



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 6, 2019

THE ATHLETIC

Five takeaways from media day: Lots of Justin Williams, good vibes, the new guys and Storm Brew

By Sara Civian

“Media days” are usually a mixed bag.

You acknowledge their necessity, you get your question-asking reps in before the real news starts, you remember how much you missed doing all this and how lucky you are. But at the same time, these days are not exactly breeding grounds for a Pulitzer Prize (or even a halfway decent story, if we’re being honest).

At least there was actually something interesting to talk about at PNC Arena on Wednesday: former captain Justin Williams’ decision to “step away from the game” for an undetermined period of time.

He’d said in his announcement that it’s “important to (him) that the focus of attention is on the current, very talented group the Carolina Hurricanes have assembled,” so hopefully he’s been off the grid for the past 24 hours or so. Based on what was said about his decision Wednesday, it’s safe to assume he is.

After talking about his decision with dozens of Hurricanes staff and players, the main point is obvious:

1. Williams is irreplaceable, so the Hurricanes won’t try to replace him

Head coach Rod Brind’Amour: “We chatted all summer, this wasn’t a surprise. Justin came to his decision, I knew a long time before that but I was kind of hoping maybe he’d lean a different way, but he’s in a real good place and that’s the important thing. He’s feeling good about his response to it, leaving it open a little bit. But as far as we’re concerned we’re moving forward, he’s not part of this group right now and that’s how we’re approaching it. Certain players earn that right, that little bit of freedom and he is definitely one of them.

“He’s done so much in his career, it’s not like he has anything to prove. ... I think he enjoyed the summer, enjoyed being with his family, enjoyed coaching his son now. I think he’s done everything he can do in this game.

“As far as the leadership side of things, you’re not going to replace a Justin Williams, but somebody is going to have to emerge and lead by their style. Willy

helped to create this culture, he left it in a better place than it was when he showed up.

“I’ve been there and I certainly didn’t like the way my end went, I don’t think it was handled right, to be honest with you, we gotta make sure we do it right. He’s driving his ship on this. If it’s over he had a great career, if not we’ll see what happens.”

- The obvious takeaway from Brind’Amour’s scrum is the Canes are open to Williams coming back, but they aren’t depending on it. They aren’t going into training camp with a captain, they definitely aren’t re-introducing co-captains and they don’t seem too pressed about any of this.
- The subtle takeaway is Brind’Amour’s reference to the end of his career. A franchise legend getting benched and stripped of captaincy as a precursor to retirement is tough to stomach — it takes someone special to relive those memories to help his friend make the right choice, especially when the “wrong” choice could help out his team. Mad respect for that.

Jordan Staal tried to stay out of Williams’ hair as much as possible, but he gave in and shot him a text midsummer.

“Obviously midseason and through playoffs you’re not going up to him like ‘Hey, what are you gonna do next year?’ That’s not really a question you ask,” Staal said. “I waited as long as I could this summer, I think it was mid-July I shot him a text to see how he’s doing and what his thoughts were and he still didn’t really have any idea. It’s a tough conversation to bring up, you don’t want to heckle him too much. His decision is his decision, and what he ends up doing is going to be right for him. He’s had an amazing career, what he’s done for our team last year and everything, it would be a tough hole to fill. But as of now, we’re moving on from Willy as our captain and we’ll see where it takes us.”

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"No matter what Willy decided, if he came back, we would have been waiting with open arms. As it went further along, we were thinking it might not happen, I think everyone's kind of been in contact about it from both sides — if he does come back it'll be like nothing ever happened, if he doesn't a couple other guys are going to have to kind of carry the load and have a bigger voice. It's opportunity for other guys to develop into leaders. You look at the Aho and the Teravainens and the good, young players. One day this is going to have to be on their shoulders. It doesn't have to be this year, but everybody can grow each year and the guys that were a bigger voice last year can take it to the next level and carry on the foundation."

Warren Foegele: "I don't really think anyone can replace what Justin brought to this team ... just the impact he brings, there's not really words to describe it. At least the doors open. Hopefully, he comes back."

Dougie Hamilton: "I didn't look too much into it. I don't know what he's going to do, but for us it's a huge loss. Obviously we would love to have him, but at the same time he's such a good player, good person, good leader you just respect what he wants to do. ... He never seemed fazed by anything, you looked at Willy and everything's OK kind of attitude."

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- Even though Hamilton is a Toronto native, he was rocking a Steph Curry shirt, and when I acted surprised he said he's a huge Curry fan. I just felt like North Carolinians would appreciate this tidbit. For those who don't know, Hamilton's mom is a decorated Olympic baller.
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- Martinook was wearing a customized Durham Bulls jersey, and if you follow him on Twitter you know he's started to get pumped about local sports, because of course he is.

- Congrats to Staal and his family on the birth of his son over the summer.

3. High expectations for Martin Necas

Brind'Amour noted that while of course you can't replace Williams off the ice, someone's going to have to take care of his 50-plus points on the ice. He mentioned offseason acquisitions Erik Haula and Ryan Dzingel as possible candidates, but he also tossed Necas out as a possibility.

"We kinda knew this was a possibility, so we added Haula and Dzingel," he said. "But I also think Marty Necas has a chance. Somebody's going to have to step up and fill those shoes (on the ice)."

It was a passing comment, but Brind'Amour is super careful to place expectations on anyone at all. You saw that last season in his hesitancy to call Sebastian Aho a superstar, and the way he protected Andrei Svechnikov.

I caught up with Necas and he seems to agree with Brind'Amour.

"You know, last season I made the team and got sent down, and now that's a big motivation for me to stay here the whole season," he said. "I didn't expect it. (Last season I learned) that this is different, the game is a little different in Europe — those little battles along the boards, in the corners, around the net. I had to get used to it."

That'll be one of the best training camp storylines.

4. Meeting some new Canes

This is usually the most ~media day~ thing about media day, but Dzingel shocked the world with a good interview.

"I'm actually way too excited," he said. "I keep talking about it with everyone. It's a hidden gem (Raleigh), you don't hear too much about it. I'm excited to be here, buy a house and make it my home for hopefully a long time ... like I just said, I'm way too excited right now. My fiance and I wanted to be somewhere where we leave the rink and be happy and feel like home. I want to make this my home, so I need to produce and I need to play well."

That's some strong motivation.

5. Storm Brew is good

As far as ~media days~ go, you won't find a better one than the Hurricanes'. They let us try out the highly anticipated Storm Brew by R&D Brewing. Light, refreshing and easy to drink, but trust my review of free beer at your own discretion.



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YAHOO! SPORTS

Hurricanes' Andrei Svechnikov calls Alex Ovechkin best pound-for-pound boxer in the world

Stan Temming

Whenever a discussion about the current world's top boxer comes up, names such as Vasyl Lomachenko, Terence Crawford and Canelo Álvarez are usually mentioned.

Andrei Svechnikov has never tossed hands with any of those men, though. Therefore, when asked who the best pound-for-pound boxer in the world is, the 19-year-old forward for the Carolina Hurricanes could only answer based off his personal life experience (as limited as that may be).

Before dropping the mitts with the 33-year-old Russian during Game 3 of the first round playoff series between the Hurricanes and Washington Capitals last spring, Svechnikov had been in precisely

one fight, according to hockeyfights.com. That lone tilt during a preseason game while a member of the OHL's Barrie Colts back in 2017 couldn't have prepared the youngster for what was to come.

The second overall pick in the 2018 NHL Entry Draft ended up missing six postseason games as a result of Ovechkin's devastating right hand.

All of these months later, it appears Svechnikov has learned a thing or two from taking on someone with plenty of NHL experience and about 40 pounds on him.

As a result, we expect Svech to stick to scoring goals and showing off his playmaking ability this season. This knuckle chucking thing just may not be for him.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

By The Numbers: Life After Justin Williams

Justin Williams will not be in the lineup on opening night. How will the Hurricanes fill his offensive production?

By Andrew Ahr

After what was by any measure an exceptionally long summer of speculation, Justin Williams has finally announced his desire to take a break from hockey. The intangible leadership value that Williams brought to the team last year is immeasurable and irreplaceable. But he also played the role of a top six winger and a 20-plus goal scorer who was relied on heavily in critical situations throughout the season and playoffs. Let's take a look at the measurable impacts that he had last season, and how the team can fill them as they face a future without Justin Williams.

Williams played over 17 minutes per night last season — at the age of 37. That's incredible in itself. The fact

that he was able to score 23 goals and tally 30 assists is a testament to just how good of a player he is.

(Bonus points to anyone who can name a player that took a break/retired from professional hockey after a 20+ goal season in the NHL.)

On top of his scoring acumen, Williams is an exceptional possession forward. He posted the fifth-best Corsi For Percentage on the team at 57.89%, and it's not hard to imagine why. He's very slippery on the boards and creates space for his linemates in a unique way. He had the second highest Scoring Chances For Percentage on the team behind Jordan Staal, meaning that his line was producing scoring chances at a much higher rate than they were conceding them.

Williams' most valuable offensive asset is his ability to put the puck in the back of the net at will. He was relied on last season to score at both even strength



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and on the power play, and his departure will leave a big hole in the top nine. That hole could easily be filled by the best pure goal scorer on the Hurricanes — Andrei Svechnikov.

Svechnikov is the most natural successor and will likely be thrown into those offensive situations in Williams' absence. Increased responsibility in the top six could be exactly what Svechnikov needs to really catch fire this season.

Offensive newcomers will also be relied on to fill the gaps left by Williams. Ryan Dzingel and Erik Haula (and even Martin Necas to a degree) will see increased ice time without the captain around. In

retrospect, the Dzingel signing makes even more sense. The forward corps is a bit less of a logjam now, and Dzingel's role on offense is a lot more clear than it was a month ago.

Justin Williams' leadership last season is irreplaceable, and his stepping away from the team will leave a huge hole in the locker room. It will also leave a hole in the top six — 23 goals and 17 minutes per night is a lot to lose. The good news is that the front office did a great job this offseason in preparing for what ended up being the inevitable.



RALEIGH • DURHAM • FAYETTEVILLE

919 Beer: How the Carolina Hurricanes and R&D Brewing partnered for new beer

By Joe Ovies

The Carolina Hurricanes announced a partnership with R&D Brewing, a local brewery in Raleigh, to produce a 97-calorie lager style beer called "Storm Brew" in August. The beer will be available at PNC Arena, area bottle shops, and grocery stores year round.

