, but thin system depth-wise, and need a player like Boqvist to have a good camp, look like a real player and make their lineup longer to make their rebuild work.

New York Islanders: Oliver Wahlstrom, RW

Wahlstrom had a tough season in Boston College but was very promising once he turned pro and played in the AHL. A lot has been said about Wahlstrom in the past 12 months, among fans and media and behind the scenes in the scouting community, so this is a great chance for him to play well against NHL opponents and ease the concerns of some of the Islanders faithful.

New York Rangers: Igor Shesterkin, G

Expectations are that top prospects Kaapo Kakko, Vitaly Kravtsov and Adam Fox will make the Rangers, but Shesterkin is the most interesting to me given the Rangers' goalie situation. Henrik Lundqvist is in the twilight of his career and signed at big money for the next two years, and Alexandar Georgiev has been a pleasant surprise the past two years. It's a tough situation when you add in Shesterkin, who is 23 years old and one of the best goalie prospects in the NHL. He may need time to adjust to North America, but if he looks excellent, it could create a very difficult choice for the Rangers front office.

Ottawa: Logan Brown, C

Brown has been up and down the past few years, with his second half of his rookie pro season being more on the upward trajectory. He's a player who inspires a lot of debate among scouts. Some love him. They see the size, skill and IQ, and think he's a no doubt top-six center. Others think he's too slow, and doesn't compete hard enough. The Senators need help, a lot of help, and I think Brown has the most upside of any player in that farm system. A camp from Brown where he shows continued improvement and forces his way onto the big team would be a sign of good news for a fanbase that is longing for good news.

Philadelphia: German Rubtsov, C

Rubtsov's stock was trending down before the start of last season where he looked excellent as a rookie in the AHL before an injury ended his season. There's an opening down the Flyers lineup, and for a guy like Rubtsov who is such a

well-rounded forward – the fit there seems ideal. If he shows up at camp and looks like the player he was in 14 AHL games, he could find his way onto the roster even with top-end talents like Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost competing with him.

Pittsburgh: Pierre-Olivier Joseph, D

Pierre-Olivier Joseph was an important part of the Phil Kessel trade, but at the same time, is a player who some scouts have soured on since his draft year. He stagnated a bit toward the end of his QMJHL career, but after turning pro and with a new organization this is a chance for him to show he's still on the NHL radar. I don't expect him to make the Penguins, but they are not that deep on defense organizationally and if he can at least look like a call-up option it would help the team a lot.

St. Louis: Jordan Kyrou, RW

It's not easy to make the reigning Cup champions' roster as a prospect, especially when that roster has not seen much significant change since that championship run. Kyrou is going to be in the mix though. He's a dynamic player who was excellent in the AHL as a 20-year-old. And while he won't have a job handed to him, he is a player all eyes will be on to see if he can wrestle a spot away from a winger on the Blues. The Athletic's Jeremy Rutherford reported that Kyrou will be healthy for camp after having knee surgery.

San Jose: Ryan Merkley, D

Merkley had a good but not amazing season, with elite offense and subpar defense. With rumors circling in OHL circles since the end of last season of Peterborough looking to trade Merkley, the off-ice arguments about the player that have followed him for years were revived – which he brought upon himself. Merkley had a very good camp last fall and looked solid in the AHL in the spring. You could make an argument Merkley needs to get out of the OHL and have the Sharks work with him full-time, but he will need to give them a reason in camp for them to hold onto him and not send him back to junior.

Tampa Bay: Carter Verhaeghe, LW

Verhaeghe is one of the more interesting prospects in hockey. Not long ago you could have called him a likely career AHLer. But he had a monster 2018-19, leading the AHL in goals and points. Now, the 24-year-old heads in Tampa's camp as a legit contender for a roster spot despite how many solid forward prospects they have on the way.

Toronto: Rasmus Sandin, D

With how well Sandin played last season in the AHL even as an 18-year-old, with Travis Dermott's injury and the options on Toronto's third pair not being the best, there is an opportunity for Sandin to break camp with the Leafs. Even if he doesn't make the team, if he looks close, he could give the Leafs a real option if injury or performance issues arise to deepen their defensive unit.

Vancouver: Kole Lind, RW

Lind had a tough first pro season, struggling to earn AHL ice time two years after being the 33rd-overall pick in the 2017 draft. He's a very talented player who checks a lot of the boxes you look for in a future NHL player, but the pro level proved to be a challenge for him. I don't expect him to make the Canucks, but I am looking to see any improvements he



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may have made over the summer physically and if he can have more of an impact versus men.

Vegas: Nicolas Hague, D

Hague had a great camp last season with Vegas and followed it up with a promising first pro season. There's a lot of competition for one defense spot in Vegas' camp, with Jimmy Schuldt and Zach Whitecloud also battling to make the team. Hague is the clear best player of the three, even if the youngest. There aren't many defensemen with Hague's combination of size and skill, and the Vegas blue line isn't that deep, so if he plays well he could force his way into an important role with the team.

Washington: Alexander Alexeyev, D

Alexeyev is a highly talented defenseman with size and a former first-round pick of the Capitals. He's entering camp with the mindset of winning a roster spot and the Capitals' defense unit right now has space. With the so-so play of first-round pick Lucas Johansen in the AHL and Alexeyev having more puck-moving skill than Jonas Siegenthaler, if Alexeyev has a good camp it's not unheard of that he could make his way onto the roster or at the very least make himself the first call-up option.

Winnipeg: Logan Stanley, D

I don't expect Stanley to make the Jets out of camp, but for a pick that has been debated significantly since the Jets traded up to get him in 2016, Stanley's first pro season was promising. He was a top rookie defenseman in the AHL. It will be interesting to see how the tall, physical defenseman carries that over to this NHL camp and if he can at least make it a hard decision to cut him.

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The Athletic / Inside the Summit: How Auston Matthews, Hilary Knight and hockey's elite get better

Craig Custance

Sep 4, 2019 83

ESTERO, Fla. — Auston Matthews stood at the front of the room and immediately jumped into his explanation. He was in a conference room at a Hyatt resort that, it's safe to say, never hosted a group quite like this. He leaned one arm on the podium, freeing up his other arm to point at the screen to his immediate left showing a goal he scored.

In front of him was an incredible collection of women's hockey players. American stars like Hilary Knight, Kendall Coyne Schofield and Brianna Decker were mixed in with counterparts from rival Canada like Laura Fortino, Natalie Spooner and Brianna Jenner. A combination of elite hockey players from two hockey superpowers setting aside country for one shared goal: to get incrementally better at their craft. Just like NHL stars did in that room a few days earlier.

First, Matthews lets the clip run in its entirety. It's a one-timer he scored against the Panthers after a lengthy possession in

the offensive zone. There's a lot to talk about. So he plays it back, walking everyone through what he sees. There's cycling. A bit of chaos and, ultimately, Matthews finding open ice.

