



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 11, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

After offer-sheet drama, Canes star Sebastian Aho ready to work

By Chip Alexander

Sebastian Aho scrimmaged Tuesday with his Carolina Hurricanes teammates at Raleigh Center Ice, did some extra skating and then spent time taking shots before finishing up the informal workout.

Had things gone differently on July 1, had the Montreal Canadiens not made an offer sheet for Aho, had Aho not signed it, the Canes center might not have been at RCI. Aho might still be in Finland, waiting for a new contract extension to be hammered out with management.

Like other restricted free-agent forward in the NHL — Toronto's Mitch Marner and Winnipeg's Patrik Laine, to name two — Aho might be still be unsigned, still sitting out, wondering when he'd be joining his teammates.

"You never know but watching those other guys, there's a pretty good chance," Aho said in an N&O interview on Tuesday.

But the offer sheet was tendered by Montreal, the Canes quickly matched it and that was that. Aho was signed for the next five years (for \$42.2 million). When preseason training camp begins Thursday with physical testing, then on the ice Friday, the Canes' leading scorer (83 points) from last season will be there.

"That was a pretty big reason why I did it," Aho said. "I wanted to start the season on time and it's pretty good to be here right now with the guys. You don't have to stress or anything. You're here."

The Canadiens' offer sheet on July 1, when NHL free agency began, was the first in the NHL since 2013 and widely discussed around the league, even though Aho said he missed most of the "drama" of the day.

"It was probably the weirdest day of my life," Aho said. "It all happened pretty fast. Obviously there's a big time difference, too. It was evening already (in Finland) when I had to make a pretty big decision. Actually that was a good thing. I was sleeping when a lot happened. I went to bed and the next day was a new day and Carolina matched."

Canes owner Tom Dundon appeared almost offended that a team would make such an offer — five years, with an average payout of \$8.454 million per year.

That it was front-loaded with bonuses, with \$21 million to be paid Aho in the first 12 months, caused Dundon no hesitation or consternation. He is a billionaire owner, with the financial wherewithal to match any offer.

Dundon on July 2 said the Canes would match the offer sheet, although the official notice to the league was not sent until July 7. Dundon referred to the ploy as a "waste of time" on the Canadiens' part, even as Montreal general manager Marc Bergevin and Aho's agent, Gerry Johansson, talked publicly of Aho's apparent willingness to join the Canadiens and speculated that Dundon and the Canes might balk on making the financial commitment.

"I didn't read any of that stuff," Aho said. "I had no clue what was going on in the media."

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That Johansson made his comments to Marc Antoine Godin of The Athletic after the offer sheet was tendered made little sense. The terms of the contract were set once Aho signed the offer sheet. If anything, Johansson's comments could have poisoned the water a bit for Aho with some Canes fans. Does Aho really want to play for the Canadiens?

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Canes general manager Don Waddell said on July 1 and afterward that he believed Aho only wanted to be with the Canes, that he had no intention of leaving regardless of what his agent said.

"I don't take his comments with any grain of salt at all. I take Sebastian's comments," Waddell said in a recent interview. "I trust players, I don't trust the agent. Sebastian has made it very clear this is where he wanted to be."

Of the offer sheet, Waddell said, "It was sold to him as a way to get a contract done one way or another."



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"We knew he was going to be a part of our group," Brind'Amour said last week at the Canes media day. "It was just a matter of how much we'd have to pay him."

Canes center Jordan Staal said Aho texted him a few times this summer. The message, Staal said, was that Aho was "happy to be part of this group and what we've accomplished so far and obviously trying to bring another (Stanley) Cup here."

Added Staal: "I think in general everything worked out the way everyone wanted it to, for the most part. Maybe the Canes probably wanted to have had him for a few more years but beyond that I think the numbers probably weren't far off. It's done and it's over with and he's focused and he's ready to go. I

think that's a big thing for our team and obviously one of our best players."

Aho, used at center by Brind'Amour, had a career-high 30 goals and 83 points in 82 games last season, and was named an NHL All-Star, as Carolina surged into the Stanley Cup playoffs and reached the Eastern Conference finals. Conceding he was ailing a bit in the playoffs without disclosing the injury, Aho had five goals and seven assists in the 15 games.

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Aho said he worked even harder this summer than in past years in conditioning, beginning his skating in June rather than July, determined to make his fourth NHL season better than the first three.

"It's really nice to know I will be here for a long time and I really like where this team and this organization is going," Aho said. "I mean we had a great year last year but I think that's just us setting the bar a little bit higher. We want to be a really good team right from the jump and go from there."



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THE ATHLETIC

Is Justin Faulk the latest moving piece in a whirlwind summer for the Hurricanes?

By Sara Civian

Perpetual trade bait Justin Faulk is once again popping up in rumors as his contract year is about to begin, and this is possibly the furthest along talks have ever been.

But no, a trade that would send the offense-oriented defenseman out of Raleigh for the first time in his eight-season career is still not imminent.

Timeline of events

- A league source told *The Athletic* that after extension talks did not go as well as advertised between Faulk's camp and the Hurricanes around the draft, the Canes started hearing teams out for potential deals. At the time, as I wrote that day, it was also clear there would be a defenseman imminently on the move.
- The Canes traded Calvin de Haan to the Blackhawks a few days later. A handful of sources indicated a Faulk deal was still very much on the table.
- Carolina signed college UFA Chase Priskie. While there's certainly no expectation that he'll make the team out of camp or become a mainstay this season, there was reassurance that he'd get a fair shot and that the Canes are high on him.
- The Hurricanes signed Jake Gardiner to a four-year, \$4.05 million AAV deal. Whew. Our Pierre LeBrun also weighed in, saying Faulk may be the odd one out after the Gardiner signing.
- It's been my understanding as of last Friday that the Hurricanes have had a deal for Faulk in place to a team on his partial No-Trade list, meaning he'd have to waive the clause. The ever-reliable Elliotte Friedman reported Monday that the team is Anaheim, though he described the situation as intense discussion, not exactly a done deal.
- The News & Observer's Luke DeCock first tossed out the idea of Ondrej Kase as a potential return. Now, the potential trade is not imminent — Faulk would have to accept, and he is seeking an extension among other

reasonable holdups. There has also been increased interest for Faulk elsewhere as this has been floating around the league, and there is still no extension deal that Faulk has accepted, so the Canes might field something else. But as of Tuesday, Kase is believed to be part of this particular deal.

Rapid-fire thoughts

- Faulk is a lot of things around here: a lightning rod of takes, sometimes a scapegoat, sometimes deserving of criticism, a constant representative of a darker time. But bottom line, he endured the dark days right beside all of you, and I'm sure they were just as painful for him. Then, when he finally made the playoffs for the first time in his eight-season career, he *showed up*. He seemed to play with the physicality of someone who regained a love for his job. When the Canes clinched, I asked him what the biggest difference was with the 2018-19 team. "It's been kind of a fun atmosphere the whole year," he said. "Everyone really enjoys coming to the rink every day, and when you have that it makes it easy to work. That's the biggest thing. There weren't really any of those days this year where you're rolling over in bed saying, 'Darn, I gotta go to the rink again.' It's been fun, and everyone's enjoyed it. I know we get to do this for a living and we all understand that but it gets tough once in a while when things aren't going well. We're all enjoying it right now." One simply cannot blame Faulk for not instantaneously giving that up once he finally has it. And of course, he's not going to do that without an extension in place.
- The Hurricanes aren't exactly tossing him around like he's some scrub, either. They still very much like him as a player and a person. You just look at the business side of things, and he's the player in a contract year in a tight defensive logjam. His ask is most likely more than the Canes can afford with all their spending lately.
- Colleague Eric Stephens touched on the deal with Kase from the Ducks perspective of things: "Kase is 23 and a legitimate offensive talent.



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- In addition to the above, a league source speculated that to the Ducks, the benefit of fulfilling a serious roster hole outweighs the risk of a player who has sustained a few serious injuries at this point.



Prospects Showcase Preview: Hurricanes vs. Predators

Canes cap three-game Showcase against undefeated hosts

by Michael Smith

NASHVILLE - The Carolina Hurricanes square off with the host Nashville Predators in the final game of the 2019 NHL Prospects Showcase.

The Hurricanes are coming off a 7-4 win against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Sunday, while the Predators have won their first two games of the Showcase.

"I thought our compete was good. I thought our desperation was better," head coach Ryan Warsofsky said after the second game. "We'll look to get better again. Every time we're in that room or on the ice, we have a chance to get better."

The Hurricanes' lineup for Tuesday's 2 p.m. ET puck drop largely resembles what they iced in the first two games. The biggest adjustment is on the back-end,

as Jake Bean, a late roster addition and also the team's best player in the Showcase, flew back to Raleigh on Saturday. (Don't worry, he's not injured.)

In Bean's absence, Jesper Sellgren assumes top-pairing duties alongside invite Kaleb Bulych. Chase Priskie pairs with invite Noel Hoefenmayer. Jeremy Helvig will make his second start in net.

Hurricanes Lineup

Kuokkanen-Luostarinen-Murray
Henman-Suzuki-Pritchard
Rees-Topping-Mattson
Hutcheson-Kielly-Crossman

Sellgren-Bulych
Hoefenmayer-Priskie
Pelletier-Maier

Helvig
Harvey



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Prospects Showcase Recap: Canes Show Resiliency in Finale

Kuokkanen, Luostarinen each record a goal and an assist

by Michael Smith

NASHVILLE - The Carolina Hurricanes fought back from a four-goal deficit to draw within a goal of tying the game in the third period but fell 6-3 to the Nashville Predators in the 2019 NHL Prospects Showcase finale.

Finnish forwards Janne Kuokkanen and Eetu Luostarinen each recorded a goal and an assist, and first-round pick Ryan Suzuki netted his third goal of the Showcase.

Here are five takeaways from Tuesday afternoon's match.

1. A Rough Start

The Hurricanes got buried in a quick 4-0 hole in the first period, and if not for Jeremy Helvig, it could have easily been a wider deficit. Helvig came up with a pair of quality stops early when it was scoreless, turning away a shorthanded breakaway chance and making a diving stop on another grade-A scoring opportunity.

"I thought he played really well today," Warsofsky said of Helvig, who was originally supposed to play half the game but remained in net in what was a much-improved second period for the Hurricanes.

2. Fighting Back

The Hurricanes charged back in the second period, netting a pair of goals to slice their deficit in half.

Kuokkanen found Luostarinen in front on the power play, and Luostarinen tapped in his own rebound to get the Canes on the board. With just six seconds left in the period, Kuokkanen netted a goal of his own to make it a 4-2 score.

"That was a big goal," Warsofsky said. "Those guys pushed."

Before the first game, Warsofsky said he hoped the two Finns would develop a bit of chemistry, and they certainly seemed to have found it.

"A couple of Finn guys," Luostarinen smiled. "We can talk in our own language. That makes it easier. It helps on the ice."

3. A Chance to Tie

Suzuki whacked in an elevated centering feed in the third period to bring the Hurricanes within a goal. The Canes then had a two-man advantage for 62 seconds, but, outside of a couple of Chase Priskie

one-timers from the right circle, they couldn't connect. Nashville reestablished their two-goal lead shortly after and then found the empty net to preserve their unblemished record in this year's Showcase.

"We gave ourselves a chance to tie the game up," Warsofksy said. "I thought our guys responded in the second and third, which is impressive for a young group."

4. Improving

The goal of this weekend was multi-fold. The Showcase, for one, set a competitive stage for an introduction to Hurricanes hockey and what it takes to play at the next level.

"[They learned] what it takes to play for the Carolina Hurricanes, the mindset and philosophy we have," Warsofsky said.

It also provided another opportunity for each of the players, prospects and invites alike, to improve their games.

"You hope that, individually, they get better. Skill development, whether in the video room or on the ice, they're learning. That's the most important thing," Warsofksy said. "I thought we got better each and every game. There were some inconsistencies in our game, but that comes with the age of some of these kids. They're just learning this game and the pro hockey style. It was impressive to see."

5. Off to Raleigh

It's back to Raleigh now for Hurricanes training camp, which first gets on ice on Friday morning.

The hope is that a number of these players can use their performances in this Showcase as a confidence springboard heading into camp.

"I'm looking forward to it," Luostarinen said. "I haven't been there yet, so big expectations."

"They can now have some confidence in how they need to play," Warsofsky said.

2019 NHL Prospects Showcase

Saturday, Sept. 7 2 p.m. Capitals 10, Hurricanes 3

Sunday, Sept. 8 5 p.m. Hurricanes 7, Lightning 4

Tuesday, Sept. 10 2 p.m. Predators 6, Hurricanes 3



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LeBrun: Trade interest in Faulk growing

With a trade to send Justin Faulk to the Anaheim Ducks stalled on a contract extension, TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun reports other teams have "upped their trade interest" in the Carolina Hurricanes defenceman.

Reports emerged Monday that the Hurricanes and Ducks were working towards a deal, but that Faulk would only waive his partial no-trade clause if he worked out an extension with Anaheim first.