Ian Van Gundy, head brewer at R&D Brewing, and Mike Forman, VP of Marketing for the Carolina Hurricanes, joined the 919 Beer Podcast to discuss how the partnership came together and what fans can expect when they grab a glass during games.

Forman on when the Hurricanes began thinking about their own beer: Honest answer? Years ago. Jim Ballweg, who is our VP of Corporate Sponsorships, I've been knocking on his door for years saying this is something we should be looking at and to his credit

he said we'd need to find the right partner. We would need to find someone who is just as invested, if not more invested, as we are and someone that's local. We found that in R&D Brewing.

Van Gundy on what they wanted to accomplish with the beer: We feel that where beer is going is that it'll eventually go to just being beer and not necessarily this boutique specialty product. We also wanted to see our beer being part of the community in more ways, and putting local fresh beer for many people with the Carolina Hurricanes is exactly that. When the Carolina Hurricanes came to us, there were a ton of bullet points to hit. It had to be distinctive, yet appeal to as many people as possible. In order to do that, it has to be light. It's distinctive in that it's local and fresh. The appeal comes in with the beer being 4.2% ABV and only 97 calories (a play on the year the Hurricanes were established).

TODAY'S LINKS

- <https://theathletic.com/1186245/2019/09/05/five-takeaways-from-media-day-lots-of-justin-williams-good-vibes-the-new-guys-and-storm-brew/>
- <https://sports.yahoo.com/carolina-hurricanes-andrei-svechnikov-calls-alex-ovechkin-of-the-washington-capitals-best-poundforpound-boxer-in-the-world-010226282.html>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2019/9/5/20807306/carolina-hurricanes-by-the-numbers-life-after-justin-williams-martin-necas-andrei-svechnikov>
- <https://www.wral.com/919-beer-how-the-carolina-hurricanes-and-r-d-brewing-partnered-for-new-beer/18615658/>



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SportScan

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

1151823 Carolina Hurricanes

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The Athletic LOADED: 09.06.2019

1151900 Websites

The Athletic / LeBrun: What the positive tone between the NHL and the NHLPA means for labor negotiations

By Pierre LeBrun Sep 5, 2019

CHICAGO — It was a revealing glimpse, a ray of hope perhaps.

Donald Fehr, who has slugged it out with baseball and hockey owners his entire life, was asked on Wednesday night how he would compare the tone of these current bargaining talks with the NHL compared to seven years ago.

The response from the executive director of the NHL Players’ Association, while measured, noted how “cordial” these talks were and lacking the “rancor” which existed during the 2012-13 negotiations.

Seriously, take that in for a moment.

Of course, those talks in 2012-13 were held during a lockout and well, that’s a whole different atmosphere to what been’s going on since last December between the NHL and NHLPA, with both sides rolling up their sleeves before there’s a lockout or strike.

Both parties met back in December, had a series of rather secretive meetings, then broke as the NHLPA took stock with its players to help guide their next steps. This summer about 10 bargaining sessions took place, with another one on tap for Friday in New York.

Most notably is the presence of current players in the bargaining sessions of late, not just lawyers.

Which is to say, both sides are taking a real crack at this. It doesn’t mean it’s going to work. It doesn’t mean that we’re not headed for Armageddon again. But in the here and now, there is real, honest positivity.

During the negotiations, the NHLPA has been sharing their “asks” with the NHL, which the league has taken back to headquarters in an attempt to address those concerns.

This is very much about appeasing the players right now because it’s a fact they gave away more in concessions in the last two CBAs than the owners.



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In my mind, the players are owed. I don't know how anyone could argue that. But how much is enough to appease them? That's the delicate dance.

Can the league give back enough now to salvage labor peace? The league has much at stake, Seattle entering the league in two years, a new more lucrative U.S. TV deal down the road ... it needs labor peace.

How much is enough for the players to vote not to re-open the CBA in 2020, a decision which is due by Sept. 15 (there will be no deadline extension, the players have to decide on the re-opener by Sept. 15).

How much progress in these bargaining sessions will be enough for the players to forego using the biggest leverage stick they have in re-opening.

The reality is that both sides will want to continue bargaining talks regardless of the Sept. 15 decision. But that decision will set the tone for these talks. If the players decide to re-open in 2020, it means 12 tense months to figure it all out or else games are lost.

If the players decide not to opt out, it means three more seasons under the current labor deal and a more relaxed atmosphere to extend the CBA past that.

The question the players are going to have to ask themselves in short order before Sept. 15 is whether opting out is the best way to get a deal done, with the pressure on, or whether opting out pokes the bear and invites the kind of demands from owners they'd rather not hear about?

How quickly could both sides hammer out an extension? If all goes well, it's not out of the question that within a month or two of Sept. 15 there could be a tentative deal. I mean, that's if everything goes well.

But that's if the current momentum continues. There's no guarantee of that. It could take much longer, it could also fall off the rails.

Judging from the history of these two parties, as the negotiations get more and more serious, it's also possible that positions on certain issues become so entrenched that it all blows apart.

The No. 1 issue, of course, is escrow, finding a way for players to collect closer to 100 percent of their negotiated salaries. Formulas are being looked which would try to fix that by ensuring the growth of the salary cap is more in line with the natural arc of Hockey Related Revenue (HRR) and not artificially inflated.

Now, there are some who have floated out the idea that perhaps the newfound flexibility in the system could be found if the players would be allowed to creep above the 50 percent threshold in their share of HRR. I highly doubt that's something the league has any appetite for. They view 50-50 as a non-negotiable number, especially considering it was a watershed get in 2012. It's staying.

But if the cap formula is properly massaged to mitigate escrow, if the NHL maximizes its efforts to find every dime available to players in HRR, there seems to be a way to find a solution here.

And the NHLPA has other asks, to be sure, as it should. The league is working through them ahead of Friday's meeting (of note, NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly canceled his scheduled appearance at the Player Media Tour in Chicago this week to stay behind at the league office in New York, presumably to work away on the CBA matters at hand).

The NHLPA has suggested a three-year CBA extension, which would mean six years in total when you add the remaining three years of the current deal. That boils down to labour peace through 2024-25.

The league may want more years than that, so we'll see how that plays out.

Of note is the fact that Olympic participation hasn't really been broached a whole lot during these bargaining sessions. Which is not to say the NHLPA doesn't still want to re-enter the Olympics. The players want back in. But what is says is that both sides understand the biggest issue is the IOC and the way it botched everything last time around. I also think that if indeed there's a February 2021 NHL-NHLPA World Cup of Hockey as is currently being discussed as part of a CBA extension, that the NHLPA would want some kind of assurance that every effort is being made to include the Olympics if at all possible, depending on future negotiations with the IOC.

Whatever the case, the financial particulars of the NHL system, escrow, the cap, HRR, are currently taking precedence over the Olympics.

Let's be clear, there is still lots of work to be done before anyone can see daylight. As one source suggested on Thursday, this thing can still go all kinds of different ways.

But there's no mistaking the honest desire right now by both sides to try and figure it out.

Cross your fingers, hockey fans.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.06.2019

1151901 Websites

The Athletic / Individualism and swagger: What the NHL can learn from the NBA about branding its stars

Joe Smith Sep 5, 2019

When Auston Matthews watches the NBA pregame, he can't help but be a bit jealous.

"It's the whole runway show," he said.

Matthews, 21, the Maple Leafs star and fashion aficionado, marvels at the out-of-the-box outfits showcased by the likes of Russell Westbrook, James Harden and LeBron James. From top hats to plaid pants to pink sneakers, the incredible show of individualism has sparked spreads in "GQ" and "Esquire."

And it's made for big business. Westbrook released a fashion book, "Style Drivers." Dwyane Wade launched his own sock brand. Beats headphones blew up worldwide, partially thanks to James.

Matthews would love to see hockey players show that type of flair and provide a window into their world. They're not just athletes — they're people. And brands.

"You look at what the NBA has done and other leagues and how they market guys, you look at their social media, offering more behind-the-scenes stuff," Matthews said. "That's what fans love. They eat it up. What guys are doing outside of hockey, walking down the (street in the) city they live in — that's growing more



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and more. The younger generation of guys coming into the NHL are open to it. You get the personalities, and I think it's something that fans love.

"It profits and benefits everybody."

It's hard to argue with the numbers. In Forbes' 2019 list of the top-100 earning athletes, 35 were NBA players (with a cumulative take-in of \$1.3 billion). There were 10 sports represented on the list, but there was not a single hockey player (cricket star Virat Kohli was No. 100 at \$25 million combined between winnings and endorsements).

Marketers and brand strategists love to go by social media following, and the NHL falls behind there, as well. The league has 6.2 million Twitter followers compared to the NBA's 28.3 million, the NFL's 24.5 million and MLB's 8.4 million. Former fourth-line NHL player Paul Bissonnette (@BizNasty2point0), thanks to leveraging his (often NSFW) personality on social media platforms, yields more followers (1.1 million) than the last three Hart Trophy winners combined — Connor McDavid has 347,900, Taylor Hall has 506,100 and Nikita Kucherov has 20,800. Penguins captain Sidney Crosby, the long-time face of the league, says he prefers not to have social media accounts.

WATCH THE CCM SANDBAGGER INVITATIONAL BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE @SPITTINGCHICLETS PODCAST & @CCMHOCKEY. A BIG THANK YOU TO SIDNEY CROSBY & @MACKINNON9 FOR HITTING THE LINKS WITH US LAST MONTH IN HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA. CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE & WATCH -> [HTTPS://T.CO/UBCJFEDC2B](https://t.co/UBCJFEDC2B) [PIC.TWITTER.COM/9M5H6AID3E](https://pic.twitter.com/9M5H6AID3E)

— PAUL BISSONNETTE (@BIZNASTY2POINT0) AUGUST 10, 2019

But it's not all about followers and likes. The effects spill beyond social media and into the real world.

McDavid is considered by many the best hockey player on the planet. But on the eve of the NHL Awards in June, he often darted around a Las Vegas casino without drawing so much as a double-take.

Matthews, recently put on the cover of EA Sports NHL 2020, can walk into a restaurant in his hometown of Scottsdale, Ariz., and not get bothered.

Kucherov set a Russian record with 128 points last season, topping legends like Sergei Fedorov, Alexander Mogilny and Pavel Bure. He has endorsement deals with Adidas, Bauer and Geico, but he still doesn't get recognized back home in Moscow.