"I think guys moving around like that, you don't really know who to check," Matthews says of the issue facing the Panthers defenders. "Nobody knows who to guard, who to take. It opens up space and I just kind of try to find an area where I can get the puck back."

He finishes and it's quiet.

Knight breaks the silence with an observation. Then there's a question and the conversation slowly gets going. There's a point made about the angle of his skates. There's a question about who Matthews looks at when trying to find an opening.

When it gets quiet again with an extended pause, Matthews smiles.

"This is how we started off, too. Don't worry," he says, to laughs.

It wouldn't stay quiet for long. Like the group of some of the NHL's best players who experienced this same exercise a few days earlier, this conversation would heat up quickly. To understand how all these great hockey players quietly ended up all in one place, in a rigorous late-August week of on-ice training mixed with high-end film study, it helps to understand the mind of the guy who made it all happen.

Auston Matthews leads a film session with a room full of the world's best women's hockey players. (Craig Custance/The Athletic)

Darryl Belfry is standing in his Naples living room next to a giant television showing the U.S. Open. Venus Williams is taking on Elina Svitolina. It's Wednesday afternoon in one of the busiest, most stressful, exhilarating and rewarding weeks of Belfry's calendar year. More than 20 of the NHL's best players, like Matthews, Patrick Kane and Mathew Barzal, have been training with him all week in a group that also includes standouts like Roman Josi, Charlie McAvoy, Frederik Andersen among many others. Some train with Belfry or fellow skills coach Adam Nicholas all year, others came via personal invitation. Another 20-plus accomplished women's Olympians have either just arrived or are en route to take part in the first Olympian summit. His house is full of activity.

Three coaches helping him out — Tristan Musser, Adam McHugh and Dan Dukart — are at the kitchen table breaking down video from the morning session with NHL players. Belfry's golden retriever Solo is stalking lizards on the other side of the sliding door. Belfry's son is playfully chasing Nicholas in the hallway.

Belfry pauses in the midst of it to watch Williams play tennis. Jack Han, the video coach of the Toronto Marlies, is on the couch manning the remote control. Han is a tennis player, so Belfry starts grilling him about strategy. Han grabs the remote, rewinds to the beginning of the most recent rally and they immediately break it down.

Williams rips the ball across the court. Han pauses it. Then comes a 90-second breakdown between Han and Belfry focusing on why she hit the ball where she did. Svitolina returns it. Pause. Another analysis. This is repeated over and over again. The rally comes to an end when Svitolina



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barely gets to a backhand, lofting a return to the middle of the court that Williams was waiting for in perfect position.

"... then you report to that middle T and you have your shot," Han concludes.

"I like it," Belfry said.

It goes to commercial and they get back to work. That's how Belfry's mind works — even when he's taking a break from hockey, he's still trying to figure out how elite athletes operate. Maybe there's something there to learn, to steal, to pass on to the players with whom he's working. There's no off switch. There can't be, he believes.

Belfry didn't play hockey at a high level. He's worked his way up to having a stable of yearlong clients, this annual camp of NHL standouts and his spot on the Maple Leafs coaching roster as a player development consultant by constantly learning and innovating.

"I feel like when you don't have an accomplished playing career at any high level, you have to assume that there is just a ton you don't know. So there is an endless search for meaning that you're going to try and check and recheck," Belfry said. "The league evolves, people are getting better. I took that on myself. I'm responsible for providing new ideas or teaching them something new, then I have to take that on as a challenge for myself. I have to get better. I have to find faster, more efficient, more effective ways."

And when he does, he has to clearly communicate that to the players with whom he's working. During this camp, everything is recorded. The conversations. The meetings. There are coaches on skates with iPads, constantly recording every drill, every sequence and then tagging the players so that they can be cut into clips after the session. There was even a drone above the ice until it came a little too close to the action for everyone's comfort.

When the clips are sorted by player, the coaches look for nuances to highlight and tweak. Then Belfry does a personalized voice-over for each player after every session, with detailed suggestions on areas they can improve.

It's now later on Wednesday afternoon when Belfry sits down on his patio, an iPad on the table and a plan to help Blackhawks sniper Alex DeBrincat improve his vision. He shuts off the outdoor fan for clearer audio. The clips of DeBrincat are playing and he records his observations over them:

I want to go through this one habit that you have as it relates to your hands and puck protection. This first one, you're going to see your hand, see how it tucks there? With this top hand right here, it goes underneath. What that's going to do is throw your weight back on your heels and you're going to have a hard time getting out of this to make your next play.

He moves on to a clip of DeBrincat doing a similar play more effectively, highlighting the positives. He goes over very small details about the placement of DeBrincat's elbows and how one small tweak might give him more flexibility to make the next play.

Then it moves to a clip of DeBrincat working against Sabres forward Kyle Okposo.

I love this cutback. One of the reasons I love this cutback is you turn Okposo's feet in before you turn back. So that's really effective. Allows you to really open that play up.

"It's great to have," DeBrincat says the next afternoon after watching his clips. "It's just great to see the video to what he's talking about. He's drawing on it too right there. It's easy to understand ... anything different I can take and put in my game is obviously a positive."

As useful as that might be, it's not the most impactful part of this week. That comes from the collaboration between the players.

Patrick Kane, the namesake behind The 88 Summit, has taken the lead in sharing his insight with fellow players. (Syl Corbett / Special to The Athletic)

Vegas forward Alex Tuch admits later that he was surprised to see his name up on the screen in the front of the hotel conference room. That meant a clip featuring a play he made during the season was going to be shown at the 88 Summit, the gathering of NHL standouts breaking down film of each other's game one evening at Belfry's camp.

During the season, Nicholas, a skills coach who trains with Tuch, sent Belfry six or seven clips of Tuch repeating a move often enough for it to clearly be intentional. Do it once, it's a fluke. Six times? This was someone who had mastered a unique skill. Nicholas noticed Tuch using his size and reach to extend plays by taking one hand off his stick, shielding a defender with the other and making one-handed passes to teammates. It was the perfect skill to share with a roomful of players hungry to add to their toolbox.

The best example of Tuch's move came during a November game against the Bruins. The highlight shines on the screen, showing Tuch driving down the left side of the ice, defended well by Bruins defenseman John Moore. Just when you think he's going to keep going behind the net, he reaches out with one hand and wraps around a pass to Cody Eakin, who was streaking into the slot. Eakin buries a goal past Jaroslav Halak.

The room is quiet as Tuch explains his thought process.

"My stick allows me to stretch out and whip the puck around a little more than other guys," Tuch begins, standing at a podium in the front of the room. "By taking off my inside hand, I try to almost shield the pokecheck to create space between the puck and the gap and the defender as much as possible here and almost tie him up, which allows my stick to come across and put it into the slot area."

Then come the questions and comments from NHL players sitting around the dark room.

Moore plays that pretty well but you put the puck in a position where he can't get it.

