



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Sept. 11, 2017



Prospects Gameday: Hurricanes vs. Red Wings

Canes open NHL Prospects Tournament against host team

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

September 8th, 2017

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. - It's time to play some hockey.

The NHL Prospects Tournament in Traverse City gets underway tonight, and the Carolina Hurricanes open their three-game round-robin slate against the host Detroit Red Wings.

"I had a tough time sleeping last night. I want to get the game action going," head coach Mike Vellucci said. "I'm excited for the game and the opportunity tonight."

"It's going to be fast. Guys want to come out and make a good first impression," defenseman and team captain [Haydn Fleury](#) said. "They'll be a little nervous. Mistakes will be a part of the game tonight, and you just want to manage those."

The Hurricanes, aiming for a defense of their second tournament title from a year ago, will ice a balanced and talented bunch, backstopped by [Callum Booth](#) in net.

"Speed and skill are important," Vellucci said. "We've got size, which is great. We're going to get in on the forecheck and be aggressive to make sure we're playing in their end most of the night."

Anchoring the first line is center [Nicolas Roy](#), who will begin his first professional season this year. He's flanked by [Spencer Smallman](#) and [Andrew Poturalski](#), who has two games of NHL experience to his name.

"It's a pretty quick tournament. You need to pick up the pace in the first game," said Roy, who is competing in his third prospects tournament. "It's a hard, physical game, and we'll be ready for it."

"You notice the maturity mentally and physically. He's gotten a lot stronger and faster and has worked on his skating all summer long and over the past three years," Vellucci said of Roy. "He's just a real good person and kid. He thinks the game really well. On the power play, he just makes some nice little plays. You have to be very smart to make those plays."

The Canes' 2017 first-round draft pick [Martin Necas](#) centers the second line with [Warren Foegele](#) and tournament invitee Nick Shilkey alongside.

"All three of them are skilled," Vellucci said. "Foegs is a big boy who really works hard and is coming off the MVP award. I think he stirs the drink. He's the guy who gets in on the forecheck. He's always hunting down the puck, and he'll make some room for the other guys who are pure snipers."

The team defense is led by tournament veterans Fleury and [Josh Wesley](#).

"We haven't played together a lot, so the more you talk, the easier you make it on each other. That will be a big key tonight," Fleury said. "Keep it simple, let the game come to us and don't make it too hard on ourselves."

After finishing 4-0 last year en route to the team's first tournament title since 2009, the Hurricanes are well aware how vital game one can be.

"It's huge. There's no semifinal here, so you basically have to run the table if you want to win," Fleury said. "We want to come out with a good start tonight."

"It's really exciting," Roy said. "I can't wait for tonight and for the season to start."

The Canes' tournament-opening game will be available to stream live through the [FOX Sports GO app](#), which will have live streaming coverage of all NHL Prospects Tournament games and Hurricanes hockey throughout the 2017-18 season. We'll also be rinkside at Centre Ice Arena to bring you live game updates tonight and throughout the tournament.

Smallman-Roy-Poturalski
Foegele-Necas-Schilkey
Lorentz-Kuokkanen-Gauthier
Elynuik-Geekie-Mattheos

Fleury-Wesley
Bean-McKeown
De Jong-Carroll

Booth
Helvig

Scratches: Hollowell, Boka, Thilander



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Recap: Booth, Dominant Third Carry Canes Past Red Wings

Goaltender made 34 saves in Canes' 6-2 win

by Michael Smith @MSmithCanes / CarolinaHurricanes.com

September 8th, 2017

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. - As defending champions in the NHL Prospects Tournament, the Carolina Hurricanes know how vital it is to start quickly and notch an early victory.

Through an opportunistic first two periods followed up by a dominant third, the Canes did just that on Friday night in a 6-2 win over the host Detroit Red Wings.

"We turned the puck over a little bit too much in the first two periods, but finally in the third period we decided to protect it a little bit better and be stronger on it," head coach Mike Vellucci said. "I thought we played really well from an offensive standpoint. There is a lot of skill and speed, and we made some really nice plays."

Goaltender [Callum Booth](#) posted 34 saves, 16 of which came in the first period alone.

"It was definitely fun. I think the team did a great job of letting me see it," Booth said. "It's great starting the tournament with a win, and hopefully we can continue that through the next couple of games."

"We have to thank him for holding us in there for two periods, especially early on in the first period when we were a little scrumbly," Vellucci said. "He played really well."

"I thought we had a bit of a slow start," said defenseman [Jake Bean](#), who tallied a pair of assists. "Boother helped us out at the start, and credit to him because he had a really good game."

Despite the slow start, the Hurricanes still skated to the locker room with a 2-0 lead after 20 minutes. Officially credited with just four shots on goal, the Canes were an opportunistic bunch.

On their first power play opportunity of the game, Bean slid the puck over to [Janne Kuokkanen](#) for the one-time blast that opened the scoring.

"We've got five good players on that unit," Bean said. "Kuokks is a really talented player. That was a good goal."

Later, [Martin Necas](#) and Nick Schilkey played a game of back-and-forth on a 2-on-1 before Necas finished off the rush with the Canes' second goal.

Detroit's Dominik Shine netted two second-period goals - one of which he gloved and then batted the puck out of mid-air and in - to tie the score, as the Hurricanes regularly found themselves hemmed in. But, they continued to be opportunistic. With not much going offensively, [Nicolas Roy](#) made a steal in the neutral zone, skated in alone and went forehand-backhand-twine to put the Hurricanes back on top, 3-2.

"He made a strong play in the neutral zone, and he was strong on the puck," Vellucci said of Roy's goal. "When you have skill, it's a good thing to have because when the game is close you can make a nice play real quick. You only need one scoring chance."

The Canes capped their first game of the tournament with a dominant 20 minutes that started with strong plays on the puck.

"I think we started to figure things out in the third," Bean said. "We were a bit more responsible with the puck and guys started to click a bit more."

"We talked about protecting the puck and using the boards," Vellucci said. "If we were being soft on it, we were going to be in our own end all night."

The Canes regained their two-goal lead when [Warren Foegele](#) cashed in on a rebound from a Bean point shot. [Julien Gauthier](#) banged home a pass from Kuokkanen to make it 5-2, and Schilkey took a feed from Necas to find the empty net to seal the 6-2 win.

"It was a pretty good match," Necas said. "The third period from us was good."

"It was a huge game-changer the way we came out in the third and played simpler hockey," Booth said. "We were able to outwork them, and it brought us the W."

It's a quick turnaround for the Hurricanes, who get back at it on Saturday afternoon with a 3:30 p.m. tilt against the New York Rangers.

"We have to play like we did in the third period tomorrow," Necas said.

"Get some rest, make sure we get a lot of water and have a good stretch in the morning to come out ready," Vellucci said.



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Prospects Gameday: Hurricanes vs. Rangers

Canes go for two in a row in NHL Prospects Tournament

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

September 9th, 2017

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. - Following a 6-2 win over the Detroit Red Wings to open the NHL Prospects Tournament, the Carolina Hurricanes will look to make it two in a row with a Saturday afternoon tilt against the New York Rangers.

Because of the quick turnaround, the team opted for a morning stretch outside of the hotel in lieu of the traditional morning skate, and the Canes will make a few lineup tweaks heading into the matinee affair. Jeremy Helvig will get the nod in net after [Callum Booth](#) stopped 34 of 36 shots in Friday night's win. Two tournament invitees will draw into the lineup, with Luke Boka making his debut in [Steven Lorentz](#)'s stead and Adam Thilander replacing Brendan De Jong on the back-end.

[Martin Necas](#), selected 12th overall by the Canes in the 2017 NHL Draft, tallied a goal and an assist in Friday's win, and he'll center [Warren Foegele](#) and Nick Schilkey on the team's top line on Saturday. [Janne Kuokkanen](#), whose power play snipe opened the scoring on Friday, will shift over to the left wing today with [Nicolas Roy](#) and [Spencer Smallman](#) to his right. [Andrew Poturalski](#) will see some time in the middle, as he centers Stelio Mattheos and [Julien Gauthier](#). Finally, Boka

slots in on the right wing with Hudson Elynuik and Morgan Geekie to his left.

The defense remains consistent aside from the Thilander-De Jong swap on the third pair's right side.

The Rangers jumped out to a 3-0 lead over the Chicago Blackhawks in the second period on Friday. Chicago pushed back with two goals late in the third period but fell short in a 3-2 Rangers win, so the winner of today's game will take sole possession of first place in the Gordie Howe Division.

The puck drops at 3:30 p.m. at Centre Ice Arena. You can stream today's game live on [FOX Sports GO](#), and we'll have you covered at the rink with game updates on Twitter at [@CanesTracking](#).

Foegele-Necas-Schilkey
Kuokkanen-Roy-Smallman
Mattheos-Poturalski-Gauthier
Elynuik-Geekie-Boka

Fleury-Wesley
Bean-McKeown
Carroll-Thilander

Helvig
Booth

Scratches: De Jong, Lorentz, Hollowell

Recap: Helvig, Canes Blank Rangers

Helvig posts shutout, Elynuik scores two in 4-0 win

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

September 9th, 2017

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. - The Carolina Hurricanes earned their second win in as many days at the NHL Prospects Tournament in Traverse City, blanking the New York Rangers 4-0.