LeBrun notes that he believes there are teams not listed on Faulk's 15-team no-trade list that have since phoned the Hurricanes.

Faulk skated with Hurricanes teammates on Tuesday, but declined to comment on trade speculation, according to Chip Alexander of The News and Observer.

The 27-year-old scored 11 goals and posted 35 points in 82 games last season and is entering the final year of his current contract. He carries a \$4.83 million cap hit for this season and is currently scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent next July.

Luke DeCock of The News and Observer reported Monday that the Hurricanes have had "longstanding interest" in Ducks winger and added he would be surprised if 23-year-old isn't involved in a deal between the two sides.

The Hurricanes signed defenceman Jake Gardiner to a four-year, \$16.2 million contract last week, leading to speculation surrounding Faulk's future with the team.

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SportScan

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

1107758 Carolina Hurricanes

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BY CHIP ALEXANDER SEPTEMBER 10, 2019 03:33 PM

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Like other restricted free-agent forward in the NHL — Toronto's Mitch Marner and Winnipeg's Patrik Laine, to name two — Aho might be still be unsigned, still sitting out, wondering when he'd be joining his teammates.

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But the offer sheet was tendered by Montreal, the Canes quickly matched it and that was that. Aho was signed for the next five years (for \$42.2 million). When preseason training camp begins Thursday with physical testing, then on the ice Friday, the Canes' leading scorer (83 points) from last season will be there.

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Carolina Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho (20) waits for a face-off during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the Detroit Red Wings, Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018, in Raleigh Karl B DeBlaker AP

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News Observer LOADED: 09.11.2019

1107759 Carolina Hurricanes

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Colleague Eric Stephens touched on the deal with Kase from the Ducks perspective of things:

“Kase is 23 and a legitimate offensive talent. He has scored 31 goals over 96 games in the past two seasons. He has the best possession numbers among Ducks forwards and has the potential to be a 30-goal weapon. But he has also had trouble staying healthy, with multiple concussions in his history and a season-ending shoulder surgery in January from which he’s had to recover.”

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The Athletic LOADED: 09.11.2019

1107760 Carolina Hurricanes

Could Justin Faulk be the answer to the Ducks' persistent blue-line woes?

By Eric Stephens Sep 9, 2019

It cannot be said Bob Murray isn't trying to fortify his thin defense corps, but at what cost?

Had the Ducks' longtime general manager secured the commitment of Kevin Shattenkirk, that cost would have only been monetary and affordable after the New York Rangers bought out the veteran. Shattenkirk had a better free-agent offer from Murray but chose Tampa Bay, which set franchise records with 62 wins and 128 points and won the Presidents' Trophy last season and is still very much a Stanley Cup contender despite its stunning first-round knockout.

At 30, with his days as a power play specialist and consistent point producer from the blue line probably behind him, Shattenkirk is a player with more questions now beyond being shaky defensively. But he is a right-handed shot, and his skill set would have filled a need for the Ducks. Two years and maybe \$2.5 million per year is a commitment, but not an exorbitant one.

Murray's quest did not end there. It continues. It is an implied admission Hampus Lindholm, Cam Fowler, Josh Manson and the remainder of a defense corps occupied by the unproven, unknown and underwhelming is not enough if there are designs on putting together a playoff-worthy roster.

Hello, Justin Faulk.

Right shot? Check.

Power play ace? Check.

Point producer? Check.

Shutdown defender? Er, um, yeah, let's skip that one.

That sounds a bit like Shattenkirk, doesn't it? Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman first reported Monday that Anaheim and Carolina have had "ongoing discussions" regarding Faulk, who has spent his eight-year career with the Hurricanes. Sources confirmed Faulk does not have the Ducks among the 15 teams he would be willing to accept a trade to, meaning he'd have to waive that clause to facilitate a deal.

Negotiating a contract extension could be the key toward sealing a trade. Faulk is entering the last of a six-year, \$29 million deal he signed with Carolina in 2014. It is likely the Minnesota native will want to have one in place before considering a move to Southern California. The Ducks might also be open to making a trade and working on an extension later if they can't come to an agreement with Faulk and his camp right now.

The Ducks are believed to have had interest in Faulk for a while, especially after his future with the Hurricanes progressively got cloudier. Carolina acquired Dougie Hamilton, a skilled right-shot defenseman with offensive leanings, in a blockbuster trade with Calgary at last year's draft. And while they moved Calvin de Haan just one season after signing him as a free agent, the Hurricanes convinced right-shot college free agent Chase Priskie

to sign with them after Priskie didn't agree to terms with Washington. Does he sign with them if he knew Faulk would still be there blocking his path? Who knows, but one fewer defender makes the route to the NHL a bit clearer.

The surest sign Faulk would be on the move happened Friday when Carolina signed former Toronto defenseman Jake Gardiner to a pricey four-year contract. With Brett Pesce also signed to a long-term deal and scant salary-cap space, it behooves the Hurricanes, who made a run to the Eastern Conference final and are poised to enter a period of playoff contention, to move Faulk's salary.

Faulk's \$6 million expenditure is higher than his \$4.83 million cap hit. The Ducks can make a deal work. According to Cap Friendly, they've got about \$8.5 million of cap room, and that's not counting the ability to stash away Ryan Kesler's \$6.875 million cap hit on long-term injured reserve.

Is it the wisest move to make? That's a far different question.

To start, the mere acquisition of Faulk will be much more of a substantial cost than what the outlay for Shattenkirk would have been. And that's not to say it will happen. There might be trade talks, but it doesn't mean one will occur. Still, let's look at the price Anaheim might have to pay.

If a deal is contingent upon a contract extension, Faulk could see his next contract in the range of \$6 million or above in average annual value. He has had 10 or more goals in four of his last five seasons, and his 85 goals since entering the league in 2011-12 ranks ninth among defensemen in that span. The eight who have more are big names: Brent Burns, Shea Weber, Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Erik Karlsson, Dustin Byfuglien, Mark Giordano, Roman Josi and Victor Hedman.

Moreover, Faulk's 40 power play goals over those eight seasons rank fourth behind Weber, Ekman-Larsson and Burns. His cannon of a shot produced a career-best 12 goals in 2015-16 and his six last season were four more than what the entire Anaheim defense produced.

Faulk is the better player than Shattenkirk at this point, so the higher financial cost is understandable. He is also 27. If he was 30 or 31, the Ducks likely aren't trying to pull off a deal. What will be enough to entice him to waive his no-trade clause? Can Murray get him in under the \$6.5 million AAV that Fowler now makes? (Lindholm will eventually surge past Faulk and Fowler when it's time to start talking his extension two years from now.)

Then there are the assets Carolina will want. The Hurricanes are in a cap crunch, and moving Faulk might be a formality at this point, but it's a bet they're not looking to deal him for pennies on the dollar. They're going to want something of quality and the ask could be higher if Faulk is good with sticking around in Anaheim for some time.

Raleigh News & Observer columnist Luke DeCock tweeted the Canes have long had an interest in Ducks winger Ondrej Kase. If Kase is indeed a return piece, it is guaranteed to not sit well with a vocal segment of the fan base.

Kase is 23 and a legitimate offensive talent. He has scored 31 goals over 96 games in the past two seasons. He has the best possession numbers among Ducks forwards and has the potential to be a 30-goal weapon. But he has also had trouble staying healthy, with multiple concussions in his history and a season-ending shoulder surgery in January from which he's had to recover.



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Those factors, and the belief Troy Terry (and perhaps Daniel Sprong) can make up for Kase's goal-scoring, could be what leads Murray to feel as if he can withstand the loss of a talented forward to fix a critical need on the blue line. Manson is the only right-handed shot who has been a regular. Murray signed Jani Hakkanpää, but he has yet to play his first NHL game.

Faulk would give the Ducks a solid foursome leading the defense for the coming seasons and ease the pressure on Brendan Guhle and Jacob Larsson trying to fill a big role. It would slot Michael Del Zotto and Korbinian Holzer as what they generally are now: serviceable part-timers.

Would a Faulk trade make the Ducks a playoff team? It's still questionable with a slight lean toward doubtful. Would it make them appreciably better? Maybe not appreciably, though John Gibson and Ryan Getzlaf wouldn't mind having another proven veteran who can chew 22 minutes a night and get booming point shots through to the net. Over the last five years, Faulk has averaged 427 shot attempts and 215 on net. Fowler is the only Ducks defender who has been remotely close to those two numbers in one season.

With the attempts to bring in Shattenkirk and to acquire Faulk, Murray is trying to fix a problem that has developed through challenging asset management that hasn't been error-free. The Ducks have not had the superstar No. 1 defenseman their SoCal rivals have (in Drew Doughty), but their defensive depth was once enviable. That's no longer the case.

Trading Shea Theodore was a casualty of the Vegas expansion draft, with the need to shed the salary of an injured Clayton Stoner (a costly free-agent mistake) to keep the Golden Knights from taking Manson or Sami Vatanen. Trading Vatanen for center Adam Henrique has been a wash, with Anaheim and New Jersey desperately filling needs at those positions. Trading Brandon Montour in February was a risk, though the Ducks are high on Guhle, who is younger and cheaper.

(There is also the inability to protect Manson or Vatanen because of Kevin Bieksa and his full no-movement clause, but let's not reopen an old wound.)

It is a predicament, but Murray has been trying to fix it. Losing someone like Kase would sting, and maybe the Ducks can make the trade without him. There is the fear the ebullient and energetic Czech right wing could play a full season and ring up 25-to-30-goal seasons for a long time. Sending him to the Eastern Conference would at least sharply lessen the opportunities of him hurting them in the future.

Ultimately, it could all be up to Faulk. He can seek a trade to one of his preferred destinations instead, and the Ducks could lose out again in their pursuit of the almighty right-shot defenseman. It could be a trade that works or one that backfires. It could not happen at all and maybe it can go down as one of the best trades to never be made.

It can be any of the above.

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The Athletic / In Moscow, Evgeni Malkin opens up about his lost season, loneliness and NHL future

By Rob Rossi 197

MOSCOW — Though it is only 3 miles southeast of the Kremlin, Morozovo Arena can be hard to find. Ringed by traffic-filled main roads, it's nestled into a nondescript, mostly industrial area near the meandering Moscow River. Its windowless exterior is stark save for 20-foot-high fabric murals of hockey players and figure skaters near the main entrance.

Inside, the building is more familiar. Twin rinks dominate the space. At a modest cafe, teenagers serve hot tea to visitors watching adults and kids of all ages skim across the ice. Twin steel doors lead to a corridor, which leads to dressing rooms with wooden benches. Nearby, there is a snack shop and a glass case displaying trophies won by youth teams and champion skaters. Jerseys of Russian hockey stars hang on the walls.

At the end of the corridor is a small room, and it is here where Evgeni Malkin occasionally retreats after his grueling summer training sessions. He sits near a big wall decal of a cartoon wolf in a hockey jersey and watches his 3-year-old son Nikita. Outside the room, out on the ice, Malkin pushes himself along with other NHL players, trying to drown in sweat the memories of a disastrous 2018-19 season. Here, in this little playroom, he is mostly still, often for up to an hour, looking on as his son relentlessly slaps at plastic pucks with his toddler-sized stick. Instinctively, like his dad, he loves to grip and rip it.

"(He's a) forward for sure," Malkin says. "No defenseman. No goalie. If he (is not a) forward, he not play hockey. ... He loves to take, like, 20 pucks and wants to score 20 pucks. He never puts pucks back. He's trying (to) find more pucks and score again. I say, 'No, we need (to put) pucks back.' And he's, like, 'No, no — pucks always stay inside.'"

Malkin is driven by that same desire. When he scores — as he has for most of his career — he is happy and confident. When he doesn't — and last season, he didn't — that confidence turns to doubt, fear and anger.

"You lose confidence, and you start (to) think too much," Malkin says. "I (started) to think too much. And when I start to think too much, I start to get mad at everyone."

Not since the summer before arriving in Pittsburgh at age 20 has Malkin faced an offseason like the past few months. After a dozen mostly charmed years, he was not expecting a season when he would feel frustrated by his language limitations, embarrassed about his on- and off-ice decisions, angry at almost anyone, and isolated from loved ones.

He comes to Moscow each summer to reconnect with his heritage, friends and family. After a hellacious season, he also returned needing to find a new purpose, even if he didn't know that when he arrived.

He found it during hard training sessions on the ice of this nondescript arena in the working-class South Port District, and also in that small room watching his son trying to score and score and score. And the latter may be as consequential as the former in helping Malkin find his greatness again.

"I never see the future," Malkin says. "I think this is my problem."

Nobody was more shocked than Malkin when last season turned into "the worst" of his 13-year NHL career.

"I think last year, it was all my fault," Malkin says.

He scored half as many goals (21) as the previous season. He seemed slow in transition. He took too many risks and made too many turnovers. He was injured at times but also frustrated.

He grew distant. He fought with his coach. He lost faith in his winger. He looked like a "regular player."



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Malkin was unrecognizable in almost every way. To himself most of all.