It's funny to watch the other defenders backcheck because they pretty much think the play is dead when you're pretty much on the goal line with one hand, they think the play is dead. You tossing the puck right back to the guy down the slot is a surprising play to the defense.

Yeah, I don't know how you defend that. You can't really defend that.

Tuch responds.

"I try to keep (Moore) behind me like I'm going to be cutting to the middle a little bit. I just try to lower my shoulder. I've found that extending the stick and being able to protect the puck allows me to reach around. I'm still pushing him behind me, so he's not going to have the same reach I do."



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If he backed off you, would you have taken it to the net?

“Yeah, probably driven the shoulder down, extended my inside leg and tried to keep two hands on the stick so I could shoot the puck.”

(Torey) Krug is getting ready for the release to the back of the net. He’s thinking you’re going to go around and he’s going to jump it. That’s a smart play.

At this point it’s rapid-fire. The players are legitimately curious about the play. Tuch answers it all. This goes on for several more minutes. Just this one clip sparking observations from all over the room. Goal scorers are wondering if you can shoot it. The defensemen are trying to figure out how to defend it. There’s no coach telling these players what to do, just a group of elite athletes brainstorming around a unique play.

Then, the next morning, these same players are on the ice at Hertz Arena (home of the ECHL’s Florida Everblades) and as you might expect, there’s a group of them out there trying to incorporate one-handed Tuch passes into their game.

“Guys were apparently pretty impressed,” Tuch said after the camp wrapped up. “It’s exciting for me being a first-time player in here, still a young guy trying to make my footprint in the league. Guys like Kane and Auston Matthews, a couple other guys who were just passing by and complimenting it, trying to break it down. Roman Josi says he doesn’t know how to defend it. I’m like, ‘Maybe I should start doing this more.’”

The on-ice sessions provided opportunity for more organic collaboration. There was Barzal and Matt Dumba chatting on the ice and talking about entries. Dumba wanted to know how Barzal determined which side of the body to attack against defensemen while entering the offensive zone. Barzal explained that he looked to see which hand the defender was and then tried to see if he could influence his stick one way or the other in the way he uses his feet.

“Sometimes, I’ll decelerate just a little bit to get a hesitation one way and then I go the other way,” Barzal explained to Dumba.

Later, Dumba shared his own knowledge with Noah Hanifin on how to get more velocity on one-timers, a conversation Nicholas witnessed. Not only did he see the conversation, he saw immediate results. These mini sessions between players happened repeatedly.

“Dumba was teaching Hanifin how to rotate his stick on one-Ts. Dumba has an absolute rocket,” Nicholas said in relaying the advice. “He has that snap at the end. That little snap at the end, when he rotates his hips and his hands release through that hip rotation? That’s what gives him that extra added kick. He’s showing Hanifin how to do that.”

Later in practice, Hanifin put a one-timer through the net.

“Right through the net,” Nicholas said. “Ridiculous.”

It all certainly raises the question: Why do these elite NHL players give away their secrets?

“It’s actually funny you mention that,” answers Kane. Kane has been working with Belfry for years. Last year, Kane was the first player Belfry pitched the idea of the film portion of the camp where players break each other’s plays down. It’s even named after him, with The 88 Summit logo filling the screen on those sessions.

He smiles at the question.

“We were laughing — me, DeBrincat and (Dylan) Strome — after it because Roman Josi was asking me a lot of questions, more than anybody else,” Kane says, laughing. “You give up information because everyone is genuine.”

“If I were Patty, I wouldn’t give away too many things,” Tuch jokes but then adds some insight. “Even Roman Josi grilling Patrick Kane — he’s also giving input to see what he’s trying to exploit so Patrick can go back and say, ‘If he’s trying to exploit this, I have this option.’ It’s a give-and-take kind of thing. We’re making each other better hockey players as a whole.”

Belfry addresses the group of women’s hockey standouts before an on-ice session. (Craig Custance / The Athletic)

It’s 1:15 p.m. on Thursday and the best women hockey players in the world are getting ready to take the ice at the camp for the first time. They’re sitting in their dressing room stalls, in full uniform, as Belfry walks in to address the group. Any other week of the year, these are heated rivals working separately to try and beat each other in the inevitable showdown that always materializes between the United States and Canada. In this moment, they’re eager to get a look at the training their NHL counterparts have been getting all week.

“This is about the most comfortable I would like you the rest of the day,” Belfry says to the players in the room. “My objective is to make you feel terrible and really awkward for as much of the time you’re here as I can. Otherwise, if you’re just feeling good, that means you’re in old habits. It’s all the same and it’s what you normally do. Then we’re not getting anywhere.”

He explains that he’s going to focus on many of the progressive tactics he works on with the NHL players, even if it may run counter to what their coaches prefer during international play. He hopes adding new pieces of movement and skill to their games is something they’ll ultimately be able to incorporate within their normal structure.

Then he gets at his motivation.

“You’ve taken on some big challenges. You’ve battled Hockey Canada. You’ve battled USA Hockey. You’re battling anybody and everybody, it seems. It just seems to me like you could use a week where you’re not battling anybody, you’re collaborating together to try to make yourself better,” Belfry says. “This is all about you. It genuinely is.”

With that, the women take the ice and it’s the same experience as the men’s session, right down to the iPads recording every moment to later be broken down into individual film sessions.

That night, like the men, they gather in the Hyatt conference room to break down clips of each others’ games together. These are primarily Olympic clips from PyeongChang in 2018, stakes much higher than the regular season NHL clips the men examined. These aren’t regular-season games from October where the players have more freedom to take risks and showcase individual skill. This is USA versus Canada, where one mistake can mean four years of pain.

It leads to a different discussion than that with the men’s group. For the NHL players, there was a lot of one-on-one focus. As the video clips play for the women, there’s much



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more talk about how to better utilize the players around them more in a team setting. The clips are extended possessions for each team in the offensive zone and it's an hourlong glimpse into the minds of elite hockey players.

In the dark room, voices pop up from all over. There are questions. Observations. Players sharing all they know with each other. At one point, Coyne Schofield fires a shot from near the goal line and it's immediately met with a question from the back of the room.

"Kendall, what prompts you to take that bad angle shot there? Is it the way the goaltender goes down in the post or do you see two U.S. players headed to the net?"

"I was thinking I probably should have not shot there."

The entire room laughs.

"I probably should have pulled back," she says. "Driving with speed, it was a good entry. I could have created more space and separation for the other two guys by pulling up ... and let the D come up in the play. Not a great shot selection."

"I'm just curious with the way the goaltender is playing, what we call a RVH, you see her going down like that, does that prompt you to shoot, just seeing her down like that?"

"I think you're giving me too much credit."

"I think too if you would have curled back, I think all red was really backchecking super hard, you would have a lot space. Even walk it yourself or go far-side D if they were jumping in."