Jeremy Helvig posted a 19-save shutout, and Hudson Elynuik chipped in two goals as the Canes remain perfect through two-thirds of their round-robin slate.

"When you're winning it's fun to play hockey. They're getting along great," head coach Mike Vellucci said. "There's a lot of talent and skill, and when you win it makes it a lot more fun."

"The team played great defensively. They didn't give up a lot of grade-A chances, and it made my day pretty easy," Helvig said. "It was really good to play in my first Traverse City game, playing with all these future pros."

Friday's first period was a bit scrambled and disorganized for the Hurricanes, who took advantage of limited offensive opportunities to take a lead to the locker room. Saturday afternoon's first period was much the opposite; the Canes were the team possessing the puck and controlling play with

a 13-3 shot advantage. And again they held a lead after 20 minutes.

"It was a really good bounce-back," Elynuik said. "We got off to a quick start, and that was the message before the game."

"I thought we controlled the puck way better this game. We didn't give it away early on," Vellucci said. "We dominated the first period and out-shot and out-chanced them. We controlled the play. When you have skill and speed and the puck, it's a dangerous combination."

[Janne Kuokkanen](#) scored his second power-play goal in as many games, as he received a beauty of a centering feed from [Nicolas Roy](#) and banged it in the gaping cage.

"He's got a great release, and he knows how to get open, too," Vellucci said. "Nic Roy made a nice play there, too. He's such a good player net-front on the power play. They moved it around well. It's a great unit."

Elynuik twice found the back of the net in the second period to stretch the Canes' lead to three goals. His first tally came after he gathered his own rebound in the slot and finished. Later, he put his shoulder down, drove the net and scored his second straight of the period.

"He's a power forward, and he has to play [that way]," Vellucci said of Elynuik. "He's 6-foot-5 and he can fly. He's got pull-away speed. If he can do that on a consistent basis, he's going to be a heck of a hockey player."



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"I just wanted to be better than yesterday," Elynuik said. "I worked as hard as I could to be in the right spots at all times and play hard. It paid off."

Helvig, who was making his NHL Prospects Tournament debut with the Hurricanes, didn't see a ton of rubber, but he was sharp when called upon.

"For sure, a little bit [of butterflies]. To play my first game ... it's great," Helvig said. "I'm happy to get the shutout."

"When it did get a little difficult, he held his ground. They have some quick jam plays, and his legs are strong," Vellucci said. "I thought he saw the puck really well and moved really good. He had a great game."

"I give them both credit. Yesterday Boother outstanding and Jer today got the shutout," Elynuik said. "It's a lot of fun watching them. The team has a lot of confidence when you have those guys behind you."

The Canes' penalty kill remained perfect in the tournament. The man disadvantage went 4-for-4 today, a mark that

included a 6-on-4 kill late in the third period with the extra skater on the ice for New York.

"I think we pressured them quite a bit. We didn't let them set up at all," Vellucci said. "We've done a good job of blocking shots. That's key. And both of our goaltenders have played well. They're a big part of the penalty kill."

The Hurricanes will take the day off Sunday before returning to the ice on Monday evening to face the Blackhawks at 6:30 p.m., a match-up that will decide if the Canes will compete for their second straight championship.

"It's a good vibe in the room. When you're winning, it's always fun. We're all enjoying it," Elynuik said. "Day off tomorrow and get back at it Monday."

"The guys are bonding great. It shows on the ice with the two wins," Helvig said. "We've got to work hard and get ready for Monday."

TriangleSportsNetwork

Hurricanes prospects open Traverse City tournament play with 6-2 win over Wings

[September 9, 2017 Peter Koutroumpis Carolina Hockey Network, Carolina Hurricanes, Triangle Sports Network, Triangle Sports Roundup 0](#)

TRAVERSE CITY, MICH. – Not one, but many [Carolina Hurricanes prospects](#) shone in a 6-2 win over the host Detroit Red Wings in opening-game play at the Traverse City NHL Prospects Tournament held at Centre Ice Arena on Friday.

Posting goals for Carolina were [Janne](#) Kuokkanen, Martin Necas, Nicolas Roy, Warren Foegele, Julian Gautier, and

Nick Shilkey, while [goaltender](#) Callum Booth made 34 saves in the win.

Shilkey led all scorers with three points (1g, 2a) as Kuokkanen and Necas also tallied assists.

Defenseman Jake Bean posted two points – helpers on Kuokkanen and Foegele goals.

As the [tournament's defending champs](#), the Hurricanes [continue](#) their quest to repeat, and will [face off against the New York Rangers](#) prospects on Saturday afternoon.



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NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Five difficult truths for the Hurricanes

Carolina is improved on paper, but there are still concerns heading in to 2017-18

[September 8, 2017 Cory Lavalette NHL, Sports](#)

RALEIGH — Carolina Hurricanes general manager finally made his move this offseason. Better stated, he made his *moves*.

An upgrade in goal? Done with the acquisition and signing of former Blackhawks backup (and the [closest thing](#) the NHL has to Game of Thrones' Gregor "The Mountain" Clegane) Scott Darling.

Veteran leadership? Check! It doesn't get much better than Justin Williams, who knows the market, knows what it's like to win in Raleigh, and has the rings to demand respect in the Hurricanes locker room.

Need an influx of talent at the bottom of the lineup? Enter Marcus Kruger and Trevor van Riemsdyk, who come to Carolina from Chicago via Las Vegas and should stabilize the bottom six forwards and bottom D pairing, respectively. Josh Jooris will also add speed and competition to the fourth line.

All those additions have made the Hurricanes — already a, ahem, darling of the analytics community — a frequent choice among prognosticators to snap their eight-season postseason drought. But Carolina returning to the playoffs is anything but an iron-clad guarantee, and there are still concerns.

1. Is Darling the answer?

We've been here before, most recently with Eddie Lack being the guy who was going to unseat Cam Ward. Yet this feels different — Darling is more proven than Lack even if both had similar experience upon arriving in Raleigh. But that doesn't make the 6'6 Darling a sure thing. If the 28-year-old struggles or can't handle the increased [workload](#) (he hasn't played more than 40 games in season since 2007-08 before he went to college), Carolina could be back to Ward — and right back to where they were before.

2. Depth is a concern.

There's better depth at the bottom of the roster, whether it's on defense where veteran Klas Dahlbeck will likely lose his

No. 6 spot to Haydn Fleury or one of the other young blueliners in camp, or at forward where the competition for a fourth line job should be fierce. But if Carolina suffers a key injury to one of its top six forwards, there's no one that screams "deserves an opportunity." A rookie could emerge — I'm on the record as a big Janne Kuokkanen believer — but the Hurricanes can't afford any key injuries.

3. Slow starts.

I'm a Bill Peters fan, but if Carolina gets off to another slow start this season his seat will get very warm. Unless things go very south, Peters' job isn't at risk in-season. However, a bad opening month will bring out the critics, and it could become a distraction for a young team still trying to find its way. The Hurricanes get two games at home to start the season, then play four away from [PNC Arena](#) for the annual State Fair road trip. If the team can't get at least six points in those [half dozen](#) games, it's time to start wondering if it's not the annual roadie that's the problem.

4. Is 2016-17 Jeff Skinner the real Jeff Skinner?

Skinner set a high in goals (37) and matched his rookie season point total (63) last year, and for the first time in his career he has strung together back-to-back very good seasons. Part of that is health — Skinner's missed just eight games the last three years — but Carolina is hoping No. 53 is a 35-goal (or more) guy going forward. If he's not, Carolina's goal-scoring woes are even more of a problem than perceived.

5. Navigating the NHL's toughest division.

The Metropolitan Division is arguably the best division in hockey. All four of its playoff teams (Washington, 118 points; Pittsburgh, 111; Columbus, 108; New York Rangers, 102) cracked the 100-point barrier last season, while no other division had more than two. The Hurricanes finished seventh out of eight teams in the Metro last year, and the Islanders, Flyers and Devils could all be improved. Expectations are high for the Hurricanes, but that's a lot of teams to climb over. Couple it with the fact Tampa Bay and Florida each missed the playoffs last season and could enter the playoff mix, and it's an imposing task.



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Booth impresses Hurricanes with revamped training routine

Conversation with assistant GM gave goalie, 20, 'wake-up call' to get in better shape

by Sean Shapiro / NHL.com Correspondent

September 10th, 2017

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. -- Two years ago, goalie prospect Callum Booth had what he called a career-defining conversation at Carolina Hurricanes development camp.

Booth, who was selected by the Hurricanes in the fourth round (No. 93) of the 2015 NHL Draft, wasn't in the best shape. He was overweight and behind during fitness testing, and it impacted his ability to make saves on the ice.

"We had a good talk and he took it to heart, and he lost about 5 or 6 percent of his body fat," Hurricanes assistant general manager Mike Vellucci said. "Very proud of him, he's worked very hard at it."

Booth, 20, looks back somewhat fondly on that conversation.

"It became a huge part of my summer training," Booth said. "It was a wake-up call after I was drafted and I came into my first camp. And it was like, 'Oh my god, these are all men in amazing shape.' So you start to do things differently, which I try to do, and it's been working out so far."

Booth started working out more, making two-a-day training part of his summer routine through a combination of cardio

and goalie-specific drills. He also changed his eating habits, paying closer attention to what and when he was eating.

"Dedicating yourself 100 percent to hockey on and off the ice," said Booth, who is 6-foot-4 and 191 pounds. "Hopefully that can help me in my future."