"I think my head starts, like, (getting) crazy," Malkin says, "I fight with Sully. I fight with teammates. A little bit upset at everyone."

Malkin's fights with his coach, Mike Sullivan, were about ice time. Malkin lobbied for around 20 minutes and he wanted to play when opponents pulled their goalie. Sullivan needed to see the Malkin from the Penguins' championship runs in 2016 and 2017. He wanted to trust Malkin in the crucial moments of games. He wanted Malkin to give what captain Sidney Crosby was giving the Penguins every game. He needed to eliminate blind passes to the middle of the ice. Pick spots instead of going in the corner. Take pucks from opponents rather than committing turnovers.

While Malkin's fights with Sullivan typically took place in private, his problems with Phil Kessel were much harder to hide.

Each is proud to the point of being stubborn. They are fussy about their equipment (and were agitated by problems last season: skates and gloves for Malkin, sticks for Kessel). They have some of the best shots in the history of the game. And when the stakes are highest, Malkin and Kessel are at their best, a trait among some great players who transform into icons.

Their friendship is real, Malkin says.

But by the end of last season, everybody from ownership to management to coaches believed Kessel had to go for Malkin to stay.

Phil Kessel and Evgeni Malkin were teammates for four years and linemates for three. (David Dermer / USA Today)

Malkin declined to elaborate on how his on-ice relationship with Kessel fell apart. But it's clear he grew tired of feeling caught between the ongoing Sullivan-Kessel rift, according to multiple team and league sources. Those sources also say Malkin had come to believe Kessel was content with two titles and mostly interested in his statistics. Malkin was worried he'd be seen the same way if Kessel remained his winger.

Multiple team sources say Malkin requested a trade if Kessel was to return.

Malkin denies that, but it doesn't mean he wanted to play another game, let alone another season, with Kessel as his linemate.

He did not.

So now Kessel is in Arizona, traded away.

In June, Penguins general manager Jim Rutherford said only Crosby was untouchable in trade talks, a shot across Malkin's bow, intended or not. Multiple team sources said Crosby, rarely one to involve himself in management matters, made it clear to the Penguins that Malkin should not be traded for any reason.

"It's me and Geno," Crosby said.

Malkin downplayed Rutherford's comments. He rolled his eyes while discussing them and noted he had heard trade talk before. Privately, the trade talk stung. It hurt worse because he first heard the news while with Team Russia at the World Championships in Slovakia.

Mostly, Malkin was peeved because for the first time, his future — not just in Pittsburgh, but as a great NHL player — was being openly doubted.

"We talk (about) one bad year, you know?" Malkin says. His quick, deep sigh suggests exasperation.

Malkin has not shared with many people — especially in Pittsburgh — just how difficult last season was for him.

He had gone long stretches without seeing his family. Nikita accompanied Malkin's wife, Anna, to Moscow, where she spent the Christmas and New Year holidays working for Russian television. When they weren't in Moscow, Anna and Nikita spent many winter days at the Malkins' property on Fisher Island, just outside Miami.

Daily video messages and phone calls only made him miss them more.

Malkin was often separated from his wife, Anna, and son, Nikita, during the season. (Charles LeClaire / USA Today)

At the same time, Sergei Gonchar, an assistant coach with the Penguins and a man Malkin says is "not like a friend, like family," was not around as often. He had received permission from management to split his time between the team and his family in Dallas.

"I think I'm sometimes (too) alone thinking about myself," he says. "My wife is mad (at) me; I'm not open to her still. We're, like, five years together, but sometimes I'm never saying my problems to her.

"I never say my problems to anyone."

Pittsburgh also began to feel smaller. Though he had always found cities such as Moscow, Miami and New York to be more exciting, Malkin appreciated Pittsburgh for its people; the blue-collar mentality of Western Pennsylvania reminds him of his hometown, Magnitogorsk, another steel city.

The local teams mean more to the people of Pittsburgh and Magnitogorsk than they do in bigger cities. Malkin loved the passionate connection he had formed with fans. Unlike when he played for Metallurg, he could have the best of both worlds in Pittsburgh: adoration and privacy.

But Pittsburgh had turned gloomy. "It rains, like, every day," he says. And he is not wrong. The city's wettest year on record was 2018, and 2019 was tracking similarly.

Malkin also still feels somewhat like a stranger in North America. "U.S. is a little bit hard for me," he says. "Because (of) language. Because maybe it's, like, different mentality."

Malkin says he is not confident either friends in Pittsburgh or Penguins teammates, specifically newer ones, "understand" him. He does not join many group meals and admits he often fails to return text messages.

He theorizes his hesitation to quickly engage with younger or newer teammates limits his ability to be an effective leader for the Penguins. All these years later, and even though he can conduct entire interviews in English (including several for this story), Malkin remains "scared" he will say the wrong words, and to his embarrassment "people will not understand me."

"I know I need (to bring) leadership in the room," Malkin says. "Sometimes I'm scared because I feel like my English is, like, bad."

He trusts that Crosby and Kris Letang, his teammates for well over a decade, know him as "a funny guy." They do. He feels safe sharing "the real Geno" with Penguins vice president of media relations Jennifer Bullano Ridgley.

Mostly, though, Malkin has yet to reveal himself in full to Pittsburgh or the Penguins.

Moscow for Malkin offers the familiar and the foreign. The colorful cathedrals, stone statues and brilliant buildings throughout the city center. The hidden-gem restaurants — Italian, French, Middle Eastern and Asian eateries mixed with the few spots serving traditional Russian dishes such as borscht and freshly stirred citrusades.



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Malkin has always found in Moscow a sense of comfort that allows him to breathe easier, center himself and get back on track.

Moscow is where Malkin flipped from recovery to revival after losing the second half of the 2010-11 season to torn knee ligaments. It was here where Anna whisked him for the final days of the 2014 Olympics after Russia failed to medal in the men's hockey tournament. This is her hometown, but it's been his safe space.

So, after the worst season of his career, it was the only place he could land. If Malkin was going to find himself again as a great hockey player, it was going to be here.

Malkin is not from Moscow, but his wife is, and they spend most of his offseason in Russia's capital city. (Rob Rossi / For The Athletic)

A year ago at this time, after reconditioning his body under the guidance of Alex Trinca, the Penguins assistant strength and conditioning coach, Malkin anticipated a "great year." But after the opening month last season, Malkin says he "forgot to still work" as Trinca had taught.

He stopped staying in the gym to stretch after lifting. His legs betrayed him, feeling weaker each game. Skating had always been the foundation for his success, but his "first couple steps were really hard" and Malkin says he felt "slow a little bit."

He tried to compensate by cheating up ice. Except he could not get back fast enough to help defensively. He forced high-risk passes because he could not consistently burst through the neutral zone or dance around opposing skaters. He put himself in harm's way with reckless dashes into the corners. Had he not, he never would have been able to win races to loose pucks.

Penguins personnel cited Kessel becoming too content as one of the issues Malkin had with his former winger. If he was being honest, Malkin would say he had allowed the same to happen.

Reigniting a career is easier said than done in Russia.

Ice time is hard to find, especially once KHL clubs open training camp in July (which is typically when NHL players start to ramp up their offseason workouts). Finding a rink with a weight room attached? Forget about it.

Nutritious meals are not as readily available as they are even in Pittsburgh. Moscow is a bigger city, but it remains a city in Russia, where trying economic times have not allowed the country to keep up with America and Canada.

Trinca had once heard Malkin describe a day in his Moscow life from only a few years ago: He would grab something to eat on the way to a rink. He would change after an on-ice workout, but could not store equipment at the facility. So Malkin would toss it in the trunk and have a driver take him home, where he'd hang his gear so it could air out. He would eat again — and again, not something all that healthy — before he was driven to a different facility, usually in another part of town, so he could warm up and lift weights in a gym that did not really meet the basic needs of a professional hockey player.

"It's not too easy for hockey players in Russia," Malkin says.

A few years ago, Malkin was told about a former hockey prospect named Pavel Markidan, who worked out of a new facility, the Morozovo Arena. It had the bare minimum of what he needed, good enough but not too good.

Malkin parlayed his high profile into gaining squatter's rights to Morozovo Arena. He does not own the building, but he has the run of it. Malkin calls the shots on ice time and gym availability, and can even request menu items at the arena restaurant.

Malkin takes a break during a July training session at Morozovo Arena in Moscow. (Rob Rossi / For The Athletic)

In return, Markidan has been allowed to hang several of Malkin's autographed jerseys throughout the building. He also runs on-ice sessions that feature Malkin, Alexander Radulov and other NHL players including Denis Gurianov of the Stars, Ilya Lyubushkin of the Coyotes and Vladislav Kamenev of the Avalanche. When Ilya Kovalchuk is in Moscow, he also joins Malkin's posse — an ultimate sign of respect from the unquestioned leader of this generation of Russian hockey stars.

Malkin takes charge in Moscow. Much the way he has seen Kovalchuk do for years. Much the way he feels he can't in Pittsburgh.

He never would have tried to gain favorable treatment at a North American facility. He would have been embarrassed to play up his fame in such a manner in Magnitogorsk or Pittsburgh.

But in Moscow, Malkin is a man in full, and the presence of Anna and Nikita play a huge part in that.

He and Anna want their son to appreciate the country and its culture, especially because Nikita was born in Pittsburgh and is being raised primarily there and near Miami.

Malkin's free time with his son is mostly limited to the offseason, and even then — between training sessions, visits with friends and things like traffic, going to the bank and, well, life — he doesn't get as much time as he would like. Here in Moscow, the nurturing side of Malkin is able to come out in ways it can't elsewhere.

His support group in Moscow has always included the Gonchar family, which spends a few weeks in the city every summer. Russian agent Gennady Ushakov, for whom Malkin reserves his most playful jabs but to whom Malkin is fiercely loyal, is around to handle all variety of needs. Childhood friends from Magnitogorsk make visits with their families. Malkin also has made friends of Moscow celebrities from the art and music scenes.

Few from Pittsburgh have made the trip here to visit Malkin. Trinca is the exception.

Unlike a year ago, Malkin already had been skating for three weeks when Trinca arrived in the last week of July. Anna had taken Nikita on a holiday to Sochi to guarantee Malkin could focus on Trinca's training. Soon Malkin and Trinca were accompanied by Besa Tsintsadze, a former competitive figure skater who is now a power-skating specialist and has worked in the past with Malkin and Crosby in Pittsburgh.

"We had an incredible 10 days of skating and he went hard," Tsintsadze says. "What I like is when Geno said, 'Besa, you come to Miami and we keep going.'"

"You know, everybody is saying Geno is finished. I see him skating strong again, and I say he's going for another great five years now."

Malkin has spent much of his summer with Pavel Markidan (left) and Alex Trinca (right). (Rob Rossi / For The Athletic)

Malkin punished himself on the ice with Markidan and Tsintsadze. He tested his own limits during workouts with Trinca, who intentionally inserted discomfort into the dynamic by changing all the exercises from the previous summer.

This rebuild was happening from the ground up. But Malkin also was making changes he once resisted.

He cut alcohol from his diet to train. He signed up with a health-food delivery service. He ate salads and lean meats for lunch. He dropped about seven pounds.



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Malkin even started turning in early on weeknights.

As August ended and Malkin returned to Pittsburgh, he felt he had made good on the goal he set for himself when his flight touched down in Moscow a couple of months earlier.

Retreat. Recover. Rebuild.

Then return with a purpose.

Hockey players are taught to seize the moment and avoid fixating on the past or the long-term future. Win the next shift. Make the next save.

But now, at this moment in his career, looking ahead was what Malkin needed to do.

"My desire is to win a fourth Cup," Malkin says. "It's, like, not many Russians with four Cups. I would be (the) only one. This is my target right now."

Mentioning Crosby and Letang, Sullivan and Rutherford, Malkin says he "understands our group" and is confident the Penguins' early postseason exit last year was an aberration — not unlike his aggravating season.

"With this team, we have (a) real chance to win again," Malkin says. "I believe that, for sure. Because we have professionals in our organization."

Malkin believes winning the Stanley Cup a fourth time would cement his legacy among Russian greats. (Christopher Hanewinkel / USA Today)

He knows winning the Cup again is not possible without him back at "my level."

"It's my challenge," Malkin says. "I know I can."

In a June meeting, Malkin told Sullivan to give him 20 minutes of ice time and he'll make sure it's a "good 20."

"I always feel like I'm thinking on ice," Malkin says. "But it's only when you're older you realize how I can change (my) game to be better."

Can he be better?

Even if his mind is right. Even if his body is stronger. Even if the fights are over and he's on the ice more. Even if all the problems that led to the worst season of his career suddenly disappear, can Malkin, at age 33, make it not only back to where he once was but improve?

Malkin has returned to Pittsburgh with a clear vision for the rest of his hockey life.

Up first, he says, is a top-five finish in the scoring race and "close to 100 points, for sure." That should ease the burden on Crosby and help the Penguins reach a 14th consecutive postseason. Only nine goals from 400, Malkin is already eyeing The 500 Club and joining Alex Ovechkin as the only Russian member. He is close to surpassing childhood idol Sergei Fedorov's 1,179 points.