It's amazing to witness. Historic, really. It'd be like the '72 Russians and Canadians getting together in a room and explaining the way they play. But the most poignant moment comes from Coyne Schofield after 60-plus minutes of video, 60-plus minutes analyzing different opportunities for these women to show more creativity and skill in their game.

Coyne, who captured the imagination of hockey fans across the world with her blazing speed during the NHL All-Star skills competition in San Jose, explains why we're not always seeing that creativity on the ice in these big moments.

"The difference between a man making that play and us ... he makes a turnover, he's still making money. He still has a job. He's still on the team," she tells the room. "Our spot is not guaranteed — neither is his — but we're constantly cycling through things. Sometimes the creativity gets taken away. We're always under the pressure of making the next roster. It's finding that balance, combine creativity with confidence. We're fighting those two things."

The session ends shortly after that. A sobering reminder of the difference between the men and women. That there's still so much more to see from the women, if they are just given the opportunity. You see it the next day on the ice, where they're working on all these concepts, trying to get better. Maybe those concepts will never make it to an Olympic game. Maybe they will. Either way, they're clearly eager to learn it all.

"It's awesome. Whenever you can get the top athletes in the world together and you can learn from one another, it's a great environment to be in. Belfry has provided an amazing opportunity," Knight says after one of the on-ice sessions. "It was overwhelming trying to be a sponge and soak

everything up as much as possible. These opportunities are rare and you have to make the most of them."

Perhaps Dumba summed it up best. After the final men's on-ice session, they all lingered on the ice like the last day of summer camp. Players seemed genuinely reluctant to leave. When Dumba finally skates to an exit, he's smiling.

"Great camp right there," he says, stepping off the ice, ready to head home.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.05.2019

1151794 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Pettersson feeling quicker, stronger after summer of conditioning

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

September 4, 2019, 7:53 PM

VANCOUVER – Super soldier serum transformed skinny, sickly Steve Rogers into muscular super hero Captain America. Unfortunately, the Marvel Comics' serum is currently unavailable outside of top-secret military labs, so Elias Pettersson had to get bigger the old-fashioned way: conditioning and diet. How boring.

The results, however, are somewhat similar.

In his first interview since returning to Vancouver ahead of next weekend's NHL training camp for the Canucks in Victoria, Pettersson, 20, looked slightly bigger and more muscular than last season, when the six-foot-two Swede won the Calder Trophy while generously listed at 176 pounds.

Another stark difference from this time last year was Pettersson's ability Wednesday to make light of his weight.

He had seen the Twitter post comparing his transformation to Captain America's.

Yes, he told reporters at Rogers Arena, he is bigger.

"Maybe it's not a big difference like Captain America," he added.

"I talked to my strength coach at home (about) what I want to get better at – and stronger, of course. He put up a schedule for me. . . and I feel great. Quicker, like in tight turns. And, of course, more leg power, more conditioning. At the end of last season, I felt kind of tired, and not 100 per cent energy towards every game. That would be the main focus this summer.

"This summer, I knew what I was preparing for. So I've been working a lot on my conditioning to get more leg power, and to hopefully play a full 82-game season and, hopefully, playoffs. I know what I'm expecting now."

So does the rest of the NHL, which is why Pettersson's strength and conditioning, still evolving at his age, are critical elements.



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The centre's skills and hockey intelligence were proven beyond question at the start of last season, when Pettersson began his NHL career by scoring 10 goals – and 16 points – in his first 10 games.

But amid that historic start, Pettersson was rag-dolled to the ice by Florida defenceman Mike Matheson, whose two-game suspension was only one-third the length of the Canuck's absence due to a concussion.

Pettersson later missed five games with a leg injury after he was pulled over by Montreal rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

In the Canucks' final 19 games, when opponents were keying on Pettersson, he managed only two goals and eight assists and admitted he didn't have the same energy he felt at the start of the marathon season.

Pettersson still won the Calder Trophy by a landslide, beating the runner-up, St. Louis goalie Jordan Binnington, 151-18 in first-place votes cast by the Professional Hockey Writers' Association. But the weak finish to Pettersson's formidable first season in the NHL fired him up to be better.

"I'm really motivated," he said Wednesday. "The last two weeks felt like a lifetime because I really wanted to come back to Vancouver.

"I've been working out this summer a lot just to get better, get stronger and be as prepared as possible. I want to get better every day and become a better player every day."

General manager Jim Benning's summer acquisitions of potential 20-goal wingers Micheal Ferland and J.T. Miller, as well as the free-agent signings of defencemen Tyler Myers and Jordie Benn, make the Canucks better.

But coach Travis Green told Sportsnet in August that the Canucks' improvement still hinges on the continued development of Vancouver's young stars.

"Petey becoming a better player is a big part of us taking the next step," Green said. "I can be very open and honest with him, but I know he's driven to win. There are other young players I've seen in junior and the AHL that were very good players but weren't driven to win. I know he's going to do everything he can to be a better hockey player and push us to be a better hockey team. I believe Quinn Hughes has that in him. And I believe Brock took a lot of steps last year, too."

Calder candidate Hughes, a potential game-changer on defence, will be on the ice this weekend for the Canucks' rookie camp in Vancouver. But Brock Boeser, who scored 59 goals in 140 games during his first two-plus NHL seasons, is home in Minnesota, unsigned as a restricted free agent.

Pettersson's friend and linemate has also been dealing with another horrendous medical challenge for his father, Duke, who has Parkinson's Disease and suffered massive heart failure on July 29. Brock's dad stopped breathing for 15 minutes and spent most of August in the intensive care unit of his Minnesota hospital.

"It's been a long month," Boeser, 22, recently told The Athletic's Michael Russo. "I went to the hospital every day for the first, what, three weeks. But he's showing us some good signs lately, which if you know Duke, is very much like him. He's getting his color back. He's looking around, moving around. Maybe he recovers from this and is stronger. That's very much like him."

Benning said Wednesday he's optimistic he'll get Boeser re-signed before training camp opens next Friday. Like so many restricted free agents who are core players on their teams, Boeser has been at a standoff with the Canucks, unwilling to sign long-term for what the team is offering.

Pettersson said he texted Brock and has been praying for Duke Boeser.

"Of course, I hope he's here tomorrow," Pettersson said of his teammate. "I hope he's here as quick as possible."

Has he been lobbying Brock to sign a new deal and get back to Vancouver?

"Not yet," Pettersson said. "But if it's getting close to Oct. 2 (and the Canucks' season-opener in Edmonton) and he's not here, I'll put some pressure on him."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.05.2019

1151795 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs' Liljegren, Sandin determined to crack opening-night roster

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

September 4, 2019, 1:45 PM

TORONTO — Like all good defencemen, Rasmus Sandin and Timothy Liljegren begin licking their chops when they spot an opening on ice.

And a rather large one has presented itself this September in Leafland. Who wants to seize it?