"I never get stopped," Kucherov said. "You ask anybody in Russia, 'Who is Nikita Kucherov?' They probably say, 'Who?'"

The NHL is working on changing that. They're taking advantage of what they feel is a cultural shift, the emergence of numerous outgoing, young stars who welcome the spotlight, and are putting together a social media strategy to bring their stars to life. There was "Cup Confidential," a series of selfie-style Twitter posts during the Stanley Cup playoffs; and "Skates Off," vignettes with stars displaying their passions (like Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman flying a plane, below, or Buffalo's Jack Eichel as a DJ).

With a 2016 Magna Global study showing the average age of a hockey fan remaining stagnant since 2000 (going from 33 to 49), the league has targeted some mainstream avenues, including trying to get some players on ABC's "Dancing with the Stars." They're interested in teaming up with Animal Planet to integrate a "Pup's Cup" onto a television show.

Devils defenseman P.K. Subban has shown what's possible as the league's most outgoing and polarizing player hosts his own late-night talk show and ruled the summer on social media, including his engagement to Olympic skier Lindsay Vonn. The couple recently appeared together at MTV's Video Music Awards.

At this week's annual NHL Player Media Tour in Chicago, you'll see a lot of the younger stars on display for worldwide promotion.

"I think we're really entering an interesting watershed moment of our growth," said Brian Jennings, the NHL's VP of marketing. "The younger generation of players have an abundance of talent, and they're so much more used to having their personal lives out there, understanding what being a brand will open up for you. They have this expression of interest outside the rink and give people this other view.

"I think while we always look over at the other leagues and benchmark ourselves, I always come back to wanting to be true to ourselves and not play catch-up. We want to do things right in our voice — what's right for our sport and right for our players."

It was late May, late in the Stanley Cup playoffs, but Hall took a moment to give props to the NBA.

FOLLOWING THE NBA MORE CLOSELY WITH THIS RAPTORS RUN HAS REALLY OPENED MY EYES TO HOW GREAT A LEAGUE IT IS. THERE IS A REAL SENSE OF BRAVADO AND SHOWMANSHIP THAT YOU DON'T SEE IN OTHER SPORTS. THE STARS ARE ON DISPLAY EVERY NIGHT AND IT'S IMPRESSIVE

— TAYLOR HALL (@HALLSY09) MAY 31, 2019

Hall made it clear in a follow-up tweet that this wasn't "shade" directed toward his own league. He was simply complimenting the NBA.

"They have so many advantages over other leagues," Hall wrote. "Visibility through the roof."

While the NBA and NHL have similar schedules — 82-game regular seasons from October to April — comparing them can be like apples and oranges. There's the mega TV deal the NBA has with ABC and ESPN, which even airs Summer League games in Las Vegas. The NHL, formerly on ESPN, was broadcast on Versus after the 2004-05 lockout, which became NBCSN in 2012.

Then there's the individualistic style of the sport, with one player — whether it's Steph Curry, James, Kawhi Leonard or Harden — able to log 40-plus minutes and steal the show. You can even see an impact with supporting players, like Nuggets guard Jamal Murray, who parlayed a decent playoff run into a move from regional endorsement deals at Western Union and Lyft to an Adidas spot that will air during the Tokyo Olympics.

"Basketball is inherently a game that favors one guy that can dominate the game," said Will Ho, 46, creative director for EA Sports NHL 20. "Hockey, you do have a superstar that can be a cornerstone of a team, but generally it's about that team coming together, a team like St. Louis this year. There was no bona fide superstar on that team. You might have heard of Vladimir Tarasenko, but there's not one single player on that team that won the Stanley Cup.

"It's harder for individuals on an NHL team to really break that mold and really stand out as individuals. That's why it's really important what you do off the ice: what P.K. is doing, what



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Matthews did in the beginning of the year with fashion shoots and really getting himself out there.”

AUSTON MATTHEWS IS READY FOR HIS CLOSE UP
[HTTPS://T.CO/EK0A3FAQ9M](https://t.co/EK0A3FAQ9M)
[PIC.TWITTER.COM/7ZU2765L0M](https://pic.twitter.com/7ZU2765L0M)

— GQ MAGAZINE (@GQMAGAZINE) SEPTEMBER 27, 2018

Another advantage is that many NBA and NFL players have head starts with branding and social media presence. By the time they are drafted, the top prospects have played at least a season or two on national television in the NCAA, starring in March Madness or the College Football Playoff. Browns quarterback Baker Mayfield already had a cult following before he was a top pick, and it was the same with new Cardinals QB Kyler Murray.

“These kids, especially in basketball, you’re hearing their names when they’re 14 years old, if not younger,” said Colleen Garrity, VP of basketball marketing for Excel Sports Management, which represents the likes of NBA star Blake Griffin. “When you come into the draft, people know who you are and you have a huge social media following.

“When we get them at that point, we’re just able to put some strategy around that.”

Kucherov didn’t have that advantage. The 2011 second-round pick’s humble beginnings included moving from Russia to playing juniors in Quebec. When he arrived with the Lightning, many of his teammates hadn’t heard much about him. Similarly, Lightning star center Brayden Point played in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Sure, there are prodigies like Matthews, McDavid and Crosby, but many talented players remain relatively unknown until they arrive on the big stage.

Steve Mayer, the NHL’s chief content officer, said the league makes a point to meet with some of the top prospects around the draft to discuss ways to create awareness about them, including filming some all-access spots of the kids showcasing their personalities.

“There certainly has been a shift — largely enabled by social media — toward the game’s athletes finding a platform and gaining comfortability in showcasing their uniqueness,” said veteran agent Don Meehan of Newport Sports, which represents the likes of Lightning captain Steven Stamkos, Sharks defenseman Erik Karlsson and Boston forward Brad Marchand. “Highlighting what is important to them as individuals and providing fans with a deeper connection and understanding of the players they admire is a powerful tool for the growth of the sport.

“Athletes are now armed with their own tools to control their brand and messaging. This is a good thing. The upside is considerable, but the potential downside needs to be consistently monitored and managed. Properly educating and supporting our clients in this space is critical.”

Nikita Kucherov (Courtesy of Adidas Hockey)

But what if some of the league’s top players aren’t game for it?

Crosby sat on a couch at a restaurant in his hometown of Halifax, Nova Scotia, looking as comfortable as you’ll ever see him.

The future Hall of Famer, dressed in a T-shirt, jeans and white sneakers, was holding court with former teammates Ryan Whitney and Bissonnette, who host the popular Barstool podcast

“Spittin’ Chiclets.” Crosby laughed as he told behind-the-scenes stories, like the time Mario Lemieux had to clean up Crosby’s puppy’s dog crap when he lived with the legend as a rookie.

Crosby was engaging, introspective. It’s why the show is so popular. But it also made you wonder, why can’t we see more of that from hockey stars?

Crosby explained to the hosts why he’s so private. He doesn’t have a Twitter or Instagram account. Imagine if LeBron James or Tom Brady didn’t?

“I think it’s whatever is best for you, whatever you feel the most comfortable with,” Crosby said. “I always felt hockey was so scrutinized, so much expectations that came with it. When it came to my personal life, I just liked having that for me. I didn’t necessarily let everyone know what I was doing when I was doing it. I thought it was something I could have for me.”

Sidney Crosby (Courtesy of Adidas Hockey)

He’s far from alone. There has long been a culture in the NHL where the logo on the front of the jersey is more important than the name on the back — where, in other words, the team is more important than the individual. Whether it was out of a desire for privacy or simply to avoid rocking the boat with teammates, players didn’t like self-promotion or putting themselves out there in a public forum.

Chris Hartweg, CEO of Team Marketing Report, believes McDavid should have “10 times the visibility” he has, 10 times the social media presence. “The guy has a transformational kind of talent,” Hartweg said. “If he was playing in the NBA, you couldn’t escape him.”

But searching for the limelight is not McDavid’s M.O.

“I’m not that guy,” McDavid said. “My (public relations) team around me is trying to do their best to push me to do more and get out of my comfort zone. They do a good job, but for me, it’s tough. It’s just uncomfortable. I don’t like to be that guy that’s doing all the funny videos or whatever. It’s not me. I try to stay within myself.”

McDavid had just wrapped up a photo shoot in late June for Adidas, one of the many stars to take his turn making the rounds in the company’s Las Vegas hotel suite. He had just come from a workout, wearing a T-shirt, shorts and a brace over his injured left knee. McDavid tried on some gear, made some small talk and posed on camera with a short bit of advice for rookies.

Connor McDavid (Courtesy of Adidas Hockey)

Like the NBA, isn’t it good for the league if the top players get more exposure?

“It is good for the league. (The NBA is) very engaging with fans, and they feel like they have a relationship and get to know the players more than on the court,” McDavid said. “For us, it’s just not that way in hockey. Guys just don’t want to do it. You’re starting to see more of it, guys like Subban and (Matthews) who try to push the boundaries. And it’s great. But it’s not something I’m comfortable with.”

It’s just part of the culture.

“A lot of guys are a little more worried about the team and all that — they don’t want to piss anyone off or stand out,” McDavid said. “Sometimes, it’s a little unfortunate, but that’s the way it is.”

Garrity said the NBA does a great job of encouraging players to speak out on social issues, which is one way for them to engage



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and connect with a larger, mainstream audience. She noted that when Cavaliers forward Kevin Love opened up on his battle with mental illness, it led others to speak out. The league responded by ensuring that every NBA team had a mental health professional, Garrity said.

It's not like NHL players never enter into a public or social forum. Last fall, then-Islanders goalie Robin Lehner bravely discussed mental illness and his battle with bipolar disorder in a first-person essay for *The Athletic*. Lehner then used his stage at June's NHL Awards to send a powerful message in his acceptance speech for the Masterton Trophy.

"I'm not ashamed to say I'm mentally ill," Lehner said. "But that doesn't mean mentally weak."

"I'M NOT ASHAMED TO SAY I'M MENTALLY ILL, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN MENTALLY WEAK."

ROBIN LEHNER'S BILL MASTERTON TROPHY ACCEPTANCE SPEECH WAS POWERFUL. □ #NHLAWARDS PIC.TWITTER.COM/BUHJE7UBZ4

— SPORTSNET (@SPORTSNET) JUNE 20, 2019

Former Lightning forward J.T. Brown, one of several dozen African-American players in the NHL, became the first NHL player to make a silent protest during the national anthem at a regular-season game. Brown raised his fist, hoping to raise awareness for police brutality against African Americans and racial inequality.