"It's (a) huge next three years," Malkin says. "I still want to play 100 percent — and sign (for) three more years with Pittsburgh."

That would take Malkin through age 38 and his preferred "20 years with one team" if counting when he was drafted by the Penguins. Nikita will have just turned 9 and ideally be a big brother to at least one sibling.

How did Malkin respond to the worst season of his career?

He stepped back on the ice. He worked. He says he has changed. But that might be less important than how he looked into the future and set the ending he wanted. For his career. For

his wife and little Nikita, the kid who showed in that small room that he can grip and rip it just like his father.

"I understand I am losing my hockey life every day," Malkin says. "I want to be hungry. This is huge for me. This is fundamental."

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The Athletic / Four Calgary brothers are on the hockey map thanks to their single mom and a spirit of sacrifice

Scott Cruickshank Sep 9, 2019 22

Two brothers have gathered up their meagre belongings — well-worn clothes and tattered hockey gear. They're leaving home.

The oldest is heading south. The other, west.

Yet there are no teary farewells on the front lawn. No pleading for changes of heart. No hand-wringing anxiety.

In fact, their departure in the late summer of 2014 comes as genuine relief.

The Wiesblatt family needs help. At the head of the household is a single parent, Kim, who is deaf and going through a divorce. The family lives in a cramped rental unit in Millrise, a community in Calgary, a mom, her five children and limited means of support.

So Ocean, at 15 and her oldest kid, cooked up a plan. He will temporarily move in with another family.

"Just to get the weight off my mom's shoulders," Ocean was saying the other day. "It was kind of shitty because you weren't with the brothers — but you just had to leave and there was no choice."

Orca, then 14, seeing the wisdom of the proposal, followed suit. He, too, knew of someone who would take him in. "Kind of a unique situation," he explained. "We didn't have what every other family has."

Still at home with Kim are — Ozzy, 12; Oasiz, 10 and the boys' only sister, Oceania, 6 — each trying to wrap their head around what was happening.

Oasiz admits he had been shaken — his big brothers, his heroes, were gone, even if only a few minutes away.

"I thought they were leaving forever," he recalled. "But we needed it because my mom didn't have enough money to feed us all. We're thankful for (the other families), for taking care of the boys."

"It sucked, but it was kind of smart in a way, I would say."

The family's financial burden eased, the eldest brothers got what they needed, too. A stable environment. Square meals. Educational support. A healthy dose of structure. And, not insignificantly, they could count on rides to the rink, access to better equipment and assistance with registration fees.

"Whatever helped out my mom is what we had to do," Ocean said. "I understood the situation. I wouldn't have played hockey if I didn't go. Everyone has to make sacrifices. That's just one of the sacrifices."

"We had to do what we had to do."



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Which is the guiding principle of the Wiesblatts. They had already traveled plenty, from Osoyoos, B.C., to Kelowna to Calgary. They did what they had to do.

The brothers endured countless indignities and relentless bullying, but the strength of their family bond has put them right where they are today, which is pegged squarely on the hockey map.

Ocean, now 20, is returning to MJHL Portage for his final year of junior eligibility. Orca, 19, wants to get a full-season foothold with WHL Calgary.

And the two youngest boys appear to be stars in the making.

Ozzy, 17, heads back to WHL Prince Albert for his second season. Leading into his NHL draft year, the youngster's summer included a trip with the Canadian U18 squad to the Czech Republic for the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. Oasiz, 15, was a first-round selection of Medicine Hat in the 2019 WHL bantam draft. He'll skate for the Calgary (midget AAA) Buffaloes this winter.

Lofty accomplishments for any family, but more impressive considering the challenges topped by the Wiesblatts. Hockey, as everyone knows, is expensive. Fees and camps, gear and sticks, training and travel; imagine all of that times four.

It meant rummaging through lost-and-found bins for skates and pads.

It meant sleeping in the car at tournaments while teammates were tucked into hotel rooms.

It meant going on the road and praying that the only stick you owned wouldn't snap.

It meant skipping trips to the mall. Ocean figures it's been 15 years since his mom last bought new clothes.

It meant, in the face of mounting household bills, paying first for hockey registration — a choice that forced the family to pull up stakes more than once.

The Wiesblatts have learned to "grind," as Ocean puts it. But never have they taken for granted the generosity of others.

Clockwise from bottom left: Oasiz, Ocean, Ozzy, Kim, Orca, Oceania.

Friends bring over groceries — on one occasion enough meat for a month — and drive to the food bank on Kim's behalf. Hockey fees are anonymously donated or sometimes even forgiven. Doors to a highly regarded training facility are thrown open. New gear is now provided, no questions asked.

Mom considers the actions of supporters — some are friends, some are strangers, some pitch in without a peep — to be heroic.

"Absolutely, yes," Kim said through a sign-language interpreter. "It does make me feel awkward at times, there's no question. But it's like, 'Accept the gifts that come and move on.' We survive. We make it."

Bumps, though, never seem to end.

This past March at Lake Louise, Mom had been showing Oceania how to skate when she fell awkwardly and wrecked her right shoulder. It even hurts to sign now. Surgery is required. So there's that.

Unemployed since being laid off two years ago, Kim remains on social assistance.

But the boys have come to embrace the experience.

"It's my story," said Orca, who, like his brothers, sat down with a reporter to detail the hardships. "I love the way I live. I would

hate to be some rich kid. I'm happy that I had to sacrifice everything. It makes it kind of an adventure. If I could change it, I wouldn't change it. I love the way everything worked out."

The brothers wear brave faces. But don't be fooled — they've suffered, insists one friend, who, despite playing a significant role in the family's welfare, requested that his name not be used.

"To see what these boys have actually overcome? Absolutely amazing. Amazing," he said. "You want to talk about tough skin? They're going to school and they're being laughed at because their mom's deaf, their dad's deaf, they have no money, they're wearing second-hand clothes, they're wearing second-hand hockey equipment. When you start thinking about that, it puts a tear in my eye."

Voice cracking, he finishes the thought.

"This is about the boys. However you want to write your story, your piece should truly be about these boys and their mom. They need all the kudos. They're the ones that had to walk through the door and live it every day."

Opening up an hour-long conversation in the kitchen of the family's home in the community of Midnapore, Kim smiles and signs: "It's a long story. It's a long journey."

Which opens in B.C. in 1999, when Ocean is born. He could hear. So, as it turned out, could the rest of the kids.

But as children of deaf parents, how would they learn to talk? Communication at home was sign language. There were no bedtime stories. Exposure to television and friends allowed them to pick up only a limited amount of English.

Athletically, though, they were naturals.

Ocean and Orca tore up the soccer pitches of Osoyoos. A teammate's father, noticing their pace, had one thought: Get these lads into hockey. Kim informed him that they could not afford it.

But their new friend, who could sign a bit because his son's mom was deaf, insisted. He had connections — a key to the arena, for starters — because he was a former player. Barry Something. Kim thinks he had been captain of the New York Rangers.

Tall broad-shouldered guy? Yes. Barry Beck? Sure enough. And the long-time NHLer went out of his way to help with ice time, instruction, equipment.

"Barry was our biggest fan," said Kim. "I really have to thank him because he opened the door for my kids to love hockey. Just a nice man. Just a really nice human being."

They eventually parted ways — the Wiesblatts to Kelowna, the Becks to Hong Kong, where he coaches and manages a non-profit hockey academy there.

Beck, through an overseas email exchange with The Athletic, says those kids are an inspiration.

"They were motivated and high energy as I think they had something to constantly prove," he wrote. "Just because both parents were deaf didn't mean that they couldn't succeed at whatever they put their minds to."

Orca's assessment of Beck's presence? "He started everything."

Meaning their involvement with hockey became an obsession that ran four deep.

After supper, they would chase pucks outside — "Till 10, 11 when our parents would flash the lights (to come home)," says Ocean — or downstairs. With their father Art's blessing, they yanked the carpet out of the basement so they could rip shots off



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of the bare floor. Following practices, they would come home and pull on their Rollerblades.

In-house, it was always oldest and youngest (Ocean and Oasis, both lefties, both stocky) versus the middle two (Orca and Ozzy, both righties, both lean).

"Absolutely destroyed," is how Ocean fondly describes the leavings. Walls broken. Windows smashed. "A lot of fistfights," said Orca, grinning.

In 2012, the family moved to Calgary, a city that boasted excellent hockey programs. When the marriage dissolved, Art returned to B.C. and Kim took on a variety of odd jobs, and relied on the food bank to keep the family afloat.

"Obviously, there's four hockey-playing boys — we eat a shit-ton of food," said Ocean. "You've got to find a way to get that food. You've got to find a way."

Bantam standouts, Ocean and Orca settled for community-league placement in the Shaw Meadows association. Rep hockey, after all, can cost upwards of \$5,000 per season.

"Oh, hockey is so expensive. Absolutely, it steals every penny," said Kim. "It's been really stressful financially, I'll say that. We've sold some things. We've become minimalists ... very stressful as a single parent, but what I've tried to show my kids is that we can be positive, we can make it through this."

Ozzy remembers breaking his stick at an out-of-town prospects showcase. His tournament was over — until a teammate's parent, unprompted, bought him a new one.

"To do that out of the kindness of their hearts?" said Ozzy. "Those are pretty special moments."

Ocean Wiesblatt.

None of the boys were fussy about equipment. One on-ice snapshot shows a wee Ocean in men's skates — size 7 or 8. In another photo, a very young Oasis is wearing hockey gloves that go up to his elbows.

"I'm so proud of my kids — they never ever complain," said Kim.

Talking now, there is no bitterness. Even from Oasis, the family's bottom rung, the final stop for passed-down pads.

"Actually, I didn't mind it — I hate breaking in new gear," he said. "Usually parents always buy new equipment. This was just a whole other story, I guess. But I always thought it was a positive — 'At least I'm playing hockey.' That's all I care about."

Their hard-luck story made its way through Calgary's hockey circles. Mike Huber, whose son Brandon was a teammate of Ozzy's, stepped up, starting by ferrying the Wiesblatts to and from rinks.

Eventually, Huber and business partner Sonny Belanger hired Kim to deliver flyers for their renovation company. Belanger's father Fern began chipping in, too.

"I'm just helping these kids realize their dream," said Fern. "If I could be a tool for that? Good for me. Good for them. My reward is going to be seeing them succeed, to be a part of something special."

The family's financial strain, however, remained.

Which is why Ocean decided to approach Belanger about moving in with his family.

"We didn't know how we were paying for hockey — we honestly thought it could have been over," he said. "Mom's like, 'We can't afford this.' I was just trying to come up with a plan. So me and Orca kind of had to leave, just so we could help out my mom. She couldn't afford (the hockey), the food, driving us all around."

Orca, meanwhile, shifted to Huber's house — a change that was jarring. When he was home and his mom wanted to get his attention, she waved or stamped on the floor. And, of course, there was nearly no talking among the family members — signing, so as not to exclude Kim, was the rule.

So moving in with the Hubers was a culture shock. "I didn't know how to act or walk around."

Looking back, Orca acknowledges that it had been a necessary education, being on the hook for housework — dishes done, beds made — and schoolwork. "I'm happy I did that. He put me in a straight line."

Still, there were moments. Huber remembers one winter night arriving home late. There, in his driveway, was Orca, shooting pucks — wearing only roller-blades and tighty-whities. It was minus-20 C.

"He's a free spirit, put it that way," said Huber, who had the privilege of buying Orca his first store-bought pair of skates — the kid was 14.

Thanks to the help, Orca was able to play major bantam and the younger boys, Ozzy and Oasis, have never missed a rep season.

"I don't know where we'd be if we didn't meet them ... they really pulled us out of the hole," said Ocean.

But missing their family and realizing Mom needed help around the house, the eldest boys returned home after two years.

"That's life," Ocean said. "You've got to give things up and find other ways."

Kindness didn't always take the form of financial boosts, room and board or tutors.

Sometimes, it was simply a meaningful act.

Ozzy's best friend, Jake Neighbours, learned the basics of sign language because he didn't like seeing Kim excluded from conversations.

So, during road trips with the Buffs midgets, Neighbours got Ozzy to give him a crash course in signing.

"When he learned it, I think we became a lot closer, too," said Ozzy. "Not just me, but to everyone in my family, really. We've never had anyone who really wanted to learn and actually put in the time. He can talk to my mom just fine now. It's really cool to see."

Neighbours, who lives in Calgary and plays for WHL Edmonton, says being able to communicate was the right thing to do. "It just makes everyone's life a little bit easier."

Dave Cowan, who represents the boys for O2K Worldwide Management Group, calls Neighbours an honorary Wiesblatt brother. "He's probably the best thing that could ever happen to the family, in terms of having a kid that's right alongside Ozzy," Cowan said. "His mind is in the right spot. Takes care of the boys. Drives them to workouts. Takes them everywhere. He is essentially an extension of their brotherhood."

Cowan, who had been touched by the family's story, took on the Wiesblatts a year ago.