While the 2019-20 Toronto Maple Leafs' top two defence pairings are essentially set, general manager Kyle Dubas says the Nos. 5, 6 and 7 slots are jump ball. Go grab it.

Travis Dermott's shoulder injury will conservatively keep him out of the lineup through October, so there are cherished minutes on the bottom pairing just waiting to be filled.

A crowded knot of cap-friendly 20-somethings whose NHL experience ranges from modest to nonexistent — none will earn more than \$900,000 this season — will battle for those spots in camp.

Trade acquisition Ben Harpur's notable size, familiarity killing penalties alongside Cody Ceci and willingness to do the dirty work should give him a leg-up in earning one of those stalls in the real dressing room, but Jordan Schmaltz, Martin Marinčin and Justin Holl will be in the mix.

Much more intriguing are the kids, fellow first-round picks and Swedish talents-turned-Marlies standouts Liljegren, 20, and Sandin, 19.

"With Dermott out the start of the year, there's a spot to be filled. It's good for young guys like us to come into camp with that knowledge," said Liljegren, 2017's 17th-overall selection.

NHL-Maple-Leafs-prospect-Sandin-skates



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Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman prospect Rasmus Sandin. (Graham Hughes/CP)

Following a scrimmage in which they were partnered up against a moustachioed Auston Matthews and Co., both Liljegren and Sandin stated clearly Wednesday that making Toronto's opening-night roster is their focus.

"That's for sure my goal. I want to do my best all the time and show what I can do," said Sandin. "I feel a lot stronger. I feel faster. I feel better overall. It's been a good summer.

"I feel confident about myself, and we'll see where that leads."

Thus far, it's led Sandin to a head-turning AHL rookie campaign in which he put up 28 points in 44 regular-season games, despite battling injury, then another 10 assists in 13 playoff contests during which coach Sheldon Keefe cranked up his ice time.

Keefe lauds Sandin for his maturity and poise, his ability to control the tempo during his shifts.

"I can bring the game down to a pace I'm comfortable with. I'm also a guy who can adjust my game to how that game is being played — that's one of my strengths as well," said Sandin, taking note of Miro Heiskanen's instant impact as a teenage D-man in Dallas. "Hopefully I can be one of those guys, too."

A role player in the Marlies' run to the Calder Cup in 2018, Liljegren believes a longer summer and increased workout schedule has better prepared him to make the cut this fall. (Being a righty doesn't hurt his cause either.) And he's encouraged by finishing 2018-19 much stronger than he began.

Ironically, Liljegren points to his high ankle sprain as the reason. The injury allowed him time away from the grind to hit the gym, study film and reset mentally.

"The mental part is a huge part of hockey," Liljegren said. "Confidence has a lot to do with whether you make the team or not. I think I have pretty good confidence coming into camp now."

His game broke through in such a way that Keefe has begun using film of Liljegren's positioning and decision-making as examples for prospects on the right way to play.

"Play good defence and then you have space to be creative too" is the main lesson Liljegren has absorbed in North America. "Last year I improved my defensive game a lot, and I think that made me more comfortable on the ice."

The two Swedes knew each other casually in Europe, being only a draft year apart and spending time with Rogle. But it's here in Toronto where they've formed a bond on the ice and off, sparking chemistry as duo — albeit one that could be broken up (temporarily) if only one of them makes the NHL later this month.

"It's a good thing we have each other to compete with. We're driving each other," Sandin said.

"We want the best for each other. It's very fun to have him beside me competing for a spot, and I think we'll both be very happy for each other's success."

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Sportsnet.ca / McDavid has not had any setbacks in recovery; return date still unclear

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

September 4, 2019, 11:39 AM

EDMONTON — Connor McDavid has not had any setbacks in his recovery from a torn posterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, and no one is saying that his return to the Edmonton Oilers will be in November or December.

That's the good news.

Any major knee injury is a six-month rehabilitation project, however, and the Edmonton Oilers captain ran into that goalpost in Calgary on April 6. With the Oilers' season opener set for Oct. 2 versus the Vancouver Canucks — inside six months from the date of the injury — there are no promises that McDavid will be taking the opening faceoff.

"He tore his PCL," agent Jeff Jackson told Sportsnet.ca on Tuesday.

"For a guy like him, who relies so much on his skating his edgework, cutting back ... You don't want to have anything go wrong when you're rehabbing. So it's been very meticulous, very carefully orchestrated, the progression. But he's doing really well.

"On Sept. 3, you can't say whether he's ready or not to start the season. He has another month before the season starts, and he's in very good shape. No one is saying (he will be delayed) until November or December. He's done extremely well so far, and everyone is happy with his progression."

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

Barring any setbacks — "There haven't been any setbacks," Jackson confirmed — the rehab schedule is a six-month project. And at the five-month mark, all sides are happy with the condition of McDavid's knee.

"Dr. (Dhiren) Naidu and (head athletic trainer) T.D. Forss went into Toronto, went to the Gary Roberts facility and spent some time with Connor. They saw Connor, examined him and were very pleased with his progress," said Oilers general manager Ken Holland.

"Between the Oilers training staff and medical team, working together with the team Jeff Jackson has put together for Connor, certainly there are some top-notch people.

"Any decisions that are made on the timeline with Connor, it's not going to be one person making them."

McDavid arrives in Edmonton on Friday. He did not skate at the BioSteel camp, setting off some alarms, which is to be expected when the face of the National Hockey League opts out of an annual training session this close to the start of camp.



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

In a world where teams are not forthcoming about injuries and their respective timelines, it is fair for fans and media to be skeptical. But all sides reiterated this week that McDavid is on schedule, and it is quite possible he will be in the Oilers lineup on Oct. 2.

"He hasn't had any setbacks," Jackson promised. "He's put a lot of time and effort into his summer, spending significant hours every day making sure he's doing everything in his power to be ready. So far, it seems to have worked. But, if they played in two days, he wouldn't be playing.

"He's worked hard," Jackson repeated. "And no setbacks."

You can imagine that tracking McDavid's progress isn't something that falls through the cracks inside the Oilers' offices. He is Edmonton's meal ticket, a fact that everyone is well aware of.

"I've been updated once a week, sometimes twice, with videos. And I've (gone to Toronto) to see Connor three times. Decisions will be made on the conservative side," said Holland, who expects to see McDavid on the ice for the first day of Oilers training camp next week.

"Opening night is the goal for everybody," said Holland.

"But the bigger priority is that we're doing what is right for Connor in the long-term."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.05.2019

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TSN.CA / Escrow the symptom of a larger issue

Travis Yost

On Sept. 1, the National Hockey League declined its option to re-open the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). For many, it was an encouraging sign that the league and players' association are working towards securing labour peace – a labour peace that has been elusive in the hockey world for the last three decades.

Unfortunately, that is just the first checkpoint. The NHLPA has a similar option to exercise by Sept. 15, and if you read between the lines, it sure sounds like the union is considering withdrawing from the current agreement.