Booth helped the Saint John Sea Dogs to a Quebec Major Junior Hockey League championship last season with a .923 save percentage and 1.67 goals-against average in 18 playoff games. Now, he's trying to carry that momentum into his first professional season, beginning with the 2017 Traverse City Prospects Tournament.

"It's really fast hockey," Booth said after making 34 saves in a 6-2 win against the Detroit Red Wings. "At the end of the summer, beginning of the season and it's been a while. I haven't seen shots and stuff. Just working making sure your feet are moving and being square to the puck and you're tracking it -- that's a big thing early in the season."

Booth said it could be a springboard to a strong training camp. Though the Hurricanes appear set with goalies [Scott Darling](#) and [Cam Ward](#), Booth is competing with Jeremy Smith, [Alex Nedeljkovic](#) and Martin Ouellette for the starting job in Charlotte of the American Hockey League.

"That's a good feeling to know you can come in and win a job," Booth said. "Sometimes things are set and you have to accept that. But it's a nice opportunity when you know that your play will dictate where you end up."

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SportScan

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

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Sportsnet.ca / WHAT PRESSURE?

BY RYAN DIXON

Becoming an impact NHLer took longer than he would've liked, but everything Jonathan Drouin went through along the way ensures that he can handle Montreal's preposterously high expectations.

Because Jonathan Drouin's remarkable shift happened in the age of memes, it shines in many corners of the Internet. His 30 seconds of wizardry, though, could easily have inspired a more musical art form. "Jonathan's Quest," "Hell-bent in Halifax," or even "Doin' the Drouin" could make a good title for an east coast folk song paying tribute to what the then-17-year-old displayed the February 2013 night he moved around the entire Acadie-Bathurst Titan team as if he had wings and they had roots.

First, No. 27 for the Halifax Mooseheads — standing nearly 200 feet from the opposing net — kicks the puck up to his stick, then skates it out of the defensive zone to start the power-play attack. Just as he crosses the Titan blue line, he takes a return feed from Stefan Fournier, pivots toward the right faceoff circle and feathers a short pass for Konrad Abeltshauser to one-time.

Acadie-Bathurst jump on the rebound, but fail to clear the zone. Another shot is kicked out by goalie Jacob Brennan to the right side, where Drouin collects it about eight feet from the half-wall. When Christophe Lalancette approaches, Drouin draws the puck toward his feet, jukes right, left, then right again and darts toward the net. After eluding defenceman Anthony Gingras, Drouin wires a forehand over the net on Brennan's blocker side. The puck ricochets in the air and before it lands near the far boards, Drouin tracks it like a Gold Glove centre-fielder. With Lalancette in pursuit again, Drouin corrals the puck and slams on the brakes to throw a little space-creating hip check that knocks the Titan centre off-kilter. With a crack of daylight opened, Drouin spins to his forehand, drives the net and makes one more cut to his left. His last act is slipping a pass to Fournier, who easily taps the puck into the cage.

Whether you want to make a .GIF or get out your guitar, just know more material will be arriving soon. "We probably saw that 50 times," Mooseheads GM Cam Russell says of Drouin's man-on-fire shifts.

When the Montreal Canadiens and Tampa Bay Lightning hooked up for one of the off-season's biggest trades — a one-for-one swap that sent Drouin north and drool-inducing defence prospect Mikhail Sergachev the other way — everybody knew the Habs were getting a 22-year-old with all kinds of raw ability. A true rink rat who often had to be ordered out of the arena as a teenager, Drouin faced his share of doubt and disappointment on the road to becoming an impact NHLer. The journey, somewhat infamously, took a little longer than Drouin would have preferred, but anyone who questions his commitment should share a beverage with the people he suited up for and beside on his way to The Show. Now, everything he went through should help him handle the preposterous expectations that go with being the Canadiens' first Francophone scoring star in 20 years.

RIGHT AT HOME

Habs fans know they're getting a young scorer with heaps of raw ability, but Drouin's competitiveness and never-leave-the-rink work ethic should also be appreciated in Montreal.

In 2004, the AAA Lac St. Louis Lions organization put together one of their first Jr. Lions teams, a spring squad for 1995-born players. Technical director Karl Svoboda and GM Raz Saltarelli coached the team, which ended up encountering a nine-year-old who would eventually become a fixture in Lac St. Louis. "The story goes either they win 8-7 or

lose 8-7, but there was one kid on the other side who scored all the goals for his team," says Jon Goyens, coach of the Lions midget club.

After seeing what a wee Drouin could do, the Lions extended an invite to attend one of their skills camps. Soon, making the roughly 80-minute journey from his home in the Mont-Tremblant region to Lions headquarters in Montreal's West Island became a regular part of Drouin's minor hockey experience. Once there, he made the most of his time. "Let's say he was already peewee age," Goyens says. "He'd come on with the atoms and demo drills, but [he's doing it at] 100 miles-per-hour. Then he goes on with his own age group and he already felt pushed to be the best, so he'd go 101 miles-per-hour. And then he'd be that little brother tugging at your jacket saying, 'I want to go on.' He goes on with the older guys and now he's going 105 miles-per-hour because he wants to keep up."

When the day's drills were over, players of all ages would often scrimmage. The first step was picking teams, a task left to the senior skaters, like 2009 Canadiens first-rounder Louis Leblanc and Drouin's future Tampa teammate, Alex Killorn. Despite being six years younger than Killorn and the 1989 crew, Drouin didn't have to wait long to hear his name called. "Even then, you'd see a guy like 'Killer' [say, 'Drouin is] on our team,'" Goyens recalls. "Just because he already had a knack for distributing the puck, playing well with others, but also being so ferociously competitive — even in pickup games."

When Drouin was 15, he relocated to play full-time with the Lions midget program. Goyens was behind a bench stocked with talent, including Anthony Duclair — now a right winger with the Arizona Coyotes — and current Florida Panthers defenceman Mike Matheson. Drouin played both centre and wing that season, sometimes with Duclair and sometimes on a different line because Goyens found he would drive matchup-obsessed coaches mad by splitting the two up. In the dressing room, the Lions sat Drouin next to Matheson — the senior member of that combo by one year — so the latter could remind the always-eager former to chill out now and again.

Still, there was no tempering Drouin's zeal for the game. He often took advantage of Goyens's open-door policy to pour over the previous night's NHL action. So it was no surprise when Drouin showed up one day declaring he wanted to use the Detroit Red Wings' power play as a model for the Lions, casting himself in the Pavel Datsyuk role. Goyens was willing to listen and, up through the ranks, Drouin's man-advantage approach — playing on the half-wall on his strong side so, if pressured, he could loop way up toward the blue-line on his forehand — was often similar to what he did in Lac St. Louis. "The hockey button was always on," Goyens says. "Sometimes we had to say, 'Hey, you can't sleep here. We're going to turn off the lights, you gotta go home. Hang out and do something else.'"

Moving on didn't happen as quickly as expected after Drouin was selected second overall by Halifax in the 2011 QMJHL Draft. While a generous assessment would put Drouin at five-foot-seven and 150 pounds at the time, the Mooseheads very much anticipated he'd be in the opening-night lineup. Late in the off-season, though, Drouin opted to delay the move east and return to Lac St. Louis. However, after putting up more than two points per game for a couple months, Drouin made the major-junior jump and met one of his hockey soulmates.

ANYTHING BUT ROUTINE

Drouin's play in Halifax was so often otherworldly, his fellow Mooseheads came to expect the one-man highlight reels. "We probably saw that 50 times," says GM Cam Russell.

The only player who went ahead of Drouin in the 'Q' draft was Nathan MacKinnon, taken first overall by the Baie-Comeau Drakkar. Before the season started, however, the Nova Scotia boy was traded to Halifax for a haul of players and picks. Once Drouin came to town, he and MacKinnon struck an immediate connection. "They drove together, they hung out together, they played on the same line," says Russell. "A lot of times [with] players of that calibre, you'll get a lot of jealousy; there was [none]. I think they were smart enough to realize they were both fortunate to



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have each other. And they helped each other. Even though they were kids, they were very mature about it. They had a tremendous amount of respect for each other and were very good friends.”

“Sometimes we had to say, ‘Hey, you can’t sleep here at the rink. We’re going to turn off the lights, you gotta go home.’”

For most of the year-and-a-half that Drouin played left wing beside centre MacKinnon, the right winger on the trio was Martin Frk. The Czech says it didn’t take him long to realize Drouin’s hockey I.Q. was off the charts. “Sometimes he surprised me with how he can pass the puck, or dangle three guys and then give you the puck [for] an open net,” Frk says.

Away from the rink, Frk took a little longer to get a read on Drouin. He jokes that, for a while, he thought Drouin was living in his own world and everyone else was just passing through it. But as the two got closer, riding to games and practices together, Frk got a feel for Drouin’s sense of humour, usually while the latter downed a Coke on the way to the rink. From a food standpoint, road trips to Quebec were always cause for excitement. “He loved his poutine,” says Frk. “He was a great guy. I would say a different person on the ice and a little bit different off, [too].”