"I know there's going to be negative backlash," Brown said then. "But in my heart, I know I did what was right."

While there were 250-plus NFL players who kneeled or performed silent protests that fall during the national anthem, Brown was the only one to do it in hockey.

J.T. BROWN RAISED HIS FIST DURING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM BEFORE THE LIGHTNING'S GAME TONIGHT. PIC.TWITTER.COM/YRWVN8YE1T

□: @SNFAIZALKHAMISA

— YAHOO SPORTS (@YAHOOSPORTS) OCTOBER 7, 2017

"I think there is greater encouragement for players to speak out on social issues, but we don't see that much of it currently happening in the NHL," said Jennifer Entin, hockey marketing agent for CAA SPORTS, which represents NHL stars like Crosby, Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane, among others. "The comfort level may not be there yet for a lot of players. You'll probably see a shift as it relates to certain topics like mental health or issues that resonate with players in this league specifically.

"It's due to the culture of the sport. The crest on the front is more important than the name on the back. That mentality among players is really strong. One of the barriers of speaking out on social issues is that you may end up soloing yourself out."

You're starting to see some changes, even from the more private players.

Kucherov admits he doesn't like to draw attention to himself. "I want to earn it," he said. But the Russian has embraced his new role as Adidas endorser and done a few commercials, including one where he "lights the lamp" for Geico.

"It's been awesome so far," Kucherov said. "Ever since I was a kid, I wore all the brands and never thought I'd be the guy to represent the brand. It's been fun."

Kucherov, like fellow Russian and teammate Andrei Vasilevskiy, has also been more active on his Instagram account. You'll see photos and videos of workouts on the beach or fishing. On the road, Kucherov, Vasilevskiy and Mikhail Sergachev let fans see them riding scooters around different cities.

This is a theme around the league. There was the iPhone shoot with Matthews and Leafs teammate Mitch Marner, an unfiltered look at their off-ice life. Another Apple campaign had players take candid photos of each other, and they were placed on the walls of arenas or billboards around town; the Lightning's Alex Killorn took one of defenseman Ryan McDonagh in a scrum, and it hung from the wall outside Amalie Arena.

"We're not asking anybody to be controversial or do something crazy," Mayer said. "We just want people to be outgoing and give us some access and show the world who they are. We don't want to change the culture because the culture is what makes our sport so special, so unique. We're interested in bringing a spotlight to the culture, the players and part of the individualism."

While Crosby doesn't do social media, there are other ways for him to show off his personality. Case in point was the Tim Horton's commercial where he and Avalanche star Nathan MacKinnon, both of whom are from Halifax, work the drive-through as "rookies."

Bissonnette said his podcast aims to bring out the other sides of stars like Crosby and MacKinnon. Bissonnette's brand grew organically, from "goofing around" on social media to realizing "you can turn it into a business." Bissonnette, a radio color analyst for the Coyotes, said companies regularly approach him about using his massive media presence of 1.1 million Twitter followers.

Bissonnette pointed to how teams have made money by successfully branding themselves on social media, with the Hurricanes selling around 20,000 "Bunch of Jerks" T-shirts (in 17 different countries) by parlaying Don Cherry's viral quote this spring. Our Sara Civian reported that Carolina generated \$5.1 million in season ticket revenue, combining clever marketing with success on the ice. There's money to be made for players, either directly or for their foundations, via social media, Bissonnette said.

"I would encourage guys to (use social media) for the simple fact of opening a door for the other side," Bissonnette said. "It can help you in advertising, or you could have a charity you're passionate about. I've had a lot of positive experiences through social media. I encourage all guys to step up and brand yourself. I know how ruthless professional sports can be as someone who didn't make a crazy amount of money. It's nice to create jobs through that."

Entin said CAA SPORTS also encourages clients to be active on social media, showing fans their hobbies, whether it is playing tennis or golf, hanging with their dogs or cooking. CAA SPORTS shows its NHL clients examples like Tom Brady and Dwyane Wade for what works well. The agency has data analytics software that helps track engagement and social media success, relaying the results of positive posts to players. If, for example, a pet post does better than a hockey-specific post, keep them coming, they say.

"We've definitely noticed a big shift in players using social media," Entin said. "Not only using it, but using it effectively. With



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the younger clients we have, they are a lot more comfortable using it. It's a platform they grew up with naturally. They've seen a ton when athletes are branded in a lot of different ways — and not just in the NHL — they see that as kind of the dream.

"They want to be great hockey players, that's their first priority. But they also understand there can be more for them than that."

The creativity — both on and off the ice — is what draws the big-money endorsers.

Dan Near, head of hockey at Adidas, said he was sold after watching Kucherov's dazzling fake shot on a breakaway against Buffalo several years ago, a slick move he repeated at the All-Star Game in Tampa in 2018 against Capitals goalie Braden Holtby. Near was in Amalie Arena for it.

"Your jaw drops," Near said. "You're among the best in the game and you'll see some cool stuff, but it's a level beyond that. Against the best goalie in the game, he's not going to fall for that, right? I'm like, 'Jeez, this guy is out of control!' I didn't forget that."

So Near made Kucherov his first Russian star, believing he'll eventually accept the torch from Alex Ovechkin. Kucherov joins McDavid and Crosby with Adidas and should help the group fit in with the younger stars in other sports.

"Hockey we believe has been underserved," Near said. "They have a fan base with an insatiable appetite for content, to be spoken to in a true and authentic way.

"What is a hockey kid looking for? What is relatable, credible, authentic? We spent a bunch of time trying to figure that out and came up with our 'creator' athletes. The importance of on- and off-the-field performance. Look at our roster of athletes: James Harden, Pat Mahomes, Kris Bryant, Dak Prescott. Nikita falls in line with the group."

While the average age of NHL fans went from 33 to 49 between 2000 and 2016, the NBA went from 40 to 42 and baseball from 52 to 57 over that same span. The NHL saw the second-largest jump after pro wrestling, which aged 26 years in that time. Understandably, the endorsers also wanted to find a younger demographic.

Just ask Ho, the creative director for EA Sports NHL 20. It's no coincidence that the game's cover athletes the past two years have been Subban and Matthews.

"It's a reflection of the change you see in the culture in the NHL," Ho said. "Where it is really more about skills, athleticism, individuality and charismatic players who step out of the shadows of what was traditionally a very team-centric (game), not wanting to rock the boat, everyone says the same things, everyone looks the same. We look for players who have that sense of individualism, swagger."

There was plenty of swagger on the stage June 19 at the Mandalay Bay Events Center. Subban stepped up and helped introduce Matthews as this year's EA Sports NHL 20 cover boy. A video montage showed an array of athletes and their celebrations, from Subban to Matthews to William Nylander to Ovechkin. Interspersed were clips from various players' social media accounts.

No one expects the NHL to turn into the NBA or NFL. But there is room to grow in the sport, both in the recognizability of athletes and the strength of its brand. If the league feels it has never been better in terms of skill, speed and the array of young talent, why not take advantage of it?

"I think it falls on the players and the league," Matthews said. "I think it's good to maybe take a little bit from what the NBA, NFL and these other leagues do as far as the way they market players and grow the game in each market, in other countries. Find a good dynamic.

"It's important to make it organic — everyday life. We're not just hockey players, we have other interests and do other stuff outside the rink, too. It's important to find that happy medium where it's not forced. Not every guy is going to be into that, and it's perfectly fine."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.06.2019

1151902 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Matthews focused on improving game, not Marner's contract

Chris Johnston | September 5, 2019, 7:44 PM

CHICAGO — Auston Matthews says it's none of his business.

That even though he's spoken with Mitch Marner on a couple occasions recently he hasn't delved into the most pressing issue hanging over the Toronto Maple Leafs a week out from training camp.

The dynamic forwards entered the NHL together three years ago, but only Matthews is currently under contract for a fourth season with the Leafs. And all he can really do is sit back and hope there's a sudden breakthrough in negotiations that brings Marner back into the fold.

"I think you just leave him be. We've talked a bit throughout the summer and as of late, but nothing really about hockey or his contract," Matthews told Sportsnet on Thursday. "He's going through his process with his team and obviously everybody's hoping for the best. We'd love to have him back in Toronto in training camp or back with the team as soon as possible."

This is nothing new for the Leafs, of course, not after seeing restricted free agent William Nylander stay home in Stockholm until Dec. 1 last season.

It's a situation Kyle Dubas and the team's front office has no appetite to see repeated, but who knows how long this goes? That's why Matthews believes the players have to be ready to potentially fill a void — just as they're going to have to with Zach Hyman (knee) and Travis Dermott (shoulder) set to miss at least a month of the regular season while recovering from off-season surgeries.

"That's just the way it goes," Matthews said during the NHL/NHLPA player media tour. "Depending on what happens with [Marner], if he misses some time, I think that's just more opportunity for other guys to step in and show what they're capable of."

Coming off a career-best 73-point season (in 68 games), he sees plenty of room for personal improvement, too.

Matthews has scored more even-strength goals than any NHL player the last three years, but identified his defensive work as the main area of focus now. Using words that must sound like music to Mike Babcock's ears, the soon-to-be 22-year-old said



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he feels like he can find a heightened attention to detail in his own zone while battling the game's other top centres.

"You play against some pretty good players out there, some pretty good lines, a lot of nights you're going to be matched up against the other team's top two lines, right?" said Matthews. "They're eventually going to get some time in your zone and making sure that you're in the right area so you can get the puck back is definitely important.

"I think it's something that I still need to take another step with."

This is coming off a season where the Leafs enjoyed healthy advantages in shot attempts (52.8 per cent), expected goals (51.55 per cent) and scoring chances (53.66 per cent) while he was on the ice, according to naturalstatstrick.com.

And Matthews doesn't believe a more complete 200-foot game necessarily has to come at the expense of his offensive production, either.

"When you take care of [defensive details], it goes the other way. You have the puck more," he said. "When good players have the puck a lot of times good things happen. Of course I want to score more goals, more assists, more points and create more offence, but I think a lot of that kind of starts in my own zone as well."

There has clearly been some self-reflection since the Game 7 loss in Boston — the third straight first-round defeat Toronto suffered. Matthews also said he's had some good dialogue with Babcock throughout the summer.