"It was the exact reason why I got into the agency," said Cowan. "I wanted to support the boys and do what I can to try to keep them moving forward."

The list of benefactors includes Darryl Hughes, a Bauer Hockey executive, who ensures that the boys get proper gear; and Doug Crashley, who operates Crash Conditioning, a local who's-who training facility and allows the brothers free access.



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"He understands that our income as a family is not sufficient," said Kim. "He's been so fabulous, right?"

There are occasional difference-makers behind the scenes, too.

For instance, Ozzy's final year of midget was taken care of anonymously, a \$5,000 tab quietly settled.

"There's a lot of people helping these boys out," said a family friend. "There are three or four families giving them a big push."

But not everyone means well. It comes as no surprise to hear that the boys have been the subject of taunts.

There have been playground scuffles. "You hear, 'Oh, your parents are deaf,' so you go beat the kid up," said Ocean.

Bantam, they say, is when on-ice trash-talking gets amplified. Not hockey-flavoured taunts, but family-belittling abuse. Even a rival coach once lit into Ozzy after a game, reducing him to tears.

Ocean knows — knows — that he'll hear more this season.

"Really rude," he said. "I would never ... if someone else's parents are deaf or blind or had Down syndrome, that's just a thing you don't go after."

Last spring, as Prince Albert marched to the Memorial Cup, Ozzy got an earful of guff. Raiders captain Brayden Pachal overheard one comment and immediately confronted the offending player. "Those are moments that you can't really thank people enough for," said Ozzy.

The key, according to the brothers, is not letting the slurs affect you or your game.

"Now that you're older, if someone chirps you, it's irrelevant — 'I don't care what you have to say about my parents. You don't mean anything to me,'" said Ocean. "But when you're young, you get mad, you yell, you fight."

He admits that he let it get the best of him in bantam, leading to penalties and suspensions. "Stupid," Ocean said. "That's why you can't let people control your emotions because it'll bring the worst out of you."

Orca, who's dressed for more than 60 dates for the Hitmen, says after listening to one opponent diss his mom and dad, he wanted to drop his gloves. The rival refused, then repeated the insults. Orca was so furious, he direct-messaged him on Instagram.

"I told him, 'We're fighting,'" he said. "It was immature of me ... but he would do it every game and I would ask him every game to fight me (and he wouldn't). I'll probably just have to jump him this year."

Oasiz, too, hears plenty — "Just trying to throw you down. Pretty rude things" — but he doesn't react. Usually.

Oasiz Wiesblatt.

"It depends on the game," said the 15-year-old. "If I'm playing a good game, there's no point in me raging on the guy. I might as well put more points on the board. But if I'm having a bad game, I might throw a hit."

Like everything else they've endured, the put-downs have shaped the Wiesblatts. For the better, insists Ocean.

"It made us stronger in the head," he said. "It taught us to be more mentally strong. It made us want to be better at hockey. We just wanted to prove everyone wrong."

For the big brother, it has not been a smooth road — "I had to learn all the hard ropes" — but he helped pave a better path for his younger siblings.

Everyone refers to Ocean as the family's de facto dad because of the responsibility he's willingly taken on since his parents split up.

"I knew my mom was going through rougher shit than me," said Ocean. "The least I could do was help out, right?"

He's barely out of his teens, but you wouldn't know it. He has a hand in Lads Business Solutions, a local digital-marketing outfit, and he's focused on someday propping up his family's fortunes.

"I want to make money," Ocean said. "I want to help out my sister. I want to help out my mom. I want to help out my brothers."

When Cowan had been considering taking on the Wiesblatts as clients, he met for coffee with the family's representative — Ocean.

"It was one of the most remarkable conversations I've had in my life, to be honest with you," Cowan said. "I'm essentially sitting across from what felt like a 25- or 30-year-old man. I was really impressed. That alone, before meeting the rest of the boys, helped make up my mind in saying, 'Yeah, this is something I want to be a part of.'"

Orca tugs up his left sleeve to reveal a large tattoo. There is the word "Family" in a bed of roses, plus birds — five small ones to represent the kids and a big one for his mother.

That Kim is the focal point is no surprise. Ocean calls her a "super hero."

Orca talks about how much she's sacrificed. "My mom, she's worked all her life ... just so we could all play hockey," he said. "I've never seen her go out and have fun. I'm not just saying that. I've literally never seen her go out and have fun."

Added Ozzy: "Our mom's basically the rock. What she's done ... it's kind of unexplainable. That's something that none of us take lightly."

The brothers have been crafting a plan to show their appreciation. Details might be vague, but intentions are whole-hearted. Kim loves the coast, so it may mean finding her a place near the water. Or perhaps buying and renovating their old house in Kelowna. Something to thank Mom for her contributions, including their unique names:

Ocean Mickey

Orca Nike

Ozzy Ocean Orca

Oasiz Sky Diamond

Oceania Aloha

"I love nature. I love nature names," she explained. "I suppose if you looked at me, you would think, 'Oh, she's a bit of an old hippie.' But in our family, I was a little bit of the black sheep. Very independent. Loved nature. Loved life. Loved sort of that natural path."

Reactions are mixed. Introduced to one of the Wiesblatts, some people cackle. Others dig the names.

"I like to be different," said Orca, "so I'm happy the way it turned out."

Ever wish you were called Bob or Jason? "I think my name is sweet," replied Oasiz. "I love it. ... If I have kids, I'm going to keep it on with O's."

More than a letter of the alphabet unites this foursome.



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To say the puck-chasing boys are tight doesn't begin to describe the bond.

"You don't realize it when you're younger, but four brothers is perfect," said Ozzy. "Playing two versus two in everything. A lot of fights, but a lot of memorable times. We're still, to this day, the closest we've ever been."

Naturally, there are flare-ups. Like the time Ocean, incensed by the video-game beating he was absorbing, whipped the remote into Ozzy's face, chipping one of his teeth. "You get mad in the moment," said Ozzy, "but a couple hours later you kind of cool off and laugh about it."

They're competitive about everything — even their heights. (Ozzy, they claim, somehow manages to cheat the tape measure.) The oldest, Ocean at 5-9, finished fifth in penalty minutes last season in the MJHL. The youngest, Oasiz at 5-7, may be the snarliest of the bunch. Notes one acquaintance: "He'd be the guy coming out of the cage if they were having a cage fight."

That fire serves the plucky, undersized forwards well in their ultimate goal: to reach the NHL.

"All the boys, they can fly," said Brent Harrison, who, as part of the Buffs organization, has coached Orca, Ozzy, Oasiz. "One thing that sticks out to me? They all just love to play hockey. If they could be on the ice four hours a day, they would be, right?"

This tale, with its fuzzy-cheeked protagonists, is far from complete.

"It's the real Canadian story — boys just wanting to play hockey," said a family friend. "Struggling family, struggling mom, single mom, hard mom. The story is about a hard mom doing whatever she can to keep those boys playing hockey and doing the best she can with what she has. That's the story."

So feel free to admire the Wiesblatts. Just don't pity them. They refuse to feel sorry for themselves and they don't feel cursed.

They even have a lucky number — 7. That's how many are in the family, and their birthdays fall in seven sequential months (Ocean in January, Oceania in February, Ozzy in March, Oasiz in April, Kim in May, Orca in June, Art in July).

No. 7 is what Ocean wears in Portage and what Oasiz wore last winter.

It isn't superstition, though, that's propelled them this far.

"We had to do what we had to do," Ocean said again. "We all had to figure out how to talk, how to speak, how to sign, go away for hockey, help each other out, pay for the bills, pay for the food, find that food, find that second-hand clothing, figure out how to find gear. It was the whole thing, the process behind it — how to get it."

"It was stressful. But we got it done. We're fine. We're alive. We're good. Honestly, we all feel thankful. There's people that have it way worse than us."

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The Athletic / 2019-20 NHL Best Bets: Which teams to put your money on

By Dom Luszczyszyn Sep 10, 2019 81

Before every season, oddsmakers set lines on which teams are likely to make the playoffs, and how many points they'll get. With the NHL being a very random league, it presents a lot of opportunities to make some good coin in places where it is legal to do so.

I've been doing this feature for two seasons now and after starting hot in 2017-18, there was some regression to the mean last year — though it came from the three bets I had listed as honorable mentions. I did say it would be a tougher year! In terms of main bets, my model (which is how I decide which lines offer value) is 14-4 over the last two seasons and 4-3 in "bets also worth considering" so maybe it's time to just stick to the main bets.

2017-18 Record: 8-2 (4-0 with honorable mentions)

2018-19 Record: 6-2 (0-3 with honorable mentions)

As already mentioned, last season was a tough one as NHL oddsmakers have sharpened up on their point total game. It looks to be a similar story this season as there are 13 lines within 2.5 points of my projections and only three where the difference is greater than five points. Not a lot to work with there.

But while bookmakers have become sharper with their point totals, their playoff odds look downright wacky and that could be the new avenue to finding value in the NHL market. Playoff lines weren't on the menu in this series over the last two seasons, but they'll be added this year because there's too much value to pass up.

Here's where I'm placing my money for the 2019-20 season, sorted by the confidence I have in each bet.

Lines are courtesy of Bodog and are subject to change after publication.

Point Totals

Anaheim Ducks: (Over 81.5)

As many of you saw in the season preview series, my model is higher on the Ducks than most and is well off the market here. While it may not be completely justified, I think this line is still far too low and should improve off a nightmare-ish 80-point campaign. Everything went wrong last year, there were several lengthy losing streaks, plus the team suffered through plenty of injuries. Better health, a new coach and a youth movement should all equal improvement next season. Plus, they have the best goalie in hockey.

Minnesota Wild: (Over 87.5)

We shockingly haven't seen the Wild's season preview yet and it's because of my model's switch to expected goals, with more emphasis on defense, has found a kindred spirit in the much-derided team from the state of hockey. Regardless, I do think they're hugely underrated due to the front office turmoil and also because their strength is on defense, which isn't the sexiest skill. Strong defensive teams are still a market inefficiency and the Wild certainly qualify as one of the league's stingiest teams. As long as they're not undone by goaltending, they should be in the playoff mix.

Carolina Hurricanes: (Over 95.5)

The Hurricanes sailed past this number last year despite being largely mediocre for half the season. In the other half, they were one of the best teams in hockey. They have confidence now, their young players are only getting stronger and this number feels very low for the talent and depth they seem to have. Goaltending is always a concern, but this team should be competing for the division, not for the playoffs.

St. Louis Blues: (Over 96.5)



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Like Carolina, the Blues also surged after a lackluster start with one of the best records in hockey in the second half. The difference: they won the Stanley Cup, so I'm a bit shocked by their low valuation. Like the Wild, I think the Blues are getting underrated because their biggest strength lies in their own end. Goaltending is a wildcard here because of Jordan Binnington's small sample, but it's hard not to see the Blues improving over last year's total with a full year of him and coach Craig Berube.

Los Angeles Kings: (Over 74.5)

Same effect as the Ducks, just with less confidence that they'll be any good. I think the Kings are one of the weakest teams in the league, but 74.5 points feels too low. They have a strong chance to bounce-back after last season and they still have some players with an elite reputation that are motivated to prove they're not washed up. A resurgence feels likely, even if it's only to around 80 points.

New York Rangers: (Under 88.5)

Everything depends on how the young kids fit and develop, but for now, this appears to be way too high for a team coming in with a lot of offseason hype, but likely isn't ready for primetime just yet. While many are adding their offseason haul to their final point total, that total was achieved with Mats Zuccarello and Kevin Hayes on the team. Without them, the Rangers were brutal and that's the team the new guys are being added too, which mitigates their value.

Columbus Blue Jackets: (Over 83.5)

I'm not as confident in this one as the rest, given what they've lost, but there's still value here as there was a strong foundation laid out aside from Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky. This team has depth and a strong blue line, it's just a matter of whether the unproven goaltending can hold up over a full season. I'm not holding my breath, but I still believe there's enough here for a point total in the mid-to-high 80's, rather than the lower range.

Playoff Chances

Slam Dunks

The best value on the board.

Carolina Hurricanes: (YES -140)

Arizona Coyotes: (NO +115)

New York Rangers: (NO -125)

At around 11 a.m. on Monday, I tweeted that the Hurricanes line to make the playoffs was one of the worst I had ever seen at nearly even odds. Since then, it's already gone up to -140 and that's still way too low. It's an implied probability of 58 percent which is significantly lower than it should be.

For Arizona and New York, it's a matter of both teams being far too close to 50 percent with the Coyotes actually being favored to make the playoffs. I don't buy that with their current team. For the Rangers, as mentioned above, they're not ready for primetime yet and it would take a lot of internal improvement for them to make it in a tough East. The line suggests they miss 56 percent of the time, but my model thinks it's closer to 82 percent – a huge chasm.

Underrated

Teams not getting enough credit going into the season.

Minnesota Wild: (YES +145)

Anaheim Ducks: (YES +220)

No one likes either of these teams which is why I love them. I don't think either makes the playoffs personally, but the lines are

too good not to take given how close they are, likely much closer than they're currently being given credit for. I suspect both will be on the bubble.