Drouin’s exceptional ability earned national attention during a 2012–13 campaign that saw him represent Canada at the IIHF World Junior Championships, earn MVP honours in both the ‘Q’ regular season and playoffs, get named Canadian Hockey League Player of the Year— not a common occurrence for juniors in their first year of NHL draft eligibility — and register five assists in Halifax’s 6-4 win over the Portland Winterhawks in the Memorial Cup final. Thanks to that body of work, most people assumed the third-overall pick in the 2013 NHL Draft would start his pro career that October with Tampa Bay and never look back. When that didn’t happen, it stung the 18-year-old, who watched pal MacKinnon — among others from his draft class — crack their respective NHL clubs. “That really hurt him,” says Russell. “But the incredible thing was, by Christmas, he became a great leader for us. He could [have gone] one way or the other and, fortunately for us, he became a great leader.”

BLUE FROM THE BOLTS

Drouin’s disagreements with the Lightning can make him seem like a petulant kid, but Russell knows one thing about the winger: “You’re getting a guy who one day will lead your team to a championship.”

That ability to refocus is likely something that came up when NHL suits started calling Russell a couple years later. During the 2015–16 season, Drouin — unhappy with the fact he’d yet to secure a regular spot in the Tampa Bay lineup — went public with his request to be traded by the Bolts. Given the team was a quality outfit run by universally respected GM Steve Yzerman, it was easy to paint Drouin as a petulant youngster. Russell understood why people were coming to him for the goods and still recalls what he told them at the time: “My opinion remains the same on Jonathan: You’re getting a guy who one day will lead your team to a championship.”

That’s the obvious hope in title-starved Montreal, where part of the equation is figuring out whether Drouin will start his Habs tenure on the wing or in the middle. He played centre during his final season with the Mooseheads and Russell has no doubt he’d excel there if the Canadiens go down that path. “You could put him on defence and he’d still look like a million bucks,” Russell says.

Drouin probably didn’t even have time to contemplate where he’ll line up in the moments immediately following the trade. Goyens was in touch with him briefly on that whirlwind June day, which saw Drouin hit the brakes on his way to the golf course, turn around and head downtown to the Bell Centre for a press conference. “He was ecstatic,” Goyens says.

Less than a week later, Goyens and some other members of the Lions organization had a proper catchup with Drouin when they all went out for a steak. The coach looked hard at his old player and asked if he was really ready for everything his new life will entail. Drouin admitted the 24/7 attention isn’t something he’ll love, but he has no fears about it impacting his game. Goyens has a similar view.

“You don’t bet against Drouin,” he says. “Can he be like a moody player, this and that? Yeah, sure. But a lot of it is just because he has high expectations of himself and he hates to lose more than any other player I’ve had, bar none.”

Sounds like he’ll blend into his new hockey-mad surroundings just fine.

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Sportsnet.ca / Big Read: Why the Toronto Wolfpack is the best little startup in sports

RYAN DIXON

Full-time pros in a semi-pro league. A Canadian team flying in opponents across the Atlantic. The Toronto Wolfpack may not make sense on the surface, but they’re still the best little startup in sports.

The black fence at the north end of Lamport Stadium does an adequate job obscuring passing glances, but anyone lingering for a minute on King Street West could be privy to quite a view. In the aftermath of a rugby league practice on a hot July afternoon, members of the Toronto Wolfpack have dragged out a hose, flipped up the lids on two sizable plastic garbage bins and created a DIY ice dip. Rest assured, the sight of 230-pound Tongan prop Fuihui Moimoi submerged to his bare barrel chest warrants a double take, but even before bath time, shirts were an optional part of today’s practice. The team’s 56-year-old director of rugby, Brian Noble, peeled his off to soak in some rays on the sidelines, at times lying on the artificial turf. The majority of players went through their paces as skins, too, almost as if the fittest roofing crew on earth decided to spend their lunch hour playing a little rugby.

In a few days, Lamport will actually be visited by a group of part-time players. In Toronto for a Kingstone Press League 1 game, they’ll become the latest squad to feel just how serious the Wolfpack can be. Toronto’s collective easy spirit, however, always returns in full force once the work is done. “I think we recognize fun is an important part of professional sport,” says Noble. “And if we can show that fun — with the entertaining brand we play — to our fans, they’re going to pick up on that and enjoy our people.”

Rugby league is a variation of the sport with deep roots in northern England that is also popular in Australia and southern France. Now, there’s a group of men who are determined to add Toronto, Canada and possibly the entire North American continent to that list. That the Wolfpack — a trans-Atlantic team playing in an English league — exist at all is a minor miracle of sorts, but the person who started the club has been unflinching in his belief that rugby league is capable of converting many sports fans in his home city.

As part of that process, the Pack are on a bit of an odd journey in their inaugural season. Despite fielding a roster of full-time, paid professionals, Toronto is playing in a third-tier division, for the most part trouncing clubs — some of which have been around for nearly 150 years — comprised of rugby-loving semi-pros with day jobs. The 18-1-1 Wolfpack, with their plus-885 points differential, have a pair of home games remaining on the Super 8s playoff schedule and are essentially a lock to advance to the Kingstone Press Championship for 2018, keeping them on track to realize their three-year goal of promotion to rugby league’s highest class, the Betfred Super League. The coaches and managers associated with the Wolfpack have stellar credentials that outstrip what you might expect to find on a far-flung startup, making it all the more possible this new team boasts legitimate staying power.

‘ENJOY OUR PEOPLE’

When he’s not chilling out in a DIY ice bath, Moimoi’s warmth extends to every fan at Lamport.

A Wolfpack game, like the music that blasts around the stadium before the match, is a bit of a mashup. As Beyoncé lyrics play over AC/DC guitars on a sunny Saturday in July, people roll into Lamport, a west-end Toronto venue that also has markings for field hockey and soccer. Some walking through the gate are just looking for inexpensive entertainment on a sunny afternoon; others have more insight, understanding that league offers a free-flowing, 13-man version of the sport. Rugby union — the more traditional and familiar form of the game — is played with 15 per side and features more scrums.

None of that is news to Noble, who assumes the commentary duties for today’s broadcast, which is available in both Canada and the U.K. Injured



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Aussie halfback Blake Wallace is also wearing a headset to help tee up a contest between the 13-0 Pack and the 6-7 University of Gloucestershire All Golds, who are a bit short-staffed since a couple of their players couldn't get the time off from their day jobs to make the trip. After Wolfpack COO Joe Santos sings "God Save the Queen" and "O Canada", action at "The Den" begins. One of the first tackles is made by Irish international Bob Beswick, who doubles as the Wolfpack's strength and conditioning coach. It's a jarring reminder of the brutality at the heart of this sport. "Every tackle is like a car crash," says 37-year-old team president Eric Perez.

The force of that fact first hit Perez about seven years ago, when he was living in Birmingham, England, and working in advertising. A Toronto boy who'd grown up playing some high-school rugby, Perez found himself sucked into a rugby league game on TV. The quick pace and physicality immediately put him in mind of his home country's cherished frozen pastime. There was also an entrenched spirit of carrying on in the face of pain akin to what you'd see from a Saskatchewan boy continuing to play after he just took a puck in the teeth. "I was just like, 'Why has this sport never been to Canada?'" Perez recalls. "This is the most Canadian sport that's never been in Canada."

"It's a party. Everyone is in a great mood. Everything is reasonably priced. We're the people's team."

Despite having no money and zero rugby contacts, Perez believed he could be the person to change that. His first move was to contact the Rugby League International Foundation and indicate he wanted to form the Canadian Rugby League Association. Thanks to a go-for-it approach and the game's relatively small community, Perez was soon a fixture on the scene. "Basically, I was able to move to the top echelons of the sport within a couple years of first watching it on TV," he says.

With his shoulders rubbing against those of established decision-makers, Perez let his mouth go to work, telling anyone who would listen that rugby league was made for Canada. Part of his Toronto-specific pitch was that the city — relative to other enormous, international centres like London and New York — was actually an underserved sports market. "There's not enough teams for our population," he says.

With the Rugby Football League — the sport's governing body in the U.K. — asking roughly half a million dollars for admission to its leagues, Perez drummed up the funds, only to have a couple backers pull out with cold feet. But once he had the leverage of a binding agreement that stated the RFL would grant Toronto a team if he could come up with the money, support was easier to find. Eventually, an 11-person consortium was formed and the Wolfpack were officially in business under a couple of notable conditions. The first was that Toronto — regardless of how accomplished its roster was — would have to begin in the RFL's third tier, where clubs typically pay only a small stipend to players. The second was that the Pack would foot the travel and accommodation bill for any visiting team it played through League 1 and Championship competition. "We had to make it risk-free [for the RFL]," says Perez. "If it was costing the teams to come over, it's not risk-free."

A sponsorship deal with Air Transat has greatly softened the burden of travel expenses. And while the two sports aren't a complete apples-to-apples comparison, Perez says Hall of Famer Peter Forsberg — who's been on the management side of hockey since returning to Sweden — has cited the Wolfpack as an example of how trans-Atlantic competition can work, should the NHL ever seriously consider that route. At home, the Pack charge \$20 per ticket, understanding that the most important thing is exposing people to the bone-busting product. "It's a party," says Perez. "Everyone is in a great mood. Everything is reasonably priced. We're the people's team, so we have the people's prices."

THE PEOPLE'S TEAM

Through their first 20 games, the Pack have drawn more fans than they expected — roughly 7,000 per contest.