"Nobody liked how the season ended, us not being able to push through," said Matthews. "There's a lot of 'what could have been,' right?"

The Bruins team that erased three series deficits against them made it all the way to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final before losing to St. Louis.

About the only positive for Matthews stemming from the early exit was that he was able to have a screw removed from his knee that had been causing some pain and discomfort. It was left over from a knee surgery he had in 2014.

Beyond that, the off-season also allowed him the chance to devote some time to another passion: Golf.

"I got a little bit better," said Matthews. "I still haven't beat my sister [Breyana] yet, but I didn't play her too much at the end and I was kind of peaking then. So I kind of regret not taking that opportunity.

"Maybe next year."

The highlight was breaking 80 for the first time a couple weeks back. Matthews said he found a groove with his driver on the back nine that day in Phoenix and wound up shooting a 77.

"I was so excited," he said. "I was going crazy."

Unlike many of the NHL's other young stars — including Zach Werenski and Matthew Tkachuk, both good friends, plus Marner — he was treated to a stress-free summer.

There was no business to conduct because of the \$58.17-million, five-year extension he signed with the Leafs on Feb. 5.

"I'm happy that I kind of got it over with and I can just focus on hockey and focus on this season and not really have anything on my mind," said Matthews. "I could go into my summer and not really worry about 'What's the deal with my contract? What's my

status? Am I going to be at training camp or am I going to miss part of the season?"

"Everybody's in their own situations and it's really none of my business. With myself, I know I'm happy that everything got kind of taken care of and I can just focus on hockey."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.06.2019

1151903 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Spending time in Laval wouldn't hurt Canadiens prospects Suzuki, Poehling

Eric Engels September 5, 2019, 7:15 PM

BROSSARD, Que.— Here's something for Montreal Canadiens fans to wrap their heads around: The possibility that both Nick Suzuki and Ryan Poehling start the season in the American Hockey League, playing on a much-improved Laval Rocket team.

Would that be so bad? Granted, it's not the sexiest outcome to fathom on Day 1 of Canadiens rookie camp, when hope springs eternal and optimism is at its peak for emerging players with NHL hopes and dreams.

But it might just be the best one for all parties involved.

Don't get us wrong. It would be excellent if at least one, if not both of these talented young players proved ready to start the season with the Canadiens. A team that wants to get younger and faster could only benefit from their presence. But just knowing that they're ready to play at the top level, and that they'll have the time to grow into the roles they're likely to fill over what most analysts expect will be long, successful careers, would be icing on the cake for a Canadiens team that is at least a year away from being considered a true contender.

So yeah, the scenario that sees Poehling and Suzuki thrive at training camp only to just miss out on making the team isn't a negative one. For one, it would mean the 15 forwards on one-way contracts with the Canadiens are healthy and ready to go when the regular season starts. And, secondly—and perhaps more importantly—it would mean that two high-end prospects with one game of professional experience between them gain some much-needed seasoning before being counted on to fill important roles with the big club.

Rocket coach Joel Bouchard, who ran Friday's skate, said he wants both players to get to the NHL as fast as possible. But he doesn't see any downside in them having to spend some time in the AHL.

"It never hurt anyone," Bouchard said.

Canadiens fans don't have to search their memories for an example of how much it can help. They saw it with Victor Mete last season.

The defenceman, who was taken in the fourth round of the 2016 NHL Draft, shocked the Canadiens and their fans when he made the team outright in the fall of 2017. He had an excellent rookie season and came back primed for a top-four role in 2018.



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Mete had started off last year's campaign reasonably well, but his game began to sag in November. That's when the Canadiens decided to send the 21-year-old down to Laval.

He worked closely with Bouchard, who also had a 15-year pro career as a defenceman, and focused specifically on his defensive game—cutting off passing lanes and killing plays more aggressively instead of using his speed to just contain players and keep them to the outside. As a result, his confidence—and his game—grew by leaps and bounds.

"Mete came to us for three weeks and when he came back to Montreal it was like, 'POW!'" said Bouchard.

"The NHL is a performance league, it's not a development league," he continued. "We're not making decisions for the same reasons. For (Canadiens coach) Claude (Julien), everything is about now. Me, I'm (about) now but soon. Claude can't do what we do. He doesn't have the time. I put players in situations where they're 100 per cent going to fail, faceoffs on their wrong side just so they can learn. Claude can't do that. It's not like I'm doing it all the time like I want to lose the game. But there's times at the end of the game where I'll say, maybe I should've done something else but at the end of the day, it's about development.

"It's like (23-year-old prospect) Jake Evans (who was a rookie in Laval last season). I put him on at 3-on-3 early in the season and (it didn't go well) and I thought to myself that I shouldn't have done that. But it paid off at the end of the season. Claude can't do that. That's development."

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

It's the kind of development 20-year-olds Suzuki and Poehling could benefit from.

Sure, two kids who have played remarkable hockey since being picked 13th and 25th overall at the 2017 draft can provide youth, speed, scoring and great all-around play to the Canadiens. They might even be able to do it as early as October. But when you look at the depth of the NHL roster, when you look at the limited opportunity that exists for both Suzuki and Poehling to make an immediate impact, you have to recognize the benefit in not rushing them through the process.

Whether it's for five minutes a game or 15, both Suzuki and Poehling want to play in Montreal this season. But neither of them would consider it a failure to start with Bouchard's team in Laval.

"I was talking to my agent about that, and he said if you get sent down you want to be the first one they'll call up if anything happens," Suzuki said. "That's good motivation, and I know a lot of guys who have been sent down after main camp and they'll play a few games in the AHL and come right back up to the NHL and stay. So, there's a learning curve, and I know as a young player they want me to get into pro games, so I'm not going to be devastated if I get sent down the AHL. But I want to be the first guy called up."

Even Poehling, who recorded a hat trick and a shootout goal in his only NHL game (a 6-5 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs in Montreal's last game of the 2018-19 season) understands what there is to gain from spending a bit of time in Laval. Again, it's not where he wants to be, but he can see the benefit in playing big minutes and developing alongside several quality Canadiens prospects who are graduating to the AHL this season.

Working with Bouchard wouldn't hurt, either.

"I like him a lot," Poehling said. "I can tell he's a good coach. What you see is what you get, and I like that."

If the two end up spending a bit more time together than expected, and if Suzuki is with them both, it won't be a bad thing.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.06.2019

1151904 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers entering season with two goalies at opposite ends of spectrum

Mark Spector | September 5, 2019, 6:33 PM

EDMONTON — Mikko Koskinen is finishing off an interview with a couple of reporters, the on-ice portion of his day complete after a team skate with most of the Edmonton Oilers players. Over his right shoulder, lumbering down the rubber runner and towards the ice for his solo session with Oilers goaltending coach Dustin Schwartz is Mike Smith, the new guy in town.

It is the perfect metaphor for the Oilers goaltending landscape: the incumbent Koskinen, opening as the returning starter whose bloated salary could be (somewhat) justified if his game were to find another level or two. And Smith, an experienced, no-B.S. veteran joining his fifth organization, whose game was once far beyond where Koskinen's is today.

Smith knows the drill. Talking the good game does not keep pucks out of the net, and coaches go with the guy who will get them 'W's' — regardless of whether the old general manager thought an unproven Finn was worth a three-year, \$13.5 million deal.

Smith knows he won't play 65 games. But that doesn't mean he has to admit that, already, on Sept. 5.

"You don't go into the season saying, 'I want to split time with the other goalie,'" the 37-year-old said on Thursday. "You have to have the mentality that you want to play every game. I still have that drive to want to be the guy who gets called upon every single night.

"In this day and age, playing 65-70 games is probably unrealistic. But you still have to have the mindset like you're going to play that much."

Koskinen, meanwhile, is the anti-Smith, personality-wise.

At six-foot-seven, Koskinen has two inches on the 6-5 Smith, but as of last season he gave up almost 20 pounds in weight. Truth be told, the Oilers watched Koskinen's game wilt during that final stretch of 30 starts in Edmonton's final 31 games last season, and attributed the erosion of his game to fitness.

In his exit interviews, Koskinen was tasked with getting stronger, so he hooked up with Finnish fitness guru Marko Yrjovuori, the long-time trainer to basketball star Kobe Bryant. He trained beside Columbus goalie Joonas Korpisalo.

"I wanted to try something new," the soft-spoken Koskinen said. "(Yrjovuori) works with basketball, deals with the big guys, I thought it might be good for me. I'm trying to get everything out of my body, and play the best hockey of my life.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I have a lot of room to improve off the ice. I'm not the strongest guy, or things like that. It's not big things, but very small things. I'm just trying to get everything out of my body."

At 31, Koskinen is still trying to find a level he has never reached in his short, 59-game NHL career. Smith, meanwhile, has long ago seen his best days, likely in the 2011-12 campaign where he posted a .930 saves percentage in 67 games for the (then) Phoenix Coyotes.

With career earnings of over \$44 million, it's not about the money for Smith, who signed a one-year deal with Edmonton with a base salary of \$2 million, and another \$1.75 million available in bonuses. It's about the continuation of a long career, one where the finish line is definitely in sight.

"As an older guy you're more focused on ... staying healthy. Your longevity is most important, and if you're healthy you can play pretty well," he said. "I'm hoping to be a leader on this team. A veteran presence in the locker room and on the ice, and get this team back to where it should be."

Can a 37-year-old recent Calgary Flame walk into the Oilers room and lead? Does he say more now, as a grizzled veteran? Or does he speak less, because he knows precisely what the right words and actions are?

"I've been on numerous teams now," Smith said. "I've learned a lot along the way from veterans that I've played with. (On) how to be that leader; how to be that good influence in the room. Have the guys look up to you in a good way."

"Nealer (James Neal) and I are going to come in and be a veteran presence in this locker room. Work with the leadership group to get this team back to where it deserves to be — in the playoffs."

After 14 seasons and 571 games, Smith has nothing to prove. Koskinen, of course, has much to prove — to his teammates, the fans, the new GM, the new coach...

"The only one who I want to prove (anything to) is myself," he declared. "You play one great game, there's the next game coming the next day. You have to prove to yourself every day that you can play at this level."

Or someone will be waiting to take your minutes. And he might be coming down the hallway right now.