Overhyped

Teams getting too much credit going into the season.

Winnipeg Jets: (NO +200)

Florida Panthers: (NO +200)

Colorado Avalanche: (NO +240)

It's not that I hate any of these teams, it's that I don't think they deserve their current standing. The Jets lost a lot of wins and are closer to an average team than a contender in my opinion. They don't deserve the reverence they're getting here. Ditto the Avalanche who are stronger, but are being treated like a Cup contender when they haven't earned that badge yet – the team still has a lot of depth issues. And while Florida solved its biggest problem this summer in adding coach Joel Quenneville and goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, their line is similarly getting out of hand. They'll likely be getting closer to the bubble too.

Conservative Lines

Lines that oversell the uncertainty of an NHL season.

Nashville Predators: (YES -205)

Edmonton Oilers: (NO -190)

Buffalo Sabres: (NO -210)

St. Louis Blues: (YES -260)

Tampa Bay Lightning: (YES -400)

Toronto Maple Leafs: (YES -325)

Pittsburgh Penguins: (YES -205)

These lines come with a lot of juice attached to them, but arguably nowhere close to enough. The lines are far too conservative given the talent or lack-of, and the likelihood they'll make the playoffs as a result. It means putting down more money to win a little less, but in these cases, it might be worth it. Another way to look at the is by translating the above to the implied playoff probability for each team.

Nashville Predators: 67 percent

Edmonton Oilers: 34 percent

Buffalo Sabres: 32 percent

St. Louis Blues: 72 percent

Tampa Bay Lightning: 80 percent

Toronto Maple Leafs: 77 percent

Pittsburgh Penguins: 67 percent

Seeing the Lightning at 80 percent is all you need to know. I'll take that bet any day of the week and the rest here are just as bad. It doesn't jive at all with their point totals as I'm not sure on what planet a true talent 108.5 point team only makes the playoffs four out of five times. Whatever, their loss, our gain. Probably.

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Tense RFA waiting game hits final stages



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Elliotte Friedman September 10, 2019, 2:28 PM

Now we find out who is serious, and who isn't.

A few years ago, one particular player remained unsigned as the season approached. There was a lot of rhetoric about his situation. He agreed to terms days before Game 1, and was ready to go for puck drop.

I sent him a congratulatory text. He called back to reveal he was never going to miss games. "Just wanted to see if I could gain anything by waiting," he said. "I'm in good shape, wasn't worried about the pre-season."

I was telling this story to a GM on Monday. He laughed a bit and said, "Some (of this year's unsigned players) will do that. Yes. But this generation seems more willing to say no."

There's been so much hot air about RFAs over the past year that it might be responsible for Greenland's record ice melt. Finally, we're getting to the deadlines that really matter: training camp, the start of the season, and, ultimately, Dec. 1 — the last day any of these players can sign and still be eligible to play in 2019-20.

If I were a team, I'd want term. The price for talent never goes down. Look at all the great players who extended in the summer of 2016 — Johnny Gaudreau, Nathan MacKinnon, Sean Monahan and Mark Scheifele among them. How much has the market changed in three years? It's massive. If you really believe in your free agent, lock him in for as long as you can.

Colorado wants this with Mikko Rantanen. Gabriel Landeskog and Cale Makar are up in two years, MacKinnon in four. They don't want to worry about extending the talented Finn a second time in that span. The Avalanche seem willing to make Rantanen their highest-paid player, but don't want him making, say, \$4 million per year more than MacKinnon.

The dynamic is similar with Matthew Tkachuk in Calgary. A five-to-eight year term makes him the highest-paid Flame. Everyone understands that. But how much higher than Gaudreau and Mark Giordano is the question.

Toronto prefers term with Mitch Marner (more on him later). It's believed Kyle Connor prefers security in Winnipeg. You can't blame a player for choosing this route, but, as part of the CBA talks, everyone's been told to expect a bump in the American television rights for the 2021-22 season. Not everyone will want to lock in for eight years knowing a revenue injection is coming.

Patrik Laine, for one, is believed to want a bridge (we'll discuss him later, too). Some teams won't have a problem with that. Those without breathing room face two more seasons of tight squeezes before the new numbers kick in. It is expected that Brayden Point and the Lightning will follow organizational history with something in the three-year range. Most agents and executives picked Point as the RFA that would get done first, since he's made it clear he wants to make it work in Tampa. But nothing yet.

Back on July 1, San Jose and Timo Meier filed a contract that provided a path through stalemate. Meier signed for four years and \$24 million, with the fourth season worth \$10 million. Upon its completion, the winger will be one year from unrestricted free agency. If he wishes, he'll be able to take the qualifying offer San Jose has to extend in order to keep his rights (one year at \$10 million), and walk right to freedom.

Essentially, it makes Meier's contract a five-year, \$34-million deal. Zach Werenski followed that model with his three-year, \$15-million extension in Columbus. Because its final season is

worth \$7 million, it's essentially a four-year, \$22-million offer that could walk him right to the open market.

After Werenski signed, a few sources indicated they believed several other RFA defenders (Brandon Carlo, Charlie McAvoy, Ivan Provorov) could follow the same path. Another source thought Philadelphia might do this with both Provorov and Travis Konecny.

There's no doubt there are renewed efforts to end these skirmishes. Still, we wait to discover who is serious about sitting.

31 THOUGHTS

1. The hardest to read right now is Brock Boeser and Vancouver. They've discussed different contract lengths. There've been times of optimism and there've been times of pessimism. This is a huge year for the Canucks. They need a great start. It's going to be much more difficult without Boeser. Only four teams scored fewer goals than Vancouver the last two seasons. Boeser's 55 goals during that span are equal to Artemi Panarin and Jonathan Toews; more than Filip Forsberg, Jack Eichel and Mark Stone.

2. It is impossible to write or talk about Marner without offending someone, so here is my attempt at a bias-free take: It's tense and personal. My belief is Toronto is willing to go to an \$11-million AAV, but only if he signs for seven years. I'd heard both sides might agree to two years — then let arbitration sort it out — but a few sources threw cold water on that. I mentioned during a radio hit last week the rumour that Marner's representatives pitched a three-year contract with a structure similar to the Meier/Werenski setup, with the third season as high as \$15 million. However, I'm told that was several months ago and is no longer relevant, although both sides have continued to explore that kind of an option. I don't sense things are anywhere close.

3. Laine's looking for a bridge, but his situation is unique. This is as much about "fit" as anything. Scheifele and Blake Wheeler are hard-driving perfectionists. They demand a lot of themselves and of everyone around them. There's not much of an "off" switch. It's wrong to say Laine doesn't care, but he likes to relax, turn off his brain and do other stuff. If I'm the Jets, I'd like his game to evolve — the sooner, the better — but I recognize his incredible talent and am not giving up on it. Everyone here has to work to understand each other, for the betterment of the team.

4. Anaheim and Carolina have a deal in principle, and it is now Justin Faulk's decision. The Raleigh News & Observer's Luke DeCock reported Ondrej Kase is part of the return, and he's someone the Hurricanes tried to acquire last season. The Ducks are on Faulk's no-trade list, and the two sides are trying to hammer out an extension. Faulk makes \$6 million in salary this season, and while he's not going to reach Jacob Trouba territory, that contract raised the bar for the field. You have to think he's targeting \$6.5 to \$7 million. The Ducks appear willing to make the move without any long-term security at this time. At the very least, Faulk has to see the writing on the wall in Carolina. You never know how life will go, but, on paper, it's not ideal for a player heading into free agency.

5. At the Canadiens' golf tournament, GM Marc Bergevin confirmed his interest in Jake Gardiner. I think Vancouver and Winnipeg looked there, too. His best offer came in Carolina, but if it wasn't Toronto, he wanted something quieter. It will be good for him.

6. A few teams expressed surprise with the reports about Kase. He's not someone who was available for a long time. Anaheim must be concerned about his health.

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

7. There are teams out there who like Pavel Zacha, too. Monday's mini-blowup had other GMs wondering if the Devils



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would trade him, although Tuesday's treaty makes that unlikely. Two-way centre who kills penalties. Still young, room to evolve. Centres are hard to find.

8. Tuesday will be the third business day in a row the NHL and NHLPA have met for CBA negotiations. There were several more meetings in the summer; those went under the radar. With the player deadline to re-open the CBA on Sunday, there's a soft deadline, and deadlines spur action. Last spring, the players were hoping the escrow problem could be solved by their pension or benefit costs being moved to the ownership side of ledger, but, as far as I can tell, that's not on the radar.

What I do think is a possibility is both sides work to avoid what happened last year, where an \$83-million cap was projected only to have it fall short. That squeezed the teams — and the middle-class player. What could happen is that the 2020–21 cap is set much earlier than we're used to, based on 2018–19 revenues, instead of waiting until next June. Setting the cap earlier gives a better chance to avoid overly optimistic projections and decisions made because of them. That might end up happening throughout the extension. We don't know if it can be done by the weekend, but there's no question we're getting less rhetoric than we're used to. Thank God.

9. The Boston Globe's Kevin Paul Dupont reported last week that Jeremy Jacobs signed ownership of the Bruins to his six children. That doesn't mean his influence will wane. Jacobs remains chairman of the NHL's Board of Governors.

10. I'm very curious to see if, as part of the new CBA, NHL teams get the right to send some 19-year-old Canadian Junior picks to the AHL.

11. There were reports last week that Edmonton had interest in Patrick Marleau, but I don't think that's going to happen.

12. Jesse Puljujarvi knows what he has to do in Finland — play hard and play well. He's off to the right start. The Oilers talked with Carolina (Julien Gauthier) and Tampa Bay (Alexander Volkov was someone they liked), but didn't get to where they felt comfortable.

13. The NHL/NHLPA media tour (held last week in Chicago) is such a home run. The players are in good moods — it's too early to hate us. Jeff Marek and producer Amil Delic taped several 31 Thoughts podcasts, and there was some good stuff. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins said there hadn't been a face-to-face yet with new GM Ken Holland, but there was a phone conversation. Did Nugent-Hopkins request anything in particular?

"I think, for me personally, [it's] consistency," he replied. "That's something that's kind of been lacking when we have tough years. Obviously, when you are not having success, you want to change things up, but I think at the same time, it's important to keep guys together.... I've had eight or nine head coaches and this is going to be my ninth year.... It's a huge thing in my head where I want to play with the same guy, I want to build some chemistry — whether it's one guy or two guys. Something I really haven't even able to do the last few years is find a linemate — even one linemate — I can stick with, build chemistry with. (Holland) is a steadfast guy, and what he'll bring is some steadiness."

14. Teams are currently mandated to play between six and eight exhibition games, with rules in place to make sure they don't show up with a Tuesday night beer-league squad. I polled players about how many exhibition games they think they should be playing, and only Nikolaj Ehlers and Patrick Kane said four, preferring to play instead of practice. Everyone else went the other way, with no one going more than three.

"The last two for sure — maybe one more," Derek Stepan said.

Thomas Chabot pointed out he played just one last year, and really liked it, "because you do plenty of skating even if you don't play." The website fivethirtyeight.com calculated that this exhibition season, NFL Week One starting quarterbacks accounted for less than 12 per cent of all passing attempts, a huge drop from 2018. Teams aren't wasting their best.

The NFL's biggest pre-season story was Andrew Luck's sudden retirement. Two NHL GM's — Arizona's John Chayka and Toronto's Kyle Dubas — attended Colts camp this summer (Chayka was there right around the time Luck injured his ankle), so I was wondering if all of this would affect their approach in hockey.

"There's certainly a paradox with it," Dubas said. "You don't want your guys to burn out and spend a massive amount of energy in games that don't matter in the standings. The shift is going to go more toward playing less. Whether that's fewer games overall, or fewer core guys, I don't know. But you have to respect what your coaching staff wants. [Mike Babcock] has a long-held belief and it's proven to have success in getting guys up to speed."

Two new assistant coaches in Toronto — including a new power play — affects decisions, too.

"You have to remember that coaches and players have far more skin in the game," Chayka said. "Good young players, or those who were in the AHL, want to show what they did all summer. You have to give them that opportunity, and get veterans the games they feel they need."

The Coyotes GM said the thing he was most impressed with in Indianapolis was how the Colts go about hiring and drafting people, the research they do to make sure everyone is a fit — "how you make sure everyone is pulling in the same direction, while maintaining diversity of thought."

(As always, no one quoted in this article is used as an anonymous source.)

15. There is at least one NHL team considering having its NHL roster together right from the start — rather than mixing the groups — for practice purposes. The fivethirtyeight article said the NFL's pre-season future might be controlled scrimmages instead of games. Dubas said he's wondered about that. "I don't know how you do that in hockey.... Maybe coaches who have a good relationship in separate conferences is the way to go."

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16. When Chris Tanev hits the ice in Vancouver, word is it will be with custom-made shin pads and gloves, created by the team's trainers. He's missed too much time because he plays hard and refuses to bail out on the ice. In 2019–20, it will be with greater protection.