Throwing caution to the wind in pursuit of big dreams is not something Paul Rowley associates with his part of the world. The 42-year-old Wolfpack head coach grew up in Northern England, where the M-62 highway runs east-west from Liverpool to the North Sea, flanked by what he refers to as "pit and mill towns." Rugby league is a way of life there, often within some fairly narrow existences. "People in these pit towns, they get a nosebleed if they travel 10 miles away — they think they've gone a long journey," Rowley says.

Rowley's on-field skill at the hooker position made him a candidate for broader horizons. He spent a decade in the RFL's top division and represented England at the 1996 and 2000 Rugby League World Cups. His playing career both began and ended in his native Leigh with the Centurions, bookending stops with Halifax RLFC and the Huddersfield Giants. After hanging up his boots, Rowley eventually became head coach of the Centurions, and won Championship Coach of the Year honours in 2012.

But the good times did not last. "I'm a stubborn, strong man — call it what you will — but I'll never be bullied, financially or physically, and I didn't like the way [the Centurions] were doing things," he says. "I'm not one to take any rubbish. At the expense of myself, I walked away with nothing."

Rowley made that decision early in 2016, and he was still in the club parking lot after handing in his resignation letter when news of his departure broke on Twitter. His phone started blowing up and while sorting through the incoming messages, he found an email from Perez saying he was in the country and wanted to connect. About an hour later, Rowley got another note from Perez, who by now had caught wind of his situation. "In Eric's own particular way — without [repeating the] swear words — he said, 'Oh my God, what's gone on here?'" Rowley recalls. "That's how it all began. It was a bit of fate, really."

AUDACITY AND EXPERIENCE

Perez (left) dreamed up the Wolfpack while working in Birmingham. Rowley brought instant credibility to the team when he signed on to coach.

Starry as that beginning felt, Rowley came face-to-face with the realities of starting a club from scratch in a new country during a visit to Toronto a few months later. One of his first stops was to throw out the first pitch at a Blue Jays game. "I'm thinking, 'OK, this is a bit strange in itself,'" he says. "Came to Lamport, concrete jungle, thinking, 'All right, not sure it's the dream just yet.' Weather was rubbish and I didn't have a single player, single staff member. It was just me and Eric."

That changed when Noble got involved in the project through a connection he shared with Perez — Wolfpack team director Adam Fogerty. A former boxer and rugby league player, Fogerty is better known in North America for his role as Gorgeous George in the 2000 film *Snatch*. Noble, who has served as both captain and coach of the English national team, soon jumped in on the operation. The result was instant credibility for rugby league's newest squad. "When you got Paul Rowley [and] Brian Noble putting their names to the team, I was like, 'Yeah, this is legit now,'" says Wolfpack halfback Rhys Jacks, an Australian who's a Canada international thanks to the fact his grandfather was born here.

"This is the most Canadian sport that's never been in Canada."

Through the back half of 2016, the Wolfpack brass worked to put a roster together. Today, clubs on the wrong end of painfully one-sided scores might complain many of the players were wooed by dollars. Rowley flatly rejects that, saying he was turned down by some potential recruits because they could make more money at home with employment that has nothing to do with the sport. "Contrary to popular belief, this is not a bunch of lads who've been cherry picked from top clubs," he says. "That's what people like to think because they want to find a reason why they're not competing. There ain't a week-to-week, regular Super League player within this club — not one player. This is a bunch of waifs and strays that have all, like me, had troubles and tribulations."

Still, nobody is claiming anyone in a Wolfpack jersey is going to go hungry. Perez says top players draw six-figure salaries in Canadian dollars, with others coming in just below that mark. That may be unprecedented for League 1, but most of those athletes could have signed on with Championship clubs for a similar salary and — in the case of the many Englishmen — lived year-round in more familiar surroundings.

MAIN ATTRACTION

Rugby league is at its most enjoyable when Moimoi has a head of steam and the ball in his hands.

Toronto, though, could titillate with the opportunity to live in a part of the world that remains foreign for the vast majority of rugby league players. Beginning in March, the Pack played their first five regular-season games in England. In May, they made their home debut. When in Toronto — usually for two to four weeks at a time — the entire team lives at the same George Brown College residences that were used to house



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athletes during the 2015 Pan Am Games. The boys — many of whom signed multi-year contracts — have watched baseball over beers at Rogers Centre, caught soccer at BMO Field, visited the CN Tower and likely enjoyed their share of less structured fun, too. It's all part of being on the ground floor of something new that, a very short time ago, would have seemed completely implausible. "I'd dare to say pretty much 90 to 100 per cent of the people here could get better salaries elsewhere," says Noble. "The challenge and adventure has certainly attracted this group of people."

Long before his players could watch Toronto sports together, Rowley was tasked with finding a binding agent for a bunch of people who'd come together under a banner that didn't yet stand for anything. Last December, the Pack held their pre-season camp in Brighouse, West Yorkshire, and the rolling terrain in that part of England provided the perfect push for the players to find their collective voice. "I told them if they'd not made me a team song by the day we break up for Christmas, then I'm going to smash them to bits on the hills," Rowley says. "So, that day came, and we're standing there and there's the hill, and they sung their hearts out. I thought, 'All right, good effort.' And we sing it to this day."

NORTH FACES

Ngawati (left) is the only born-and-bred Canuck on the roster, but Jacks suits up for the Canadian national team.

Hunting down a little piece of family history proved easier than Jacks ever imagined. On Canada Day weekend, the 27-year-old set off with his partner — the Wolfpack helps facilitate visits for loved ones — in search of the downtown Toronto house his paternal granddad grew up in before moving to Australia around the age of 10. Jacks's father had sent him a picture of the place and an address. As it turned out, the spot was only a short walk from George Brown College. "It looked the exact same as the photo Dad had," Jacks says. "It was unreal walking around, soaking in the neighborhood [my grandfather] would have grown up in."

Noble has had no trouble striking a connection with his part-time home, either. A trip to the Niagara region with his son took him through unfamiliar places with names he's known all his life, like Grimsby and Lincoln. Noble grew up in Bradford, England, and says his family name is actually more common in Canada now than his part of the world. There's also a sense of familiarity he feels goes both ways. "The kind of bloodstock that created this joint understand what this game is about," Noble says.

Whether you're new to the action or immersed in it like the hardcore types who form a supporter's section in the north-east bleachers — including a man in a black-and-white kilt who looks like a Braveheart extra — rugby league might be easiest to appreciate when Moimoi is on the move. Early in the second half versus the All Golds, with Toronto already up 34-6, he's tossed the ball near mid-field. Catching it, Moimoi explodes from a light jog to full sprint, like a logging truck with the acceleration of a Porsche. It requires four All Golds to stop him and, moments later, when he's taken another pass from Jacks deep in enemy territory, the former Tonga and New Zealand international runs through Gloucestershire's Jack Mitchell for a try as if the defender was nothing more than a ribbon stretched across a finish line.

While plays like that always delight the home crowd — attendance has been even more robust than the team hoped for, usually landing around 7,000 people — one Wolfpack member drew an ovation simply for getting on the pitch. In the 55th minute, Victoria, B.C., native Quinn Ngawati made his League 1 debut. The 18-year-old, fresh off finishing his high-school exams a few weeks prior, is the only born-and-bred Canuck on the club. His mother played on the University of Victoria's first rugby union team for women and his dad, who played rugby league, is part Kiwi with Maori roots. Immediately after entering the game, the six-foot-four Ngawati got his nose dirty, confidently carrying the ball into a mob of All Golds. After the game, won 62-10 by Toronto, the youngster talked about the Pack's presence in the national sporting landscape. "Just to have that opportunity [where] there is a path that leads to you playing professional on your home soil, I think that's a massive draw for any young kid in Canada," he said.

ON FIRE

Rowley first united the team with a song, and the Pack still sing it after every win.

Despite the lopsided score, rather than resent a team that clearly belongs in another division, the All Golds seem to relish the opportunity to visit a

new country and get a different rugby league experience on someone else's dime. Thoroughly beaten — and more than lightly bruised in some cases — the All Golds are also smiling while taking a team photo. Behind them in the stands, a small band of supporters holds up a blue flag with their logo. "We've got painters, we've got students, we've got teachers — everyone is part-time on our team," says prop Joe McClean, himself a teacher working in sport development. "I can see from today and the massive crowd [that Toronto is] being run really well. Rugby league being exposed in a different country is only a good thing."

That's been the message from Perez, Noble and Rowley from Day 1. They want the Wolfpack to eventually become just one of a few successful rugby league teams rooted in North America. Thus far, the buff boys in white jerseys and black shorts are great ambassadors, no doubt winning more hearts and minds with each victory lap around the perimeter of the pitch. Noble says Moimoi will happily shake hands with every person in the stadium, while Jacks looks delighted to be nestling in for a selfie with a group of guys in full-body wolf costumes who've spent a good portion of the day in the popular beer gardens — which is precisely where you'll find imbibing members of both the All Golds and Wolfpack about 45 minutes after the final hooter.

"It's nothing like England, it's nothing like Australia," says Jacks. "But I think it's a good thing. It's sort of a fresh thing to play in front of all the music, people dancing, interacting with the crowd. I can't believe it, to be honest."

While a live band plays outside, singing inside the Wolfpack dressing room is delayed until everyone has returned from the pitch. Players waiting around for the song to start are in various stages of undress; captain Craig Hall is covered only by a couple tattoos and a pair of briefs with a Wolfpack logo featured prominently on the front. Finally, with everyone accounted for, their voices rise up and they belt out the chorus debuted for Rowley back in Brighouse: "Wolfpack's on fire, your defence is terrified!"