We've been hearing for some time now that the players are extremely frustrated with the impacts of escrow. Escrow is simply the amount of extra pay withheld from each paycheque to help ensure that hockey-related revenue (HRR) is split 50-50 between the players and owners. Escrow serves a critical function in the current system, since it takes quite some time – recall this summer, free agency again opened before the upcoming season's salary cap had been set – to fully account for HRR.

The loudest signal to date may have come from Chicago Blackhawks centre Jonathan Toews. Like many players

before him and the NHLPA as an entity, Toews voiced his frustration with how penalizing the escrow process has become.

"I'm no financial expert," Toews told John Dietz of the Daily Herald at the end of last season. "All I see is that I've signed a contract and to me, it's not exactly being honoured. So I don't care what business you're in – to me, that's kind of ridiculous."

As Dietz notes, players used to receive their escrow back. Now, due to a rising salary cap that has led to heftier contracts and revenues that have failed to keep up with those larger agreements, players lose in excess of 10 per cent of their annual salaries.

It's understandable that players talk about escrow being the dirtiest word in hockey. If we look at the effects of escrow on the players, you can quickly observe a ballooning of salary loss starting after the 2012-13 season:

A \$10-million player like Toews is routinely losing about \$1.5-million of his contract. That's not insignificant, especially for a player who was in the league under a prior agreement where escrow wasn't nearly as penalizing.

The players have tried to combat escrow penalties by changing their strategy when it comes to the escalator clause – a trigger that allows players to increase the salary cap in a given year by up to 5 per cent. The players dropped the escalator to 1.5 per cent in 2017 and 2018, and in anticipation for 2019, escalated by a mere 0.5 per cent.

Both the escrow process and the escalator clause are issues entangled with forecasting league growth. Since no entity can predict revenue growth with certainty, the league and players rely on estimates and adjust later.

So while escrow is the mechanism that takes the money out of the pockets of the players, it's really poor league revenue growth (and, by association, the definition of hockey-related revenue) relative to the growth of salaries that has created this mess. It's a vicious cycle: the league over-forecasts revenue projections and then the players and league try to manage to that guidance, eventually dealing with the repercussions of the over-forecast by withholding salary. That's why the fight against escrow is a red herring – it's merely the symptom of a larger issue.

Consider this past season. For most of 2018-19, guidance on the 2019-20 salary cap was estimated at, or north of, \$83-million. In June, reports started surfacing that guidance was missed, and that the adjusted forecast for the 2019-20 cap would sit at \$81.5-million. Most of our attention was the impact that would have on the cap-strapped teams that would need to calibrate their off-season plans accordingly. But the larger – if more subtle – story was that the league anticipated more growth than was actually realized.

Add that to the players believing the 50-50 share isn't appropriately defined – as one example, expansion fees, like the \$1.2-billion created from adding franchises in Vegas and Seattle, are excluded from HRR – and you have an environment where constituents feel like they are getting the short end of the stick.

Hope springs eternal, but there is enough smoke around the players' association to make us wonder if the shelf life on the current CBA is set to expire. If that's the case, we'll be headed into yet another combustible era of labour talks.



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TSN.CA / NHLPA weighing risks of poking the bear

Frank Seravalli

CHICAGO — To poke or not poke the bear: that is the question staring down the NHL Players' Association as they convene here for a meeting on Wednesday evening.

In this case, that bear is commissioner Gary Bettman and the NHL's Board of Governors.

The NHLPA has until Sept. 15 to notify the league that the union intends to exercise its option to opt out of the current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) after this season.

The NHL, of course, declined to exercise their same option on Sept. 1, putting the ball in the players' court.

"It is our hope that a continued, sustained period of labour peace will enable us to further grow the game and benefit all constituent groups: NHL Players, Clubs, our business partners and, most important, our fans," Bettman said in a statement on Friday.

The NHL and NHLPA have been conducting CBA negotiations off and on for the last number of months. Both sides have reported that discussions have been overwhelmingly positive, with some saying that the dialogue and communication has been more constructive and productive than it has been in a decade or more.

"It doesn't mean there haven't been disagreements and significant disagreements but it's so far at least free from rancour," NHLPA executive director Don Fehr said after Wednesday's meeting. "That's a big improvement."

In fact, there is even some optimism that a new CBA can be hammered out in the next 10 days before the NHLPA's deadline to opt out.

If the NHLPA declines, the current CBA will remain in effect for three more seasons, through 2021-22.

The key to remember is that if the NHLPA does indeed opt out this month, nothing would preclude both sides from continuing negotiations over the next months in an effort to agree on a new CBA before it expires on Sept. 15, 2020.

That is why many believe Fehr will play the opt-out card, using the leverage he has to tackle the items on the union's agenda.

Fehr addressed the media following Wednesday night's Executive Board meeting in the Windy City, where players are gathering this week ahead of the annual NHL/NHLPA North American Player Media Tour.

He said no decisions have been made and were not scheduled to be made on Wednesday. The two sides are scheduled to meet again on Friday in New York City.

However, the NHLPA knows opting out at a time when Bettman and the NHL have already laid down their arms may come at a cost.

If the ask is too great and talks drag out, Bettman might begin to dig in and pursue items on the owners' wish list. Those items could include anything from contract term limits, to a greater piece of the revenue pie, to non-guaranteed contracts – the last of which would likely be the hill the NHLPA dies on.

For now, any threats to go down that road have been mere whispers.

"In any CBA, the parties can always identify issues they are unhappy with and would like to see changed. This is certainly true from the League's standpoint," Bettman said Friday. "However, our analysis makes clear that the benefits of continuing to operate under the terms of the current CBA – while working with the Players' Association to address our respective concerns – far outweigh the disruptive consequences of terminating it following the upcoming season."

There is a certain element of MAD Theory (Mutually Assured Destruction) in play here with the threat of a fourth potential work stoppage on the table.

We know what the players want. They've been shouting it from the rooftops.

First and foremost is a more palatable escrow percentage, because escrow is the dirtiest word in NHL dressing rooms.

"A. Escrow and B. Escrow," Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews told reporters in June when asked about his top two CBA priorities.

Players have had an average of 12.5 per cent of the pay deducted and not refunded annually since this CBA took effect in 2013. In other words, players have received 87.5 per cent of the salary printed on their contracts.

Toews doubled down in an interview with the Arlington (Ill.) Daily Herald this week, saying: "All I see is that I've signed a contract and to me it's not exactly being honoured. So I don't care what business you're in – to me that's kind of ridiculous."

The problem is escrow isn't going anywhere. It is a function of the cap, money set aside to ensure a perfect 50-50 split of revenues between players and owners.

There is a myriad of ways to lessen the blow and bring it to a more manageable percentage, like two or three per cent.