17. Ehlers on how the Jets want him to maximize his speed: "That's obviously my biggest strength. For the first couple of years, I felt like I had a problem with when to use it, and when to — not take it easy — but ... how to use it as much as possible. And I think it's gotten a lot better. And [coach Paul Maurice], of course, wants me to use that as much as I can. Not just when I get the puck and skate down the side with it. But also in forechecks, in back checking, in all that."

Ehlers had a great quote about the summer trade rumours. "Everyone around me in Denmark was like, 'Hey man, where are you going, what's happening?' and I was like, 'I have no idea. I haven't heard or seen anything from anyone.'"

He said people would reply with, "What? How do you not know more than I do?"



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"I don't think about it," Ehlers said. "The only time I thought about it was when people asked me about it."

18. That Central Division is going to be brutal. There are five legit Stanley Cup contenders there including the defending champion. Nashville and Winnipeg were the big boys the past couple of years, but there is much love for Colorado and Dallas. Are the Jets and Predators being disrespected?

"I don't care," Ehlers replied. "I really don't care. I don't care if they talk a lot about us. We know what we've done; we know what we can do. They can talk about everyone else as much as they can, and we'll stay in the back and do our thing. We're good with that."

19. Sidney Crosby, on the Evgeni Malkin trade rumours: "My reaction to that, honestly, was that I've been through this before," he said. "And I didn't like it, because it brought back those memories of so many times in that window between 2009 and 2016 where we fell short. And the next few days, it was like, 'This trade's going to happen.' That's the consequence and the result of losing. I understand. I've been through it but I also know that's the way it is. You wait for the dust to settle to really evaluate things.... Usually when you do that, everything gets a little more clear and you figure out what it is you have to do.... The whole Geno thing, that's part of losing. You understand there's always different possibilities, different outcomes that come with that, but I'm happy to know that he's back."

Does Crosby ever ask to speak to GM Jim Rutherford about these things?

"I don't really talk to Jim that often. He's great at getting a pulse on the group and guys individually. I just try to focus on playing. I haven't really been one to ever call a GM and say, 'I need this or I think we need to do that.' They're there for a reason, that's their job. If they [ask for] an opinion [I will give it], but I'm not one to be knocking on the door."

20. There was a twinkle in Alex Ovechkin's eye when he tied the two years remaining on his contract to the length of his career, but we did ask him if wanting to see his son grow up in Russia would be factor in his decision.

"No, I think, for him, he's going to speak two languages anyway," the Capitals captain answered, before joking that the boy might want to speak even more. "The most important thing is [to be] healthy. If you're healthy, you can still play the game the way you want to play. I don't want to be a player who signs a contract and then, 'Okay, I'm hurt, and I'm just going to get a paycheck and going to enjoy my life.' I don't want to do it."

I always remember one of my favourite baseball players, Mike Schmidt, retiring two months into the 1989 season because he felt he wasn't good enough to live up to his standard. I have an admiration for that thinking. Wayne Gretzky's goal record?

"Of course it matters," Ovechkin answered, "but like I said, I'm not going to score 300 goals in two years. It's going to take five or six years. I have to be healthy enough to do that. I don't want to play just for that record. I want to be healthy, I want to have fun, I want to enjoy the moment when I'm on the ice."

21. Unrestricted free-agent-to-be Torey Krug on whether he's concerned about the lack of contract talks with the Bruins: "I wouldn't say concerned.... [I] would say just interested to see what is going to happen. It's my future. It's going to affect my family, where they live. It's going to affect my kids, where they go to school.... It affects a lot things. Not concerned, just curious to see what is going to happen."

22. At the recent basketball World Cup tournament in China, Canada's Melvin Ejim watched via FaceTime as wife Samantha gave birth to their second son. Krug came close to a similar experience during last year's Stanley Cup Final. Wife Melanie

gave birth to the couple's first child four days after Game 7. What would he have done?

"We had discussed the implications of that," he laughed. "Being our first child, labour is typically a little longer than normal. She had given me the green light to play in any game if it happened in the morning of the game or something — 'Go ahead and play and get your ass back here before the baby comes!' I'm very thankful and glad it worked out the way that it did. Unbelievable experience — leaves you speechless to be honest."

23. It was noticeable how hard Buffalo and Boston prospects went after Jack Hughes in their rookie games. A preview of what he will deal with this season.

24. Curious to see if Nick Suzuki gets any time alongside Max Domi and Jonathan Drouin during pre-season play.

25. The Athletic's Craig Custance reported Calgary's Noah Hanifin tinkered with his one-timer at Darryl Belfry's skills camp last month. He's not the only Flame working on his finish. Another is Sam Bennett.

"I can do a better job of finishing opportunities," he said. "Release points. Someone told me every time I shoot the puck it's the same. Sometimes you need to mix it up, change the angle, change the release point, and I was working on that."

Bennett added he was working on shooting off different feet, as well.

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

26. Mathew Dumba led all NHL defencemen in goals (12 in 32 games) before going down with a season-ending injury. Has he set a goal for this year?

"Kind of like to keep that to myself," he said, before relenting under fierce interrogation. "I want to tickle 30. I want to try to get up there, break 20-25. I want to get into that range."

Never bad to aim high.

27. There've been rumblings that Sabres players have been pleasantly surprised by their meetings with new coach Ralph Krueger. Eichel confirmed that in Chicago.

"I'll tell you, I went to meet him for a cup of coffee in Slovakia (World Championships) and ended up going to dinner for three hours," the captain said. "I was extremely blown away by my meeting with him. If he says that he does something, it makes you want to do it. He started talking to me about Bikram Yoga and how much he loved it, so I went and tried Bikram Yoga."

Eichel joked that he sweats a lot, so he fit in nicely.

"He brings the best out of people. I don't think we had one negative conversation the whole summer. He's very calculated. He knows what he wants to do and has a plan for it. Nothing's spur of the moment. Nothing emotional for him, he's very thoughtful. I think it will be very good for us."

Eichel said their conversations spanned more than just hockey, with topics including "rock and roll, cars, travelling, everything."

Does Krueger have good taste in music? "He likes '70s rock," so yes.

28. I never got to use this quote from last summer, but I loved it and wanted to include it here. At the NHL Awards, Jordan Binnington was asked how a guy who thrived with an edge would keep it after achieving the ultimate goal.

"It's an interesting question, because I think you've always got to find your motivation, and that's really key," he said. "You know,



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after a certain amount of wins, I was like, 'All right, like, what's your motivation now?' But you just keep finding things that push you. Life is tough and it's a grind, and you've got to keep finding things that will excite you and push you. Yeah, I think I'll find some things." (Thank you to NHL.com's Nick Cotsonika for transcribing.)

29. Good note from former AHL Belleville coach Kurt Kleinendorst, now running a bench in Nurnberg, Germany.

"My team played a tournament in Bolzano in August, and Jaromir Jagr was there with his team," he texted. "How many guys in our world are owner, GM and player at 47 years old? That's crazy in an awesome way. I watched two of his practices and what a treat. If he's not the hardest worker, he's one of [them]. And how he treats people is absolutely refreshing. He had time for everyone, on the ice and off. After the game he took individual pictures with half my team. Couldn't have been more gracious."

30. There's some element of, "What did you do during the summer?" when you meet up with players and staffers at the showcase. One of this year's best stories came from Tampa Bay's Senior Director of Communications, Brian Breseman. His in-laws, Dave and Cathy Helman, live in southeastern Iowa. Dave is a retired federal prison warden, Cathy a teacher. According to Breseman, their family possesses the oldest farm still run by its original owner in the entire state — East Grove Farms.

"I came home one night, and my wife (Sarah) was on the phone with them," Breseman said. "She said, 'You're not going to believe this, but Elizabeth Warren is coming to the farm.'"

There is a weekly regional flight from St. Petersburg to Cedar Rapids, so they got to Salem (where the farm is located) two days before the Democratic presidential candidate's visit. It's a mead and wine farm, and the couple spent the day before the event helping set up. Hours before Warren's arrival, they attended a breakfast with another candidate — Cory Booker — at a local breakfast cafe. (Dave Helman was once chairman of the county's Democratic party.)

"Once the higher-ups got there, things changed," Breseman said. "Ten minutes before she was supposed to speak, I was on a stool, screwing and unscrewing flags. You've got to make sure they are facing the right way.... The state flag has to be smaller and not higher than the country's flag."

On the property is a historical landmark, a Victorian-era homestead restored to look like it did back when it was built. Warren toured it with Sarah's uncle. Critical information: Her dog, Bailey, did not make the trip, but her husband did.

"He had a few meads," Breseman laughed. "East Grove ships mead, too, if your Canadian friends want some."

Warren tried the Growler Home Brew. Did Breseman get her to sign any Lightning merchandise?

"No, I didn't," he replied. "Not to nerd out or anything, but I had a copy of her Time magazine cover, and I had her sign that."

I distrust politicians of all kinds, but am glad to hear Warren was friendly and low-maintenance.

31. Whenever athletes retire, they always talk about missing not so much the games, but the behind-the-scenes moments. I can say it's 100 percent the same when it comes to Nick Kypreos, Doug MacLean and John Shannon.

Doug is the biggest ballbuster alive. Every show he would gleefully tell me how terrible I was. My opinions were terrible, my facts were terrible — everything was terrible. I would always joke what a great motivator he must've been as a coach because I knew every time I was on the air I would be done if I didn't perform better next time. I'll miss that.

John's a great teacher. When I thought I was good, he would say, "You could've been better, and here's how." When I thought I wasn't good, he would say, "It's not that bad, but here's how you can fix it."

The Nick you saw on the air is Nick off the air. Passionate, forceful, and you never knew what could happen around you. Rather than words, just watch the video below. This is Nick Kypreos. And even though this happened years ago, I still laugh my head off whenever I watch this:

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets 'not worried yet' about Laine, Connor deals but season closing in

Ryan Dixon | @dixononsports September 10, 2019, 3:15 PM

WINNIPEG — Listening to Winnipeg Jets players speak about restricted free agents Kyle Connor and Patrik Laine, it almost sounds as if they're describing an early season losing skid: There's no reason to panic yet, but things need to change in the near future.

While the start of training camp later this week represents a soft deadline of sorts, it's clear the real demarcation point in the minds of Jets players is Oct. 3, when Winnipeg opens the regular season at Madison Square Garden versus the New York Rangers. If Laine and Connor — both of whom need new contracts with the club — are still nowhere to be seen, anxiety levels are going to spike.

"(We're) not worried yet, just because it's pretty early," said veteran centre Bryan Little. "If we start getting into the regular season and playing games that matter, those are a couple of guys you want in your lineup."

Another Jets forward, Mathieu Perreault, couldn't agree more.

"We need them on the ice with us once the season starts," he said. "I'm really hoping they can figure it out with the team and get something done. We need Kyle and Patty on the ice to give ourselves the best chance (to win games)."

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

Surely nobody involved wanted the summer-long subplot to drag even this far into September. As it stands, though, Connor and Laine remain two of a few ultra-talented youngsters around the NHL who haven't been able to hammer out new terms with their club following the expiration of their entry-level deals. And while the Jets — who've been gathering in Winnipeg for informal skates for a number of days now — would love to have their teammates twirling around the ice with them, everyone understands the reality of the situation.

"We're professionals, we know it's a business, we know that's just the way it goes sometimes," said left winger Nikolaj Ehlers.

A couple Jets, in particular, have had their own trying experience with the dollars-and-cents side of the game. Defenceman Josh Morrissey missed the early part of training camp one year ago before he and the team were able to agree on a new two-year pact. And just this past July, Andrew Copp went through a seven-hour arbitration hearing that ultimately resulted in the left winger getting a two-year deal worth \$2.28 million annually. He, perhaps as well as anyone, understands players sometimes



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have to take hard action in pursuit of what they feel are their best interests.

"I don't think there's any resentment whatsoever," Copp said in reference to Connor and Laine being absent from the squad. "Everyone has their own reasons for what they're doing. I went to arbitration, so it's not like I'm (going to pass judgement).

"Guys are going to fight for what they believe in and what they think they deserve. I don't think it's a lack of loyalty by any means. It's a tough business and you don't want to (leave money) on the table. Hopefully, these guys get signed, but there's zero resentment for those guys in the room."

It's hard to know exactly what the feeling is on the other side of the fence, though Laine and Connor are certainly in touch with their teammates. It's just that those conversations don't necessarily delve directly into the biggest issue of the day. Morrissey said most of the back and forth he had with the two players over the summer revolved around the state of everybody's golf game. Ehlers, who is quite close with Laine, actively avoids the subject of new contracts, but is pretty sure he knows where his buddy's head is at.

"He wants to play," Ehlers said. "Kyle as well. I've talked to both. I haven't talked to them about the situation because that's not something I feel I have a right (to ask them about). It's between them and the bosses. I know they want to get back and play some hockey, that's what we (as players) want, that's what we work for all summer. So sitting at home right now is probably not the most fun for them."

How long that will stay the case remains to be seen. Morrissey — who acknowledged his ordeal last September was extremely tough — noted the hockey calendar has these designated pressure points for transactions sprinkled throughout. Whether it's the trade deadline in February, July 1 when guys hit the open market or a looming arbitration date, players and teams often need a nudge to finally sort things out.