Surely, there's hit potential.

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Sportsnet.ca / Too early for Canucks to panic over Boeser, Juolevi

Iain MacIntyre

September 10, 2017, 10:08 PM

PENTICTON — The best two moments in Brock Boeser's two games here this weekend were when he didn't score, which tells you what kind of Young Stars tournament the Vancouver Canucks' uber-prospect is having.

It's not that Boeser has been poor. Far from it.

You can see the poise and confidence he has with the puck. And his talent around the net was obvious on shots he made that struck posts in games against prospects from the Winnipeg Jets and Calgary Flames, who dumped the Canucks 6-2 on Sunday afternoon.

But after scoring four goals in nine games in the National Hockey League last spring after he was fast-tracked to the Canucks from the University of North Dakota — output that has him mentioned as a potential Calder Trophy candidate this season — Boeser seemed capable of standing head-and-shoulders above his peers in this tournament.

He hasn't.

The same goes for teammate Olli Juolevi, a fifth-overall pick who was the first defenceman drafted in 2016, whose most notable moment Sunday was when East Coast League winger Brett Pollock turnstiled the Canuck on his way to a third-period goal for the Flames.

Calgary's top prospect in this tournament, highly-regarded college free-agent Spencer Foo, scored twice in his team's win.



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Edmonton Oilers' first-round pick Kailer Yamamoto stood out in the one game he has played here.

Second-rounder Jansen Harkins has been among the better Jet prospects in Penticton.

But neither Boeser nor Juolevi has been among, say, the top-five Canuck prospects so far.

Vancouver ends its tournament today against the Oilers prospects.

Now, it would be so West Coast if jittery Canuck fans start panicking about Boeser and Juolevi — one has a place on the NHL team to lose, the other is a candidate to claim one — due to quiet performances in a rookie tournament.

The Canucks' training camp doesn't even open until Tuesday.

But there is a lot at stake for Boeser and Juolevi in September, and it would be good for them to generate some momentum among their peers before moving up in class against NHLers.

"I said before the tournament that I want to come here and compete," Boeser, 20, told reporters Sunday after his second pointless game. "I think I'm bringing my compete. I think we're getting some chances, but obviously we can do a little better."

Both Boeser and Juolevi were emphatic that they are not looking beyond this tournament to bigger competition.

"No, not at all," Juolevi, 19, said. "This is where our training camp starts. This is the first thing for us. You've got to be ready every day, every practice, to be your best. I always give 100 per cent on the ice. Mistakes happen; that's normal. I just want to show that I do my best."

He looked far from his best against Pollock, who wasn't the only Flame to torch Juolevi one-on-one.

In his first season of professional hockey, Juolevi will need a brilliant training camp and pre-season to make the Canucks, who signed three free-agent defencemen over the summer.

Boeser, however, is a pre-camp favourite to make the Canucks after his impressive test-run alongside Bo Horvat and Sven Baertschi at the end of last season.

Yes, Canuck general manager Jim Benning added one-third of an NHL lineup during the off-season. But management understands that providing room for their kids to develop is critical, and having at least a couple on the NHL roster is proof to fans and everyone else that there is, in fact, a rebuild going on in Vancouver and the Canucks' player-development scheme is working.

"If I work my hardest and compete in the pre-season and earn a spot, I feel the management and staff will give it to me," Boeser said before the game. "That's what management has been saying: If guys come to camp and earn spots, they'll be on the team. That's the way I look at it."

"Obviously, it's a hard league to play in. Whether you're going from college to pro or junior to pro, it's a huge jump. But I think getting my feet wet last year will help me tremendously. After playing those nine games, I feel I can play in the NHL and if I make the Canucks, I can really help the team. I'm going to compete at training camp, every game, every practice, at the highest level and hopefully earn a spot."

It's clear to those spend time around the Canucks and Boeser that he has that "it" factor. The winger who amassed 94 points in 74 games and won an NCAA championship at North Dakota possesses the confident aura that elite players often exude. Canuck goalie prospect Thatcher Demko has it, too.

Having experienced illness and a degree of hardship in his family while growing up in Minnesota, Boeser has maturity and perspective that most people his age do not. He is equipped to handle whatever is coming.

"We know what his skill set is, and he has that 'it' factor," Canuck player-development director Ryan Johnson said. "But the way he's able to mentally approach the game, you just can't teach that to guys. It's going to carry him a long way."

"He has an incredible knack of handling high-pressure situations very well. Him stepping in last year and having the success that he did, it did not shock me one bit. It's not overconfidence. Some guys just have that ability to do it."

Now, Boeser just has to do it again.

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Sportsnet.ca / McDavid on difficulty of losing close friends Hall, Eberle to trades

Sonny Sachdeva

@sonny_sachdeva

September 10, 2017, 11:31 AM

The moment Connor McDavid first slipped on an Edmonton Oilers jersey, the franchise's history was forever altered.

And as the young phenom began plying his trade in the big leagues, raising his stock with each passing game, the trade chatter regarding star teammates Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle slowly grew. Eventually a move just seemed inevitable, with theories ranging from culture issues, the need for a defensive upgrade, or the fact that the Oilers were simply destined to become "Connor's team" sparking the discussion.

Those long-awaited deals came to be, of course, with Hall moving on to New Jersey and Eberle more recently getting flipped to the New York Islanders.

But even though it seemed an expected result to many outside the Oilers organization, there's no question those two moves were hard to stomach for those within the locker-room.

"It never gets easier," McDavid told Postmedia's Mike Zeisberger on Saturday. "Jordan's a great friend. We're really close. He did a lot for me coming in as a young guy, taking me around Edmonton and kind of taking care of me. It's never easy to lose a friend like Jordan or Taylor. It sucks."

"It just goes to show you that it is a business. But friendships do last. I talk to Taylor all the time, I was at Ebs' wedding ... Those are the types of bonds you get when you are on a team."

This isn't McDavid's first trade-market rodeo. He first endured the sting of hockey's financial side during his junior days with the OHL's Erie Otters.

"I learned about that at an even younger age than people know of," McDavid said, referring to a pair of trades that sent close friends Hayden Hodgson and Stephen Harper out of Erie and onto other OHL squads. "Two months into my second (OHL) season my roommate got traded. And for me, it was like: 'This is insane. ... You can't get close to anyone.' It was so hard for me. And then a week later, my other buddy got traded. ... It was kind of a rude awakening."

At least McDavid can take solace in the fact that his former mates seem to genuinely appreciate the time they spent alongside him, especially those who witnessed the beginning of his rise to NHL superstardom.

"It seems like a long time ago," Hall said of his time with McDavid. "Going out for dinner with Connor, he was so bright eyed and trying to find his place on the team. We all knew he was the face of the team the first day he stepped on the ice for training camp. Selfishly, it's kind of cool that I got to experience that with Connor because he's going to be one of the best players in the game. I was there for his first training camp and I was able to spend time with him away from the rink, which a lot of guys didn't get the chance to do. That's pretty cool for me."

"But a lot has happened since then. Connor's a Hart Trophy winner, I'm on a different team, Jordan's on a different team. A lot can happen in this game and it just goes to show you, you have to enjoy the present at any given time."

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Sportsnet.ca / Q&A: Canucks GM Jim Benning on busy summer, what comes next

Iain MacIntyre

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Sportsnet's Iain MacIntyre, sat down with general manager Jim Benning at the prospects tournament in Penticton, B.C., to talk about the Vancouver Canucks' busy summer and what might follow it.

SN: You built new coaching staffs in the NHL and AHL, added five free agents — one-quarter of a lineup — on July 1, negotiated all summer to get Bo Horvat re-signed this week, and found time to add Thomas Vanek. Did you actually spend any vacation time on your acreage outside Portland?

Benning: I ended up getting about three weeks out there. But I was on the phone all the time. There were players to sign. I have an office down there, so I worked from there.

SN: So you didn't ride the horses?

Benning: My wife and my kids ride the horses, but I don't do that.

SN: Too busy tracking social media to see what people are saying about you?

Benning: [Pause] No. I try to do the work that's right for the organization, but I'm not on top of everything people are saying about me.

SN: Yeah, me, neither. What did you set out to achieve this off-season?

Benning: We wanted to accomplish two things. One, we wanted to bring more skill into the team. We were the second-lowest scoring team in the league last year, so we wanted to upgrade the skill of the team. And second, we wanted to add depth to our group. We don't want to be 22 or 23 players deep (when choosing an NHL roster); we want to be 28, 29, 30 players deep.

As far as the skill content, we added Sam Gagner and Thomas Vanek. And our scouts really like (Alex) Burmistrov. They think he's an offensive player just coming into his own. And trying to add skill on the back end, we signed Michael Del Zotto. He's always been a guy who can move the puck up ice and is good on the power play. And we added Patrick Wiercioch back there to give us more depth.

SN: Your boss, hockey ops president Trevor Linden, finally used the R-word after last season and told us the team was rebuilding. How does adding all these experienced players, when you have kids trying to make the team, fit a rebuild?

Benning: This is the start of my fourth year. We've gotten to the point where we drafted well. Some of these players have now finished junior or finished college, and we've got good depth in our prospects pool. Young players like Brock Boeser and Jake Virtanen and Nikolay Goldobin are ready to compete for a spot on our team. But we don't have to rush them. If they're not ready to perform at the NHL level, we have enough depth that we can develop them properly (in the minors).