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1151905 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks preaching a cautious approach with Olli Juolevi

Iain MacIntyre | September 5, 2019, 8:22 PM

VANCOUVER – Twelve years after he was drafted 26th overall by the St. Louis Blues, David Perron still hears on visits to Vancouver how the Canucks should have taken him 25th that year in Columbus.

"It's unbelievable," Perron, 31, told Sportsnet during the Blues' run to the Stanley Cup last spring. "Every time I go there, somebody brings its up. Patrick White."

White, the regrettable first-round choice of former Canucks general manager Dave Nonis, was later dumped on the San Jose Sharks by successor Mike Gillis and never played a professional hockey game in North America.

A centre who didn't hit 10 goals or 20 points during four seasons at the University of Minnesota, White scuffled for years through second-tier pro leagues in Europe. Perron has merely logged 779 games in the National Hockey League, scoring 198 goals and 490 points.

Hockey fans in Vancouver never forget, which tells you what Olli Juolevi is up against.

The 21-year-old defenceman has worked his way back from "complicated" knee surgery last December and will be among the headliners during the Canucks' prospects camp this weekend at Rogers Arena.

Before a torn meniscus, among other damaged knee components, derailed Juolevi's rookie season in the AHL last November, the Finn underwent back surgery the previous spring.

But truly, the unluckiest thing for Juolevi was his draft position in 2016. Canuck GM Jim Benning took him fifth overall, right before the Calgary Flames chose power forward Matthew Tkachuk sixth.

Benning badly needed a stud defence prospect for his rebuild, but could have drafted the Tampa Bay Lightning's Mikhail Sergechev (ninth overall) or Charlie McAvoy of the Boston Bruins (14th), for whom there were advocates within the Canucks' hockey operations.

Benning believed in Juolevi. He still does.

But while Tkachuk has already logged 224 games and amassed 174 points for the rival Flames, Juolevi is the only player among the first 17 drafted in 2016 who has yet to play in the NHL.

This doesn't make Juolevi a bust. It just makes him disappointing.

"If you get drafted at a lower number, it's always different," Juolevi said Thursday when asked if being a fifth-overall pick has made his slow start, relative to others in his draft class, more difficult. "It's easier to be in the shadows. But I don't really care about my draft number. I'm happy to be here in Vancouver and I think we have great things to come."

"I don't really follow (social media) too much, but I know there's a lot of passionate fans who want to see me play in Vancouver, and that's what I'm working to do. There's been a lot of bad luck. But I hope I can now be healthy and show what I've got and get my chance."

The elite draft position for Juolevi, who when healthy does many things well but nothing spectacularly, elevated projections for him. By definition, he was overrated. Ironically, Juolevi is probably now underrated.

He will never catch Tkachuk, but remains an excellent prospect and is still more likely than not to have a long NHL career.

"I know the type of player he is and is going to be," Benning said Thursday after Juolevi skated informally at Rogers Arena with many of the Canucks. "He's had some bad luck with injuries. But he's smart and moves the puck, and he can be one of our mainstays on defence for the next 10 years. I've always been bullish on him."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I get it, the players around him (in the 2016 draft) have all played. People have seen what type of players they are, so I get that. I still feel Olli's going to be a real good player for us. Once he's up and going, let's judge him then."

Juolevi was working towards an NHL callup last season. He had 13 points in 18 games for the Utica Comets, and if his excellent first half continued the Canucks were going to bring the defenceman to Vancouver for the second half of the season.

Instead, Juolevi was injured on Nov. 17 and underwent surgery a month later. The Canucks haven't revealed the full damage to Juolevi's knee, and the player said Thursday only that it was "complicated."

"Yes, of course, it was really tough," he said. "I had high hopes for last year. I thought I started the year great and was playing good hockey in Utica. I was hoping to make an impact for Vancouver after Christmas. It was tough mentally, absolutely."

"Especially when all the injuries are things you couldn't do much (to prevent), of course, you think: 'Is there something I can do different?' It's frustrating for sure, but I hope all that is behind me. There's been enough (setbacks) for me. That's why I'm hoping to stay healthy now."

Benning reiterated that Juolevi has been fully cleared medically, but the organization will be careful with him and may mandate some rest days during training camp and the pre-season.

"He might not miss one day," Benning said. "He might play games and everything's great and away we go. But we're going to be careful with him because he hasn't played in 10 months."

"Coming off that knee surgery, we just want to make sure we handle it the right way. We don't want him to get injured again."

The Canucks don't need Juolevi this fall. They have seven NHL defencemen under contract, plus super-rookie Quinn Hughes. But there is still a lack of organizational depth on defence, and Juolevi remains important to the Canucks' future.

"I have the confidence all the time," he said. "I know I am good. I knew last year whenever I got the chance, I was going to be helpful to the team. That's the same mindset now. When I'm healthy and ready to go, I know I can help this team. Of course, you've got to be healthy to achieve your goals."

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1151906 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Treliving sees controversy over Lucic remarks as 'totally ridiculous'

Eric Francis | September 5, 2019, 1:36 PM

When the Calgary Flames acquired Milan Lucic, few could have envisioned anyone would have to step in to defend the rugged winger.

However, that's exactly what Flames GM Brad Treliving did upon hearing that Lucic's innocuous comments at the team's golf tourney had riled up Oilers faithful.

Lucic said Wednesday he put too much pressure on himself "to overachieve" in Edmonton, and felt being surrounded by

veterans in Calgary would allow him be more comfortable and successful.

"Your captain and your leader is in his thirties and he's an older guy and I had a lot of experience with that with Zdeno Chara in Boston, and that seemed to obviously work out really well," said the former Oiler, alluding to Flames captain Mark Giordano.

The comments infuriated fans of his former team in Edmonton who saw it as a direct swipe at their 22-year-old captain, Connor McDavid.

"Totally ridiculous," said Treliving of the insinuation Thursday.

"I know he's close with Connor. I know what he thinks of him as a player and a person. I don't see him taking a swipe at Connor – no way."

The online backlash from Oilers fans is representative of the frustration they had with the rugged veteran who had just six goals and 20 points last season despite being in year three of a seven-year contract paying him \$6 million US annually.

They were happy to see him and his contract go, albeit in exchange for another significant refurbishing project in James Neal.

The fan fury is also symbolic of just how vexing Edmonton fans find all things Flames.

That isn't about to change.

"You've got two teams in a rivalry that made a deal, so everything they say will be sort of put under a microscope," said Treliving, who swapped Neal for Lucic in July with an eye on both teams trying to turn the fortunes of the former 30-goal scorers.

"I think every word guys say gets sliced and diced 100 ways to Sunday. Sometimes words get twisted around."

"In my mind there'd be no way he's taking any shots at anybody, other than to just talk about Gio, who he is just getting to know."

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Treliving knows the provincial rivalry will be even juicier this year thanks to the Neal/Lucic swap, as well as the fact former Flames goalie Mike Smith signed up north and former Oiler, Cam Talbot, will tend twine for the Flames.

The Flames have also signed former Oiler Brandon Davidson and extended Tobias Rieder a training camp tryout.

However, given how relatively inactive the Flames were this summer due to their salary cap constraints, Lucic has been all the talk in Calgary since his acquisition.

That talk heightened Wednesday when Flames die-hards participating in the team's 39th annual charity golf tournament got a glimpse of the 6-foot-3, 231-pound Lucic first-hand.

"There are guys in different walks of life that have that presence when you walk in a room – you're aware when he's there," said Treliving of the hulking winger who is arguably the toughest in today's game.

"He's a presence."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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That presence will clearly be felt by teammates who no longer have to count on Sam Bennett or Travis Hamonic to be the first to come to their aid when the temperature of games rises.

Lucic is now that guy, and while engagement has been an issue for him the last few years, Treliving is counting on a change of scenery being a shot in the arm.

Oilers GM Ken Holland is hoping the same for Neal, who posted similar numbers to Lucic's last year despite landing a similarly bloated contract at \$5.75 million annually.

Despite being a third or fourth liner, you get the feeling Lucic will be a lightning rod for controversy due to his contract, style of play and frank, open approach with the media.

Yet another intriguing addition to the Battle of Alberta.

While it's a shame these two teams don't meet until two days after Christmas, they do face off against one another in exhibition play Sep. 20 and 28, which could make for interesting previews.

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1151907 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Nugent-Hopkins on Puljujarvi: 'It's too bad to see it going down this path'

Rory Boylen | September 5, 2019, 12:33 PM

CHICAGO — When the Edmonton Oilers open training camp next week, the fourth overall pick from the 2016 draft won't be there with them.

Over the summer, Jesse Puljujarvi's agent made it clear that if the Oilers didn't trade him before the season he would sign in Europe. And on August 27, that's exactly what happened when Puljujarvi inked a deal with Oulun Kärpät of Finland's Liiga, which includes an out clause that would allow him to return to the NHL before Dec. 1.

Fellow Oiler Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is making the rounds at NHL Media Day in Chicago this week — and though he hasn't talked to Puljujarvi lately, admitting that maybe he should — he knows Puljujarvi's transition to the NHL has been bumpy.

"There's obvious frustration, but I mean as a young player — I've been with the Oilers as a young player — there's going to be frustration pretty much any team you play for," Nugent-Hopkins told the 31 Thoughts podcast Thursday.

"It's not always you're going to play the top-line minutes at all times. I know Jesse, he's been a little frustrated. I'm not going to say whose fault it is — whether he's right, whether he's wrong — I know what Jesse's capable of."

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So far in Finland, Puljujarvi is off to a great start in Champions League play, with a goal and two assists in three games. Nugent-Hopkins said it is key for Puljujarvi to find confidence in order to return to the NHL and be successful. If he does that, Nugent-Hopkins thinks there's a lot more to come.

"He's a very, very talented player. He's a big kid, he's got everything you need," Nugent-Hopkins said.

"I think he can get down on himself a little bit too much. Confidence is a huge thing in the game and sometimes I've seen his confidence kind of goes away if he's not playing his game or the best game he feels he can play. But I know what he's capable of.

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"It's too bad to see it going down this path because I think he'd be a great guy for us and a guy we could use a lot."

In the three years since he was drafted, Puljujarvi wasn't able to stick with the Oilers for a full season. His best year came in 2017-18 when he played 65 games, scoring 12 goals and 20 points.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.06.2019

1151908 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators' Batherson 'striving' for full-time role after summer with Crosby

Wayne Scanlan September 5, 2019, 4:58 PM

The first thing that jumps out at you is the mass of the young man's shoulders.