Since every dollar spent by NHL GMs over the NHL's league-wide salary cap midpoint this season (\$71.5 million) is one dollar the NHLPA must set aside in revenue, a luxury tax could be enacted to have each team chip in their same amount spent to remove escrow entirely – that would balance it out and ensure a 50-50 split. But that seems rather unlikely.

The NHL and NHLPA could artificially base the cap off of, say, 43 or 44 per cent of the league's projected revenue, and if the league revenue hits projections, the players would then receive a cheque at the end of the year for six or seven per cent. Call that a "bonus." That would also reduce the need for a large escrow deduction.



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Secondary items on the players' wish list include an agreed upon international hockey calendar, with guaranteed NHL participation in the Olympics, as well as health care and retirement considerations, and potentially reform on the impact restricted free agent players are having on the salary cap with their second NHL contract.

Whether any one of those items is enough to derail the puck dropping next September is an answer we might have in the next few days.

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1151799 Websites

TSN.CA / Escrow the symptom of a larger issue

Travis Yost

5-6 minutes

On Sept. 1, the National Hockey League declined its option to re-open the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). For many, it was an encouraging sign that the league and players' association are working towards securing labour peace – a labour peace that has been elusive in the hockey world for the last three decades.

Unfortunately, that is just the first checkpoint. The NHLPA has a similar option to exercise by Sept. 15, and if you read between the lines, it sure sounds like the union is considering withdrawing from the current agreement.

We've been hearing for some time now that the players are extremely frustrated with the impacts of escrow. Escrow is simply the amount of extra pay withheld from each paycheque to help ensure that hockey-related revenue (HRR) is split 50-50 between the players and owners. Escrow serves a critical function in the current system, since it takes quite some time – recall this summer, free agency again opened before the upcoming season's salary cap had been set – to fully account for HRR.

The loudest signal to date may have come from Chicago Blackhawks centre Jonathan Toews. Like many players before him and the NHLPA as an entity, Toews voiced his frustration with how penalizing the escrow process has become.

"I'm no financial expert," Toews told John Dietz of the Daily Herald at the end of last season. "All I see is that I've signed a contract and to me, it's not exactly being honoured. So I don't care what business you're in – to me, that's kind of ridiculous."

As Dietz notes, players used to receive their escrow back. Now, due to a rising salary cap that has led to heftier contracts and revenues that have failed to keep up with those larger agreements, players lose in excess of 10 per cent of their annual salaries.

It's understandable that players talk about escrow being the dirtiest word in hockey. If we look at the effects of escrow on the players, you can quickly observe a ballooning of salary loss starting after the 2012-13 season:

A \$10-million player like Toews is routinely losing about \$1.5-million of his contract. That's not insignificant, especially for a player who was in the league under a prior agreement where escrow wasn't nearly as penalizing.

The players have tried to combat escrow penalties by changing their strategy when it comes to the escalator clause – a trigger that allows players to increase the salary cap in a given year by up to 5 per cent. The players dropped the escalator to 1.5 per cent in 2017 and 2018, and in anticipation for 2019, escalated by a mere 0.5 per cent.

Both the escrow process and the escalator clause are issues entangled with forecasting league growth. Since no entity can predict revenue growth with certainty, the league and players rely on estimates and adjust later.

So while escrow is the mechanism that takes the money out of the pockets of the players, it's really poor league revenue growth (and, by association, the definition of hockey-related revenue) relative to the growth of salaries that has created this mess. It's a vicious cycle: the league over-forecasts revenue projections and then the players and league try to manage to that guidance, eventually dealing with the repercussions of the over-forecast by withholding salary. That's why the fight against escrow is a red herring – it's merely the symptom of a larger issue.

Consider this past season. For most of 2018-19, guidance on the 2019-20 salary cap was estimated at, or north of, \$83-million. In June, reports started surfacing that guidance was missed, and that the adjusted forecast for the 2019-20 cap would sit at \$81.5-million. Most of our attention was the impact that would have on the cap-strapped teams that would need to calibrate their off-season plans accordingly. But the larger – if more subtle – story was that the league anticipated more growth than was actually realized.

Add that to the players believing the 50-50 share isn't appropriately defined – as one example, expansion fees, like the \$1.2-billion created from adding franchises in Vegas and Seattle, are excluded from HRR – and you have an environment where constituents feel like they are getting the short end of the stick.

Hope springs eternal, but there is enough smoke around the players' association to make us wonder if the shelf life on the current CBA is set to expire. If that's the case, we'll be headed into yet another combustible era of labour talks.

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1151800 Websites

TSN.CA / Andersen ready to shoulder the load again for Leafs

Kristen Shilton

5-6 minutes

TORONTO – No goaltender in the NHL has started more games for their team than Frederik Andersen has over the three seasons since he was traded to the Maple Leafs.



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That heavy workload inspired a change in philosophy as Andersen spent the summer preparing for his fourth campaign as the No. 1 netminder in Toronto: train smarter, not necessarily harder.

"[I] tried to be on the ice a little bit earlier and not as much, so I could keep that good feeling [going]," Andersen said from the Leafs' summer skate at Ford Performance Centre on Wednesday. "[You're not] going on a lot, just once a week to start so you don't feel like you're starting all over when you're putting the gear on for the first time. [Then] keep getting better, keep getting healthy. That's been the main thing."

Health is the highest priority for Andersen ahead of this new season, although it's arguably his least favourite topic to discuss. Back when Toronto's postseason run ended with a first-round playoff loss in April, Andersen was battling through the lingering effects of a groin injury suffered in late December that never seemed to fully heal as he slogged through starting 30 of the Leafs' final 38 regular-season games.

The 29-year-old netminder is soft-spoken at the best of times, but especially cagey when it comes to how his body is feeling.

"[It's] better," Andersen said succinctly, when asked how much his health has improved since the spring.

Pressed on whether he'd call it "significantly better," Andersen replied curtly, "Yes; thanks."

Andersen has missed time each of the last three years with various injuries, ranging from concussions to knee ailments. At the same time, he's been tasked with carrying a heavier load than any other goalie in the NHL, suiting up in 192 of Toronto's last 246 games.

Head coach Mike Babcock has stubbornly maintained his reluctance to scale back Andersen's workload, assigning starts to a backup only on one half of the team's back-to-back games.

Most recently, it was Garret Sparks supporting Andersen, but he was traded to Vegas in July. Come training camp, it will be Michael Hutchinson and Michal Neuvirth, who is attending camp on a professional tryout, vying for the second spot.

Whoever wins the job this year could be more involved than previous backups. In Leafs' general manager Kyle Dubas' sit-down interview with TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie on Tuesday, Dubas hinted that the days of Andersen shouldering 60 or more starts in the regular season, as he has each year since 2016, could well be over.

"[Andersen] knows playing every game in October isn't going to earn him anything at the end of the season," Dubas said. "We're going to...really look at the amount of energy he's expending throughout the year and make sure he's set for the end of the season and playoff run."