We also signed some undrafted free agents. We signed Griffen Molino and Zack MacEwen and think they can develop into NHL players. We traded for Jonathan Dahlen, who's another young player we're excited about. We signed Philip Holm, who's 25 years old and was playing on the Swedish national team.

SN: But is there still room on your NHL team for some of these kids, even with the older players you signed?

Benning: Sure, there's room. But they're going to have to earn spots on the team. If they come in and have good camps and are consistent every day, we'll make room for them. It's like with Troy Stecher last year. He came into camp and was good in camp, then was good in the exhibition schedule and we made room for him. We brought him up early in the season (from the AHL) and he played the rest of the year with us.

SN: And if kids earn spots on the Canucks, you're willing to send other players on one-way NHL contracts to the Utica Comets?

Benning: That's part of the decision we made to add depth this summer. We realize we could have some guys in Utica on one-way contracts, but that will just give us good depth if we have injuries at the NHL level.

SN: You were a 69-point team last season, although you lost your last eight games and basically collapsed after veterans Alexandre Burrows and Jannik Hansen were traded at the deadline. Your captain, Henrik Sedin, just said he thinks the Canucks can make the playoffs. Can you really improve by 25 points this season?

Benning: We've added players who give us more skill and more depth. Our young players are going to be another year older. (New coach) Travis Green is going to be fair but demanding and make sure players play to their potential. We want to be competitive, and if everything comes together... that's why we play the games — to compete for a playoff spot.

SN: But much of the criticism directed towards you the last couple of years was fuelled by unrealistic expectations — expectations that management was partly responsible for creating. Are you worried that simultaneous talk about the playoffs and rebuilding confuses people?

Benning: I don't think there's a mixed message. The fans, when they come to our games, they want the team to be competitive. But they also want to see us draft well and develop our players to be NHL players. That first year, I signed some guys and we had a good year. We had 101 points but went out in the first round of the playoffs. And since then, we've kind of had to take a step back and try to rebuild.

We've had a couple of tough seasons with injuries and didn't have the skill and depth (to overcome them). We've developed younger players like Bo Horvat and Sven Baertschi and Markus Granlund, Ben Hutton and Troy Stecher and Jacob Markstrom. We've moved towards rebuilding the team. We've tried to get younger. It's the growth of those young players we need to continue in order to get better.

SN: The depth, especially in the prospects pool, is remarkably better than it was when you inherited the team. But is it where you need it to be?

Benning: It takes time. When you draft a player, whether they go back to junior or back to college, it takes them a couple of years before they begin the pro process. Some guys make the jump (straight to the NHL) but most guys have to play a year or two in the American League. I thought we had an excellent draft last summer. Elias Pettersson is going to be an excellent player for us. But he's still a kid who weighs 165 pounds and is going to have to get physically stronger. We have to wait for that. It takes time, but I believe we're getting to the point where these guys are starting to play and are going to be real good players.

SN: How will Travis Green help you? On the surface, he seems pretty similar to the guy you fired, Willie Desjardins: demanding coach, with a background in junior and the minors and no NHL coaching experience.

Benning: I think one of Travis' strengths is day-to-day communication with the players. He has a good feel for the players and where they're at. If you've watched his teams through the years, they play hard and they play fast. He demands that they play a certain style of game. And we have the depth this year that if players aren't playing well, he can sit guys out and give other guys an opportunity to play. He's going to be demanding and firm with the players to get their best.

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Sportsnet.ca / Stars hope to bounce back with championship after lacklustre 2016-17

Sonny Sachdeva

@sonny_sachdeva

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Sept. 11, 2017

It's been a busy few months for general manager Jim Nill and the Dallas Stars brass, but when a club with top-tier talent misses the playoffs by a hefty 15 points, perhaps a flurry of change is expected.

But if Nill and the rest of the Stars front office have their way, next summer should bring a significantly different brand of hustle and bustle, as Dallas heads into the 2017-18 campaign expecting to claim its first Stanley Cup since 1999.

"We've been rebuilding for the better part of a decade. We're through with that," Stars president and CEO Jim Lites told SportsDay's Mike Heika on Saturday. "If you look at what Jim Nill has done, we're ready for this. The fact that he's added players like Tyler Seguin and Jason Spezza in previous years, the fact that he has drafted as well as he has, the fact that he did what he did this summer, we're ready to win now."

Dallas' recent slew of additions especially positions it as a potential dark-horse contender this season, as the Stars seemingly hit every off-season target they had in their sights. Improved goaltending? Check. Revamped defence? New head coach Ken Hitchcock should take care of that. Throw in a few key offensive additions just for good measure.

"We got (Ben) Bishop, and I was like, 'That's awesome. (He's) one of the best goalies you can get right now,'" said Seguin to ESPN's Emily Kaplan on Friday. "We went out and got (Marc) Methot and I was like, 'OK, we got the goalie and the D-man.' Then we got (Martin) Hanzal, and I'm like, 'Heck that's a good summer.'"

"I was ready to go and then I saw on Twitter that (Alexander) Radulov was following me on Instagram. There were rumours that he was coming to Dallas. So I called Jamie Benn and, sure enough, we got Radulov. That was the cherry on the cake. We got the feeling from the organization that, 'Hey we're kind of going for this.'"

It certainly seems that the rest of the Stars organization shares that sentiment, especially given that it has invested in a higher payroll this season than it has at any other time during Tom Gaglardi's tenure as owner, according to Heika.

"When you look at what we needed to do, fix the goaltending, improve the penalty kill, we were able to get the pieces to do that," Gaglardi said. "I think we had a great summer. You usually don't get all of the things you want, but I think we did this year. I think we were able to target key people, and we were able to get them."

"We have always talked about leaving cap space, but we changed that this year. We knew what we wanted."

Now with all of their desired additions in the fold, the Stars enter 2017-18 hoping for a championship amid a Western Conference growing increasingly tough to crack.

While many of the usual western powerhouses remain contenders, former basement dwellers in Edmonton and Calgary have continued their climb up the conference ladder, while the Nashville Predators look to build off their first ever Stanley Cup Final appearance.

Still, Nill believes his club has the tools to make waves this time around.

"As a GM, you're always juggling, but we feel we're in a very good place," Nill said. "We have players in their prime, and we need to take advantage of that."

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Sportsnet.ca / Gryba talks training with figure skating coach, Oilers' potential

Sonny Sachdeva

@sonny_sachdeva

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After hauling in the Art Ross Trophy, Hart Trophy, and Ted Lindsay Award in just his first full NHL campaign, Connor McDavid's place among the game's best is fairly well-established.

But according to teammate Eric Gryba, the young Edmonton Oilers captain has yet to truly unleash his full potential upon the hockey world.

"It's nothing short of remarkable," Gryba said of McDavid's skill during an appearance on NHL Tonight on Friday. "I personally think we've seen like 75 per cent of what Connor McDavid can actually do. It's freakish. In practice he's skating by me and I'm just handing him speeding tickets as he's going by."

"He's the real deal. Good leader, respectful, extremely hard-working, and deserving of everything he's gotten up till now."

Working alongside McDavid and the rest of Edmonton's crop of young talents is no small feat, according to Gryba. As the game trends more towards high-end speed and skill, the Oilers arguably sit at the forefront of that evolution, led by McDavid's absurdly quick feet.

"It's the best practice pool that you could possibly have," Gryba said. "When you're trying to play at that speed – which realistically no one really can – but trying to do that. At the end of the day at practice, he's constantly pushing guys to get better. And just having him around, and his game, makes everyone else better."

Count Gryba among those on the roster working hard to try to keep up with McDavid. The 6-foot-4, 225-pound rearguard focused specifically on improving his skating this summer, looking to prove he can hang with the Oilers' top guns this season.

"I skated a bunch this summer," Gryba said. "Actually me and a couple other pros in Saskatoon flew in a figure skating coach for a week a couple weeks ago and did a bunch of edge-work and stuff like that to prepare for camp. I've basically been skating a couple days a week since June. ... So I'm really taking pride in that, and obviously working on my skating as a bigger guy."

"You can never work on your skating and your footwork too much, so it was a point of emphasis for me this summer."

The Saskatoon native has worked tirelessly to carve out a regular spot on the Oilers blue line over the past two seasons. Originally brought to Edmonton via trade from the Ottawa Senators in 2015, the big-bodied defenceman went unsigned by general manager Peter Chiarelli after the 2015-16 campaign was through.

Gryba worked his way back into the mix by way of a professional tryout deal, however, eventually earning a one-year contract for 2016-17 and a subsequent two-year extension this summer.

The fact that the Oilers have transitioned from an on-the-cusp club to one of the Western Conference's best wasn't lost on him during that process.

"I had a couple of other options – other teams I could've went to," Gryba said. "I'm comfortable in Edmonton. I'm good with the staff, the players. This is the best locker-room I've ever been a part of."

"We're contenders now. Realistically, there's as good a chance as any to win the Cup in the next couple years with this team."

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Sportsnet.ca / 2017-18 NHL Team Preview: Columbus Blue Jackets

David Singh

@_DavidSingh

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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How does a team guard against regression after posting its best regular season in franchise history? Well, acquiring one of the league's top young offensive players is a start.

The Columbus Blue Jackets finished with 108 points last season before falling to the eventual Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins in the first round of the playoffs. Not long after, Columbus drastically altered its offence by acquiring forward Artemi Panarin in a trade that sent Brandon Saad to the Chicago Blackhawks.