Drake Batherson looks like he's been bench pressing Nathan MacKinnon all summer.

Instead, he's been skating and training with MacKinnon, Sidney Crosby and Brad Marchand for the better part of two months. It's the Halifax hockey hot house, with three of the game's elite forwards and others watching, or participating, in awe.

Batherson, still just 21, used to wonder what he was doing in such an exclusive club, even for off-season skates. Not anymore. This was his fourth summer with Crosby et al. If he's comfortable with the stars, he's ready for this weekend's NHL rookie tournament in Belleville and the main camp to follow in Ottawa.

"It's huge," Batherson said after the Senators' rookies skated at the Sensplex Thursday, before driving to Belleville. "I remember my first (NHL) camp and being so intimidated by the older guys. All the great players. Coming here now, I don't feel as intimidated because I've been skating with Crosby and them, and feel way more comfortable."

Batherson had a long summer of training, as neither the senior Senators nor B-Sens made the playoffs, and he made the most of it in the gym and the kitchen, paying more attention to nutrition than ever before.

The result is he gained nine pounds, to 206, and also happened to grow a half-inch, to six-foot-three.

"I don't know when I'm going to stop growing, but I'll take what I can get," Batherson says.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 6, 2019

This bigger, more mature right winger out of the QMJHL is ready to seek a full-time spot on the Senators roster after a 20-game NHL stint last season, and 62 points in 59 games with AHL Belleville. Batherson was so hot in his first weeks as a professional he was called up to Ottawa ahead of schedule, started strong but then faded and went back down. A year later, he hopes to smooth out those rough spots.

"I matured a lot last season," Batherson says. "It's a tough league, the AHL. I think I know better what to expect as a second-year pro."

Over the summer, if he had any questions, he knew where to turn. His superstar skating pals in Halifax.

Though he was born in Fort Wayne, Ind., where his father, Norm, was playing for the IHL Fort Wayne Komets, Batherson grew up mostly in New Minas, N.S., about 14 minutes from Wolfville. It's about an hour drive to the BMO Centre in Halifax, the four-pad rink where Crosby, Marchand, MacKinnon and assorted visitors (Taylor Hall and first-overall pick Jack Hughes were among this year's guests) skate.

Last summer was Batherson's third with the group. He started as a temporary fill-in a couple of years earlier. Then, former Senators centre and coach Chris Kelly, a good pal of Marchand's, asked about Batherson getting to skate with Crosby's group full-time. They usually skate two-to-three times a week. Marchand, whose Boston Bruins were in the Stanley Cup Final, joined later this year, in July. But Crosby, whose Pittsburgh Penguins were knocked out in the first playoff round, and Batherson started in late June, getting in a full two months.

"Brad, Nate and Sid, they all set the pace very high," Batherson says. "And they work so hard, even though they're the best players in the world. It's a fun environment to be around and you learn a lot, for sure."

Especially helpful to a young player like Batherson is the fact Crosby, MacKinnon and Marchand don't just work on skills, as many NHL players do in the summer. They engage in battle drills, gruelling one-on-one sessions to fight for pucks. A kid like Batherson has to learn a ton, even by osmosis.

"Guys like Taylor Hall come down and can't believe how hard (Sid and friends) are working," Batherson says. "That's why they're so good, because they work so hard."

A productive summer, following a productive first pro season, has Batherson in position to lock down a spot in Ottawa.

"I got a taste of what it's like to play here," he says. "That's what I'm striving for at this camp. I think I'm ready, I've just to prove it in my games, starting in Belleville. Throughout camp, just be consistent."

Rookie tournament schedule

Batherson's task begins with on Friday at 7 p.m. ET against the Winnipeg Jets rookies.

Batherson will join his familiar B-Sens centre Logan Brown and speedy left winger Alex Formenton on the Senators' top line.

The Senators meet the Montreal Canadiens rookies on Saturday at 7 p.m. ET and play Winnipeg again on Monday in the tournament finale. All games are at the CAA Arena in Belleville.

Other rookies to monitor

Defenceman Erik Brannstrom and forwards Josh Norris, Jonathan Davidsson, Formenton and Brown are among those

looking to make a strong impression in front of D.J. Smith's coaching staff and general manager Pierre Dorion. Ottawa has a strong forward group in the tournament, with Max Verroneau also participating.

Brannstrom, Norris and Davidsson bring intrigue because of how they arrived — all were key pieces in trades last season involving elite Ottawa players. Brannstrom, a 15th-overall pick of the Las Vegas Knights in 2017, came here in the trade for Mark Stone. Norris, rebounding from shoulder surgery in January, was a San Jose Sharks' first-round pick who was part of the Erik Karlsson trade. Davidsson, a small, skilled winger, came to the Senators along with another prospect, Vitaly Abramov, in the trade for Matt Duchene.

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1151909 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Nikolaj Ehlers talks Kyle Connor, Patrik Laine, off-season trade rumours

Rory Boylen | September 5, 2019, 5:55 PM

CHICAGO — When Nikolaj Ehlers lands in Winnipeg for the start of training camp he'll be sporting a new, longer hairdo. Under normal circumstances, which member of the Jets would be the first to make a comment about it?

"It would probably be Patty Laine, but he probably won't be there," Ehlers told the 31 Thoughts podcast during NHL Media Day.

There are a number of RFAs still unsigned around the league, but the Jets could begin camp without two top-six forwards under contract. There's Laine, who has 110 goals in his first 237 NHL games, and Kyle Connor, a regular on the top unit alongside Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler with back-to-back 30-goal seasons.

Has Ehlers talked to either of them recently, and does the topic of contracts come up?

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"Everyone knows me and Patty have a good relationship," Ehlers said. "You have one with every other guy on the team, but me and Patty were roommates for two full years and we're really good friends. I've talked to both Patty and Kyle this summer, but nothing about that. It's been like 'hey how's it going, are you enjoying summer?' Me and Kyle were actually talking about the flow because I was letting it grow and he was like 'oh ya looks good.'

"With Patty it's been like 'hey are you coming or what?' and he's like 'I don't know, I don't know' — you know Patty he doesn't talk a lot so that's been kind of it. But that's between them. If there was anything I could do to make them both stay in Winnipeg I would. Anyone in Winnipeg would do it, right? But it's up to them what happens now. It's up to the team of course as well. There's stuff that needs to happen and hopefully we see them both in Winnipeg very soon."

But wait, there's more.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 6, 2019

It was a turbulent summer in Jets-land, which began early this year when they were eliminated in the first round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs by the eventual champion St. Louis Blues. Before June was out, the team had traded top-pair defenceman Jacob Trouba to the Rangers when they couldn't agree on a long-term extension, so rather than walk him right to unrestricted free agency GM Kevin Cheveldayoff picked up some assets — 24-year-old defenceman Neal Pionk and the 20th overall pick in the draft (Ville Heinola).

Even Ehlers had trade rumours swirling around him following a down year in which he managed just 21 goals and a career-low 37 points.

"Hearing my name didn't touch me at all to be honest," Ehlers said of the rumours. "I saw it and everyone around me in Denmark was like 'hey man where are you going, what's happening?' And I was like 'I have no idea what's going on. I haven't heard or seen or anything from anyone so I know as much as anyone else.' And that's what I told them and they're like 'What? How? How do you not know more than I do?' and I'm like... 'I don't know.'"

"It's kind of funny. I'm walking around in Denmark and I don't think about it. The only time I thought about that was when people came and asked me about it and I gave them the same answer every time. I have no idea."

There's obviously still a lot of great pieces in Winnipeg and Stanley Cup hopes will remain high in 2019-20. Wheeler and Scheifele are locked in. Dustin Byfuglien and Josh Morrissey will see a lot of minutes and younger players in Jack Roslovic, Mason Appleton and perhaps even Kristian Vesalainen are pushing for more opportunity.

It's never easy losing players who bring as much as Trouba did for years or Kevin Hayes did after he was picked up at the trade deadline. But Ehlers noted it's all part of the deal, and you just push on.

"We lost some great guys and players so... It's guys that you spend so much time with they are like brothers to you so it kind of hurts, but it's also a business. It is. That's just how hockey is. You're going to lose some players that you've played with for a couple years, but then you're going to get new ones. And you try to create a bond with them and create something special on the ice with them. It's positive and it sucks sometimes to be in this business during the summer especially."

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1151910 Websites

TSN.CA / Horvat hopeful for chance to 'wear the C' in Vancouver

Frank Seravalli

CHICAGO — Three of Canada's seven clubs have a vacancy at captain and Bo Horvat says he is ready to fill the void for the Vancouver Canucks if called upon.

Horvat had a front row seat watching one of the best in Henrik Sedin for four seasons, learning what it means to lead. Now after serving as the Canucks' de-facto captain last season following Sedin's retirement, Horvat was asked whether he could be the one to replace him.

"I'd be ready to make that next step," Horvat said Thursday at the annual NHL / NHLPA Player Media Tour. "I think it's obviously up to the GM and the coaching staff to decide who they think is the best fit ... It'd be an unbelievable honour to wear the 'C' — or to wear any letter for that matter. Even to be up for consideration is definitely humbling."

Horvat said there is "no rush for our team to name one right away."

That has been the trend league-wide. The Toronto Maple Leafs have gone without one for the past three seasons since Dion Phaneuf was traded away in Feb. 2016, but all eyes are on whether an announcement will be made before this next campaign starts.

The Ottawa Senators are in wait-and-see mode since Erik Karlsson's departure. The Vegas Golden Knights haven't named a captain in their two season existence. The San Jose Sharks have an opening with Joe Pavelski's signing in Dallas, ditto the Carolina Hurricanes while Justin Williams deliberates his future. The Rangers and Red Wings also have vacancies.

That means eight of 31 NHL teams — more than a quarter of the league — currently do not have a captain.

All of which begs the question: Does having a captain, a tradition seemingly more important in hockey than most other professional teams sports, really matter in 2019?

Patrick Kane says yes, having experienced the impact Jonathan Toews has made for more than a decade in Chicago.

"I think it's nice to have one guy defined as your leader," Kane said. "It's pretty much a no-brainer to have [Toews] as your captain and your leader. He's been doing it so long and he's done such a great job that I think it helps our team to have a guy that you can look to to lead discussions, say the right things in the locker room and lead things off the ice."