Laughing at the idea of "load management, or whatever you call it," Andersen stayed coy about how many starts he'd optimally like to make, but conceded it's easier to play often earlier in the year as opposed to when more games are crammed into the schedule following the team's late-January bye week.

"It's [just] nice to be healthy," Andersen said. "And once you feel like you can move at 100 per cent, you're going to feel more fluid."

Andersen would also like to apply some fluidity to how he communicates with Toronto's evolving defence corps. Gone are Ron Hainsey, Nikita Zaitsev and Jake Gardiner from the top-six rotation, projected to be replaced in part by the newly acquired Cody Ceci and Tyson Barrie, as well as other potential new faces in the mix once camp gets underway next week.

Like any good relationship, the one between goaltender and blueliners hinges on good communication.

"You have to get to know each other, how they like to do things, and they have to get used to me," Andersen said. "You have to get to know some new personalities and for me that's an exciting thing too."

Barrie is familiar to Andersen from attending off-season skills camps together in the past. While Andersen says Toronto is "lucky to have [Barrie]" and the other new additions, it's too soon to say just how much better they'll make this year's version of the Leafs, especially before the whole team has even assembled.

"It's a tough question," Andersen said of where the Leafs stand now. "[But] we'll find out sooner rather than later."

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1151801 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / Canucks' Elias Pettersson willing to pressure Brock Boeser to sign

Arun Srinivasan

Yahoo Sports Canada

September 5, 2019

Vancouver Canucks forward Elias Pettersson is patiently waiting for Brock Boeser to reach a new deal but as the season inches closer, his tone could soon change.

Pettersson, who took the league by storm in 2018-19 en route to Calder Trophy honours, is taking a day-by-day approach with his teammate.

"Not yet," Pettersson said to Sportnet's Iain MacIntyre when asked if he's putting pressure on Boeser. "But if it's getting close to Oct. 2 (the Canucks' season-opener in Edmonton) and he's not here, I'll put some pressure on him."

Boeser remains a restricted free agent and is part of a star-studded class led by Brayden Point, Mitch Marner and Mikko Rantanen who have yet to reach new deals before the campaign gets underway.

"Of course, I hope he's here tomorrow," Pettersson said of his teammate. "I hope he's here as quick as possible."

Boeser recently revealed that his father was in the intensive care unit due to heart failure for most of August. Pettersson made clear that he's sympathetic too, noting that he texted



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his teammate and is praying for the elder Boeser to get well soon.

Pettersson and Boeser are the core components of a Canucks team that has the pieces in place to end its rebuild shortly. With October soon approaching, Pettersson might have to hope he's equally adept at negotiating off the ice, as he is at playmaking on it.

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1151802 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / Flames invite Devante Smith-Pelly, Zac Rinaldo to camp on PTO

Arun Srinivasan

Yahoo Sports Canada

September 4, 2019

The Calgary Flames have invited a select group of veteran wingers to compete for a roster spot on a professional tryout (PTO), the club announced Wednesday.

Devante Smith-Pelly, Tobias Rieder, Zac Rinaldo and Alexandre Grenier will all compete for a shot at cracking the Flames' roster this fall.

The following players will be attending #Flames camp on a PTO:

Devante Smith-Pelly (RW) - Tobias Rieder (RW/LW) - Zac Rinaldo (LW) - Alexandre Grenier (RW)
pic.twitter.com/VIMQ4mzLWq

— Calgary Flames (@NHLFlames) September 4, 2019

Smith-Pelly is likely best known for his stint with the Washington Capitals, helping the team win the Stanley Cup in 2018-19. The 27-year-old posted four goals and four assists in 54 games in 2018-19.

Rieder spent the 2018-19 campaign with the Edmonton Oilers, posting zero goals and 11 assists in 67 games. His best season took place in 2015-16, notching 14 goals and 23 assists with the Arizona Coyotes.

Rinaldo, best known for his enforcer capabilities, scored one goal and two assists in 23 games with the Nashville Predators.

Grenier hasn't played in the NHL since 2016-17, where he played in three games with the Vancouver Canucks, and did not register a point. In nine career NHL games, Grenier has yet to find the scoresheet.

Best of luck to all four veterans, although Smith-Pelly and Rieder seem most likely to crack the roster among the quartet.

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1151803 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / Report: Pierre McGuire removed from NBC's top NHL broadcast crew

Kyle Cantlon

Yahoo Sports Canada

September 4, 2019

Longtime between-the-benches analyst Pierre McGuire is reportedly being demoted by NBC Sports ahead of the upcoming NHL season.

The Athletic's Rick Carpiniello — citing sources of the "impeccable" variety — dropped the news on Wednesday.

Per impeccable source, Pierre McGuire has been removed from NBC Sports' No. 1 hockey team, to be replaced by Brian Boucher.

— Rick Carpiniello (@RickCarpiniello) September 4, 2019

McGuire will still be working for the network, but it won't be on NBC's top, national games anymore. Former NHL goaltender and current analyst Brian Boucher will replace McGuire as the rinkside reporter and analyst alongside Doc Emrick and Eddie Olczyk on NBC's main broadcasts going forward.

The 58-year-old McGuire joined NBC when it acquired the NHL's U.S. broadcast rights in 2006, and has been working full-time for the network since 2011 while contributing regularly to TSN in Canada.

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1151804 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / Clayton Keller signs maximum-term contract with Coyotes

Justin Cuthbert

Yahoo Sports Canada

September 4, 2019

Not all contract negotiations have to be of the knock-down, drag-out variety.

Twelve months before truly reaching a pressure point, the Arizona Coyotes have locked up dynamic winger Clayton Keller to an eight-year contract extension. Craig Morgan of The Athletic reports that the now-third-year winger will earn \$7.15 million annually through the maximum-term contract scheduled to expire in 2028.

League source: AAV on Clayton Keller's 8-year deal will be \$7.15M. <https://t.co/xdoMU50AEm>

— Craig Morgan (@craigsmorgan) September 4, 2019



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While seemingly an equitable agreement, in assessing the risk included on the deal, if nothing it points to a gamble on the side of the organization. Keller took a bit of a step back after shining as a rookie, posting 14 goals and 47 points after a 65-point Calder Trophy-nominated debut.

He hasn't been a dominant play driver at even-strength either, and he really wasn't a significant threat with his power-play ice in his second season.

Still, the immense talent that made him the seventh overall selection in the 2016 Draft remains, and he should be better insulated on a Coyotes team that continues to add talent at the forward position after the addition of Phil Kessel.

Keller is scheduled to be the highest-earning forward and second highest-paid skater on the Coyotes when his contract extension kicks in at the end of the upcoming season.

In addition, his \$7.15 million salary should serve as something of a reference point in negotiations that still must be completed this summer, in that the large majority of the talented restricted free agents still waiting on a contract can confidently argue that they deserve more on a long-term agreement.

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