The 411 on the Blue Jackets

Head coach: John Tortorella

GM: Jarmo Kekalainen

2016-17 record: 50-24-8

2016-17 result: Third place in Metropolitan, lost in first round of playoffs

Key departures: Brandon Saad, Scott Hartnell, Kyle Quincey, Sam Gagner, William Karlsson

Key acquisitions: Artemi Panarin, Tyler Motte, Jordan Schroeder

2017-18 cap: \$67,012,975 (\$7,987,025 cap space)

Panarin, whose 151 points over the past two seasons is tied for seventh in the NHL, automatically becomes one of the faces of the franchise and will be counted on to help propel the Blue Jackets to greater heights.

UP-AND-COMING PLAYER TO WATCH

This could be the season where 19-year-old Pierre-Luc Dubois makes his Blue Jackets debut. The big left-winger was selected third overall in the 2016 NHL Draft — behind Auston Matthews and Patrik Laine — and is the No. 1 prospect in the organization.

Dubois has played in the QMJHL the past three campaigns, totalling 73 goals and 199 points over 164 games.

Season	Team	League	Games	Goals	Assists	Points
2014-15	Cape Breton Screaming Eagles	QMJHL	54	35	45	10
2015-16	Cape Breton Screaming Eagles	QMJHL	62	57	99	42
2016-17	Cape Breton Screaming Eagles	QMJHL	20	12	18	6
2016-17	Blainville-Boisbriand Armada	QMJHL	28	22	37	15

He figures to get a shot at making the big club during what will be his second NHL training camp.

"Last year, I wanted to prove I can play the 200-foot game a little too much, played too safe," Dubois told Dhiren Mahiban of IIHF.com earlier this summer. "Whereas this year I want to go there and have fun, play my game, play how I usually play."

WHAT A SUCCESSFUL 2017-18 WOULD LOOK LIKE

A successful campaign would start with advancing past the first-round of the post-season. How do the Blue Jackets get there? For one, reigning Vezina winner Sergei Bobrovsky will need to be nearly as good as he was last season. The soon-to-be 29-year-old enjoyed the best year of his career and was the main reason why Columbus allowed the second-fewest goals in the league. Bobrovsky's playoff performances were less than stellar; he'll need to expunge those memories next spring.

The Blue Jackets will also need their young core to continue arcing upward. Defenceman Zach Werenski scored 47 points and was a Calder Trophy finalist, while Alexander Wennberg, Cam Atkinson, Seth Jones and Josh Anderson each had what can be considered breakout campaigns.

BIGGEST REMAINING QUESTION

Panarin's first two seasons in the league were more than impressive, but the caveat is that he was playing alongside Patrick Kane. It's not exactly clear who Panarin will play with this season, but it won't be one of the NHL's 100 Greatest Players, that's for sure.

The 25-year-old Panarin will need to prove himself in his new home, but has a believer in head coach John Tortorella. "He likes scoring goals and I want to let him go," said the Blue Jackets bench boss after the trade was announced in June. "I don't want to get in his way. I want him to bring that type of play to us. We made a conscious decision to change our style last year to open it up and get some offence. We want to try to bring it to another level so you need to add those type of players.

"We're very fortunate to get him."

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TSN.CA / Dermott's stock rising ahead of Leafs training camp

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — Travis Dermott has a way of making himself seen on the ice.

Whether he's blasting through the neutral zone with the puck on his stick, or animatedly directing traffic in the defensive zone, Dermott frequently demands to be noticed. And his stock as one of the Maple Leafs' best defensive prospects has never been higher than it is with just days to go before training camp.

But before he makes the pilgrimage to Niagara Falls with the rest of the club, Dermott skated in his first rookie tournament game Sunday afternoon, a 4-3 shootout loss to the Ottawa Senators. Dermott missed the Leafs' opener on Friday due to illness but jumped back in with some impressive early shifts, shaking off the rust before more important tests ahead.

"I came out here with the mindset of trying to get my legs back underneath me and get the feel of the game back," Dermott said post-game. "Leading into camp, I just wanted to get the first game out of the way, [try] to make my good plays and make some mistakes. I knew I was going to make some and I did. I can work on some stuff but there was also some stuff that I was happy with."

The Leafs are seemingly pretty pleased with him too. Joining the Toronto Marlies for his first professional campaign last year, Dermott had a strong season, posting five goals and 19 assists in 59 games. Back in May, Leafs general manager Lou Lamoriello hinted in a conference call with media that there was "one [Toronto Marlies defenceman] in particular" they were eyeing to make a move to the NHL. Connecting the dots to Dermott is hardly reaching; he was among the Marlies best players despite an injury in the fall that held him out for weeks.

Asked about the comment, Dermott said last week he didn't read anything into what Lamoriello said, but was determined to prove he could be that guy.

"I think any player here is going to say they want to make the Leafs, that's everyone's goal," Dermott explained Sunday. "I'm going to go out there and play my hardest and try to get a spot but nothing is for sure in this organization or the whole league so we'll see what happens."

If his rookie tournament performance was any indication, the Newmarket native's summer spent in the Leafs' facilities is already paying off. Dermott is consistently reliable in the defensive zone, makes good decisions with the puck and thinks the game as quickly as he moves up and down the ice. While he stands at 5-foot-11, 207 pounds, Dermott doesn't play anything close to small. Teammates have likened him in the past to a "bowling ball" and he proves it with an almost fearless physical edge in his game.

"He really learned to use the skill sets that he has," said head coach Sheldon Keefe. "He kills a lot of plays early and he's very evasive. As he learned how to use his body and learned to use the limited time and space that you have at the pro level, he learned to make plays through that."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The crispness of Dermott's overall game stands out among his peers; now Dermott needs to elevate it even further to reach the next level.

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"Some of his stick positioning and defending, those kinds of things when he hasn't closed the space is one area," Keefe said of Dermott's next steps. "But that doesn't present itself very often because he is tight, he closes the gap real quick, so that's a real positive for him. He's got a bright future ahead, he's going to continue to work and I know he's excited to get going in camp."

Dermott was decidedly not thrilled with himself when the Marlies' season ended in May with a Game 7 playoff loss to the Syracuse Crunch. At the time, Dermott said if he continued to play like he did over that series (one assist, minus-one), he wouldn't be ready for the NHL come fall. Whatever negative feelings he harboured then are seemingly a thing of the past, with all attention turned to what's coming next.

"I think it's just confidence," Dermott said of the difference in him from last year. "Getting that AHL year under my belt, getting confident in my play and knowing what I can do instead of being the shy little rookie [and just] reacting to how other guys are playing. Hopefully I can take that confidence into camp this year and go forward."

The Leafs finished the rookie tournament 0-2 (they fell 5-2 to the Montreal Canadiens on Friday), but there were a few players, along with Dermott, who still made their mark in the losing efforts.

Mason Marchment: The son of former NHL defenceman Bryan Marchment definitely has an element of his father's physicality in his game, as evidenced by a few bone-rattling hits in this tournament, but his growing offensive skill set is emerging more and more. The 6-foot-4, 200 pound winger has always had a nose for getting to the net, and set up a few quality scoring chances – and Trevor Moore's goal on Sunday – from his perch in front of the crease. There's room for improvement in his skating and explosiveness, but few players stood out for Toronto over the course of the tournament as much as Marchment. The 22-year-old is currently signed to an AHL contract.

Projection for next season: Marlies

Carl Grundstrom: Billed as the next Leo Komarov, Grundstrom is a blossoming forward in his own right. He scored just once in the tournament, but his hard shot is lethal - and impressively accurate. Grundstrom never shies away from asserting himself in front of the net, like he did muscling past the Ottawa defence Sunday and backhanding a nice shot on goaltender Kevin Baille that he barely swatted away. The 19-year-old doesn't have a lot of experience taking faceoffs but can (and did in the tournament), adding to his value as a versatile winger able to be deployed in all situations (just like Komarov).

Projection for next season: As a second round draft pick out of the Swedish Hockey League, Grundstrom either has to make the Leafs this season or return to the SHL; the AHL is not an option. Given the Leafs organizational depth on the wing already, a return to Sweden seems most likely.

Martins Dzierkals: A standout at last season's rookie tournament, Dzierkals picked up where he left off with another strong showing. He was the Leafs' leading scorer, with two goals in two games, and along with Grundstrom was their most consistent offensive threat. Dzierkals is relentless when it comes to sniffing out pucks and doesn't quit on a play, attributes that made him more than a point-per-game player in junior. Now 20 and having exhausted his eligibility in the CHL, Dzierkals will have to prove his size (5-foot-10, 172 pounds) won't hold him back as a next season – he signed a one-year AHL contract in August.

Projection for next season: Marlies

Timothy Liljegren: Unquestionably the most improved player for Toronto over the course of two games, Liljegren put a difficult debut on Friday behind him and settled down on the team's top defence pairing Sunday with Dermott. Playing alongside Dermott suited Liljegren, and he was much calmer in his decision-making with the puck. That ability he has to quarterback the power play and find the open seams over both games was noticeable; on Sunday he showed great patience at the point that ultimately led to Moore's goal. Liljegren's confidence seemed to go up as Sunday's game wore on and that's when his elite speed and puck-moving abilities shone through.

Projection for next season: Marlies