Freshly minted Conn Smythe winner Ryan O'Reilly believes "leadership is plural" and acknowledges that "every team is different." He said a bevy of voices contributed on the Blues' Stanley Cup run, even though Alex Pietrangolo was the man accepting hockey's holy grail from Gary Bettman last June.

O'Reilly said being the face of a team may be more for the public.

"It's nice for fans to see that, it shows that there is that leader there," O'Reilly said. "I think it helps for sure if you have that, but I've seen when there isn't a captain, I still feel it can work."

Horvat, now 24, said having a captain is important.

"I think it's nice to have a guy to lean on and a guy to go to when times are tough, have somebody for the guys to set the tone for the young guys, even the older guys to follow," Horvat said. "It wouldn't change who I am and it wouldn't change the type of player I want to be. I wouldn't let it affect me that way, I'd just try to be the best leader I can be."

He marvelled at the way both Sedins — and Henrik in particular, as captain — stood daily as the faces of the franchise taking bullets during painful seasons in the twilight of their careers.

"The last three years, it definitely wasn't easy standing in front of the media and taking the heat, talking every single day," Horvat said. "Just watching it, you were like 'How did these guys do it?' I kind of had that responsibility last year, so I got a little bit of practice at times, which was good for me I thought. I'd be ready to make that next step."



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Horvat played through the lean years, now he is ready to grow with a Canucks team seemingly on the rise. The two-way pivot is coming off a career-best 61-point season and he's excited about the additions of J.T. Miller, Micheal Ferland, Jordie Benn and Tyler Myers – not to mention the sophomore season of Swedish sensation Elias Pettersson.

"I don't think he has a ceiling, to be honest with you," Horvat said of Pettersson. "Look out."

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USA TODAY / Are Olympics or escrow worth fighting about?
NHL players must decide whether to reopen CBA

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 5:50 p.m. ET Sept. 5, 2019

CHICAGO - Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews says he's usually cynical about talks involving a new collective bargaining agreement.

"I couldn't believe in 2012 when people said we were headed for a lockout," Toews told USA TODAY Sports at the NHL media tour. "I didn't believe it. Things will get resolved. Sure enough it went down the road it did (to a lockout). I shouldn't be one of the guys who comes down on the side of positivity. But I definitely am in this case."

NHL officials will meet with NHLPA officials Friday in New York to continue discussions on revising the current CBA.

"I have a very optimistic outlook about where we are going in the next few weeks," said Toews, who's always knowledgeable about player issues.

The current CBA expires in September 2022, but an opt-out clause gives players until Sept. 15 to decide whether to reopen the contract.

Commissioner Gary Bettman announced last week that the Board of Governors would not to trigger its opt-out clause.

Chicago Blackhawks center Jonathan Toews says both sides can be reasonable during this round of collective bargaining talks.

LABOR TALKS: NHL, NHLPA set to meet again on Friday

EXTENSION: Torey Krug says contract talks with Bruins are 'nonexistent'

"The league recognizes that the game is in a good place," Toews said. "We can all be reasonable and have actual discussions about the needs of either side to try keep things going in the same direction out of respect to the fans."

The two sides have been negotiating since February, and talks have been generally positive.

Bettman declined to say what's being discussed because he doesn't feel it's appropriate to negotiate publicly and he doesn't want to influence the NHLPA's decision.

"I can only speak for the clubs," Bettman said. "But whatever issues we've had, we've decided that it is more important in the foreseeable future to have labor peace and build on what we

have going. The Players' Association will have to make the same decision on Sept. 15."

Player salaries are growing under the current CBA, but they have some much-publicized issues, such as the NHL's decision to end its practice of sending players to the Olympic Games. Also, players hate the current escrow system, in which money is held back from player paychecks in case player salaries go beyond 50% of revenue, which is the split spelled out in the current CBA.

Bettman said there are steps that could be taken to reduce the sting of escrow, "but it has to be joint problem solving."

Regarding the Olympics, Bettman hasn't changed his mind about allowing players to go.

"It's a distraction with no benefit, and I'm not talking financial benefits," Bettman said. "That has never been the issue. It disrupts the competitiveness of the season, and the (International Olympic Committee) does not allow us to do anything to promote we are there."

Players have other issues that concern them, but none might be enough to persuade them to risk a disruption to the season a year from now. If they reopen the CBA, the contract expires next September.

You can make the argument that the players have leverage to get these some of these changes they want. But in CBA negotiations, we are accustomed to hearing crucial issues referring to key issues as the "hill we are willing to die on."

These issues might not be large enough to do that, especially if players believe NHL officials sincerely want to extend this deal beyond 2022. NHL officials seem sincere about desiring an extended labor peace.

We've seen one lost season and two seasons reduced because of CBA fights. Nobody wants that again.

"There are no good guys and bad guys," Bettman said. "This is a relationship."

Detroit Red Wings forward Dylan Larkin says he's optimistic.

"Not a whole lot of concern here," he said. "It's under control. People are looking into it. It will be all right."

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YAHOO SPORTS / Auston Matthews says Mitch Marner's contract is 'none of his business'

Yahoo Sports Canada Arun Srinivasan Yahoo Sports Canada September 6, 2019

Toronto Maple Leafs forward Auston Matthews is ready for the season to begin and though he's avoided distractions, he was inevitably asked about all the noise surrounding his teammates and dear friends.

By now, you've probably heard Mitch Marner - along with a host of other stars across the league - remains unsigned, and Matthews was asked on Sportsnet's Tim and Sid whether he's



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surprised that the star winger has yet to be locked up by the Leafs yet.

"I don't know. I'm not really sure how to answer that," Matthews said. "I'm not really a part of those kind of conversations, I guess it's really none of my business. Obviously he's a big part of our team and you hope to see him as soon as possible. Obviously, the situation with (William Nylander) last year was kind of tough on everybody, I guess and it's not really a road you want to see another guy go down because it's hard mentally and physically.

"You're hoping that something gets done here soon and obviously you want him here as soon as possible."

Matthews and Marner maintain a strong friendship off the ice and their discussions this summer haven't been focused on hockey.

"I think you just leave him be. We've talked a bit throughout the summer and as of late, but nothing really about hockey or his contract," Matthews said to Sportsnet's Chris Johnston. "He's going through his process with his team and obviously everybody's hoping for the best. We'd love to have him back in Toronto in training camp or back with the team as soon as possible."

Matthews signed a five-year, \$58.2M contract in February, remaining as the driving force behind the Maple Leafs' championship ambitions, and though he defended Marner and Nylander against the notion that their contract standoffs were detrimental to the team, he's relieved that he doesn't have to worry about his own.

"I'm happy that I kind of got it over with and I can just focus on hockey and focus on this season and not really have anything on my mind," Matthews said. "I could go into my summer and not really worry about 'What's the deal with my contract? What's my status? Am I going to be at training camp or am I going to miss part of the season?'

"Everybody's in their own situations and it's really none of my business. With myself, I know I'm happy that everything got kind of taken care of and I can just focus on hockey."

Matthews will once again enter the year as the Maple Leafs' best player and faces the pressure that comes with that label. For the time being, he'll have to do it without the team's best winger and his dear friend.

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YAHOO SPORTS / Tarasenko expects to be back at camp after dislocating shoulder during Final

Yahoo Sports Canada Arun Srinivasan September 5, 2019

St. Louis Blues star Vladimir Tarasenko said he'll be ready for training camp after revealing Thursday that he dislocated his shoulder during the Stanley Cup Final.

"My shoulder popped out in Game 2 in the second period," Tarasenko said via NHL.com's Tom Gulitti. "They put it back in and I was able to finish the game."

Tarasenko underwent surgery at the end of the 2017-18 season for a dislocated shoulder, but this time around, he didn't require

an operation. The 27-year-old also underwent knee surgery, which the Blues announced on June 25.

"Now everything feels fine," Tarasenko said. "I'm still recovering but I feel strong, I feel good and ready to go."

Tarasenko appeared to be relatively unbothered by the injury, posting 11 goals and six assists throughout the playoffs, notching three goals and an assist in the Cup Final.

Defending the Stanley Cup is a difficult task for even the healthiest of teams and with Tarasenko back to full strength for the start of the season, the Blues' goal of repeating becomes a lot more attainable, even if they aren't altogether deterred by a slow start after going from worst-to-first during the 2018-19 season.

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YAHOO SPORTS / Phil Kessel spills the beans on that home theatre photo that went viral

Chase Kell Yahoo Sports Canada September 5, 2019

Phil Kessel may be busy preparing for his first season with the Arizona Coyotes, but that doesn't mean he has no time to dish on that viral photo from earlier this summer.

Shortly after the trade that sent him to Arizona, Kessel put his Pittsburgh home up for sale. That alone is pretty normal for an NHL star moving to a new city, but the photo of the theatre in the basement of his home was anything but.

The photo above was unanimously deemed hilarious, but according to the former Penguins sniper, there's a good reason for that incredibly lonely chair.

"I was selling my house and, you know, there's nothing in there, right?" Kessel shared with the NHL Network. "It was used as a bedroom, like a blow-up mattress and everything. I actually never used that movie room one time, but my realtor's wife thought it was a good thing to put in there one chair or something, look like I used it or something. But, I don't know. I never used it one time there."

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This probably isn't the "what, I like movies" response that you may have been expecting, but Kessel's realtor, Dave Tumpa, can corroborate his client's story. The single chair, as Tumpa explains, was placed in the frame to draw attention to the size of the room.

Plus, Tumpa and his wife apparently thought the chair "would be cute."

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YAHOO SPORTS / Report: Oilers sign Riley Sheahan to one-year contract



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Ailish Forfar

The Edmonton Oilers have reportedly signed free agent forward Riley Sheahan to a one-year, \$900,000 deal, according to Mark Spector of Sportsnet.

Sheahan deal will be one-year at \$900K. He's at the point where he needs to prove he can still help an NHL team. Oilers get a team-friendly deal because of that. <https://t.co/RT9gX6eava>

— Mark Spector (@SportsnetSpec) September 5, 2019

The 27-year-old is expected to fill a third-line centre role in Edmonton. He's coming off a split 2018-2019 season between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Florida Panthers, tallying 9 goals and 10 assists.

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Sheahan began his NHL career with the Detroit Red Wings as a first round draft choice in 2010. He spent part of seven seasons in Detroit, recording his career-best season in 2013-2014 with 13 goals and 23 assists in 79 games.

He was traded to the Penguins in October 2017, and then to the Panthers in February 2019.

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