"Whenever there's a deadline on things, it seems to get stuff done," he said.

The next big one in Winnipeg hasn't landed yet, but it's only weeks away.

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Sportsnet.ca / Inside Duchene's decision to pick Predators over Canadiens, Blue Jackets

Chris Johnston

CHICAGO — Rewind back to the final days of June and Matt Duchene had his young family on quite the road trip. They visited Montreal and Nashville, and had just come from Columbus at the end of last season.

They were in search of the next place to call home.

As much as it had seemed fated for years that Duchene would join the Predators — where he ultimately signed a \$56-million, seven-year deal on July 1 — there was still some stress during the free-agent interview period.

This was an opportunity to tour facilities, speak with team officials and get a feel for the day-to-day lifestyle with boots on the ground. One last chance to scrutinize and prioritize before making a life-altering decision.

"I think it's important, it allows you to compare close up," Duchene told Sportsnet. "You get a taste; it's almost a sense, you get a feel of things. Both places had that for me.

"When I went in I could see myself wearing both uniforms."

So, before he ever pulled on a No. 95 sweater in eye-popping yellow at Bridgestone Arena, he had to first visualize what it might be like to wear the bleu, blanc et rouge.

There's only so much detail Duchene can share publicly about what that experience was like, but he doesn't shy away from the fact Montreal held serious appeal. The grandparents on his father's side lived near the Quebec border in Northern Ontario while he was growing up and the entire family pulled for the Canadiens — at least until Patrick Roy was traded to Colorado in December 1995, and some allegiances strayed.

When Matt and his wife Ashley welcomed their son Beau in January, the first gift he bought him was a copy of Roch Carrier's famous book "The Hockey Sweater."

And if those sentimental ties weren't enough on their own, the Habs certainly gave him something to think about when he visited the city as well.

"French-Canadian background, and [GM Marc Bergevin] and [owner Geoff] Molson couldn't have been better when we went to Montreal," Duchene said during the recent NHL/NHLPA player media tour. "There was definitely something to be said for the history and the tradition they have there. It was pretty cool just to even talk to them, go to that rink, have them [involved].

"It was very humbling."

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

Ultimately, Duchene chose Nashville over Montreal and Columbus.

He's a known superfan of country music — the Predators gave him a guitar in addition to his sweater, when he was first introduced to the media there — but the main draw was a team the 28-year-old centre viewed as having some staying power.

Duchene traces his love affair with the city back to the 2016 all-star game and insists there was no grand plan at play during free agency. Yes, he already owned an investment property in Nashville, but that didn't guarantee he'd wind up there.

"I never planned ever to end up in Nashville," he said. "It was one of those things where it was like, 'If it happens, it would be amazing' and I knew that there was common interests, for sure. And, yeah, there was rumours way back two years before I ended up getting traded [by the Avalanche] about me ending up there."

Another big thing working in Nashville's favour was how comfortable he felt there. The laid-back lifestyle reminds him of how things were in Haliburton, Ont., when he was a kid.

"I know it's the south, but I always tell people down there: Small-town Canada, it's the same thing," said Duchene. "There's obviously some little differences — maybe the accents are a little different, we say 'eh' they say 'y'all,' but it's very, very similar."

He arrives at a good moment in his life.

Somewhat incredibly, the third overall pick from 2009 is coming off his most productive NHL season with 31 goals and 70 points in the 73 games he split between Ottawa and Columbus last season. That's no small feat given the trade discussion and rumours that followed him in the early months of the regular season.



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It's also a far cry from how Duchene felt when he was dealt to the Senators from Colorado in November 2017 — a period he now looks back on as a down time. He says that former Ottawa coach Guy Boucher deserves a lot of credit for helping him dig out of it.

"I got there to Ottawa and I was fragile mentally," said Duchene. "I was playing really well at the start, but couldn't produce anything and we were losing. I was stressed, I was whatever. I've known Guy for a long time and he believes in me and believed in me. As a coach he believed in me a lot. He just let me kind of [go]. He just kept putting me out there, he just kept saying good things, he kept supporting me. Where I expected maybe to be beaten down a little bit or whatever, he didn't do that.

"Then all of a sudden it was like, 'OK, I can just be me,' and I went out and started to play that way."

Now, he hopes to take another step again.

Duchene believes there is still more in him to give and that played into the free-agent decision as well. He wanted to land with an organization where he could enjoy his best years.

"I'm a pretty decisive person, I'm pretty focused. I know kind of what I want," said Duchene. "There was kind of a few teams that my wife and I saw us going to and I think Nashville definitely was the front-runner. At the end of the day that's what made the most sense for us and that's where I think our hearts were.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Wolf triumphant in first chance to prove hockey world wrong

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis September 11, 2019, 12:42 AM

CALGARY — On this night there were no tears of joy and no family members to embrace.

Yet, you best believe the feel-good story of the Calgary Flames' 2019 draft was relieved his debut in red and gold ended triumphantly.

Two-and-a-half months after weeping in his mother's arms after being the fourth-last pick — 214th overall — of the NHL Entry Draft in Vancouver, Dustin Wolf played it cool after getting his first chance to start proving the hockey world wrong.

Okay, it was a prospects game. No big deal in the grand scheme of things, but a proud night for a kid who was almost perfect in his debut.

"It's only a rookie game, but you just want to get the first one under your belt," said the 18-year-old goaltender following a 3-1 win over the Oilers' hopefuls at the Saddledome.

"You want a little more shots, but whatever it takes to win is what you are trying to do. For me, it's just another hockey game. It's good the way it came out. Unfortunate there was one bad bounce there, but I thought I played pretty well."

Wolf led the Western Hockey League in his first full year as a starter last season with a sparkling .936 save percentage, not to mention a 1.69 goals-against average and 41-15-2 record one might think would have prompted an NHL squad to pluck him earlier than the seventh round.

If not for a frame generously listed at six-feet tall, the 165-pound teen would most certainly have gone sooner.

Alas, like so many undersized forwards making their way in today's NHL, the onus is on him to prove he can overcome the stigma of being well under the NHL goalie standard of roughly six-foot-three or more.

"Yeah, obviously teams want six-foot-three goalies now, so you're trying to be as positionally sound as you can, and you've got to make up for your height with being athletic and being able to sprawl across the net to make saves you probably shouldn't," said the Everett Silvertips star, a California native who could very well backstop the U.S. at the World Juniors this Christmas.

"I've been watching (five-foot-11 Nashville backup) Juuse Saros the last few years and he's a testament to the fact it's not how tall you are as long as you do your job. Being a shorter guy I try to replicate what he does and how he goes about his business."

Wolf didn't have a whole lot of business to tend to Tuesday in front of a surprisingly healthy Saddledome crowd that paid \$5 to charity to watch the Oilers and Flames prospects clash.

All told he faced just 19 shots in a game won 3-1 by a Flames squad powered by goals from Glenn Gawdin, Adam Ruzicka and an empty-netter from Matthew Phillips. The Oilers only goal came early in the third when Evan Bouchard's seeing-eye shot from the point eluded Wolf after being deflected in front.

None of Wolf's saves were of the spectacular variety, attesting to his positioning, which Stockton bench boss Cail MacLean had praised earlier in the day.

"Technically he's pretty strong — he's very good positionally," said MacLean, who has overseen the Flames prospects camp.

"His size doesn't overwhelm you but when you watch him play there's not a lot of room for shooters. From a player's perspective that can be frustrating because you feel there should be some room there. He understands the game and the geometry of it and he's very good at being efficient at getting to the right spot and taking those angles away."

Sitting seventh or so on the Flames' goalie depth chart, Wolf is clearly destined to return within a week to Everett, where the CHL's Scholastic Player of the Year has been a brilliant replacement for Flyers hotshot Carter Hart.

Between now and then the youngster is intent on soaking up a big-league experience that hasn't been marred by the incredible jump in intensity, skill and speed from the WHL.

"I talked to (Flames starter David) Rittich a bit," he smiled.

"I've been able to hang out with (Stockton goalie Tyler) Parsons and been rooming with Nick Schneider. It's pretty amazing being in a facility like this and around everything that is going on. You step into the locker room and it's first class — it's a lot different than junior hockey.

Everything is professional. Hopefully in a couple years I'll be back up here."

NOTES: The Flames outshot the Oilers 43-19 to win the second of two prospects games against the Oilers ... Phillips also scored Calgary's only goal in their 1-0 win Saturday in Red Deer ... The most dangerous line on the ice all night was Phillips, Gawdin and Jakob Pelletier, the Flames' first-round pick this summer ... Gawdin's goal came 36 seconds into the evening on the first shot of the game on Oilers starter Olivier Rodrigue ... Flames main camp opens Thursday with physicals.

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Sportsnet.ca / Three biggest questions facing Canucks entering training camp

Iain MacIntyre

Led by rookie-of-the-year Elias Pettersson, the Canucks did better than anyone expected last season, improving by eight points and losing Game 82 to finish one win below .500.

The team made a handful of key off-season acquisitions and has a legitimate chance to challenge for its first playoff spot in five seasons as the franchise celebrates 50 years in the National Hockey League.

Current cap space: \$4.16 million (25 players)

Get the best of our NHL coverage and exclusives delivered directly to your inbox!

Is there a place for Loui Eriksson – and his \$6-million cap hit?

Benning's biggest mistake as GM was signing Eriksson to a six-year, \$36-million contract three seasons ago. But only now, as Benning's Canucks face a cap crunch for the first time, is the contract potentially debilitating. Green healthy-scratched his most expensive player for one game last season, and Eriksson told the Swedish media at the world championships in May that he and his coach don't get along 100 per cent.

If Benning could trade Eriksson, he would have. The veteran's contract is buyout proof, so it's up to Green to find a place in his lineup for the 34-year-old or convince Benning it's worth sending Eriksson to the minors to save \$1.075-million against the cap.

Where art thou Brock?

In his first two-plus NHL seasons, Boeser has scored 59 times in 140 games, despite some serious injuries, and is already the Canucks' best finisher. But he is part of the NHL's great unsigned RFA class of 2019. Given Vancouver's needs and Boeser's desire to return to an ascending team rebuilt around players his age, the 22-year-old is still expected to agree to a lucrative new deal with the Canucks.

But what if he doesn't? And how does Benning do the salary-cap limbo if Boeser does sign? Until the sniper returns, everyone who takes a turn on Pettersson's right wing is auditioning to fill Boeser's spot.

Where do the new guys fit?

Benning's busy summer included acquiring power wingers J.T. Miller and Micheal Ferland, both potential 20-goal scorers, and signing defencemen Tyler Myers and Jordie Benn. The blue line will also feature super-prospect Quinn Hughes, who could follow Pettersson to the Calder Trophy winner's circle.

There are a pile of defence and forward combinations for Green to sort out, as well as a lot of new options for the power play. With 14 forwards on one-way NHL contracts, plus Pettersson and (we think) Boeser, there are going to be some losers by the end of training camp. Let the competition begin.

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TSN.CA / Sens aim to transition from embarrassment to genuine contender

Ian Mendes

Cold and rainy conditions Tuesday couldn't dampen the spirits of the Ottawa Senators players and coaches as they gathered for their first official team event of the 2019-20 season.

"I think this year there's a whole new mindset. It's a change for everybody," explained Brady Tkachuk, shortly before the rain opened up on the players' annual golf tournament. "This year has a different feel around it. It should be a lot of fun."

"I think everybody is kind of excited to see where everything will go," said Thomas Chabot. "I think last year at the end of the season we created a different identity and I think that's something we're going to bring to camp. Everybody is excited to be here and to get things going."

The current optimism around the club is in stark contrast to the situation that was on the golf course at this event last September when the club was also surrounded by a dark cloud – although it was a much more ominous shadow that hung over the team.

A year ago, the Senators were arguably the most intriguing NHL team at the start of training camp, as they were mired in a seemingly never-ending series of controversies during the summer of 2018. On the eve of the golf tournament in 2018, team owner Eugene Melnyk tried to alleviate the fears of the fan base, with a pre-recorded video that fell short of its intended mark.

And on the day of the 2018 golf tournament itself, Erik Karlsson showed up and declined to speak to the media, deftly avoiding dozens of cameras and reporters. The superstar defenceman was sporting a pair of bright teal golf shoes that would ultimately serve as a harbinger of his trade to San Jose 48 hours later. There were also questions swirling around the futures of pending free agents such as Mark Stone, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel. Craig Anderson had reportedly asked for a trade out of town as well.

Quite simply, the Senators were like a bad reality television show people couldn't stop watching.

But on Tuesday, the Senators had a different feel around them altogether.

There were no awkward videos from the owner. No superstar players potentially on the trade block. And no testy and terse moments with the media.

"It's a different vibe for sure. A little less turmoil, a little less tumultuous times for us here in Ottawa," Mark Borowiecki said.

"Last year was a tough year with all the 'Who knows who's going to be back?' and 'Is he going to get traded?' or 'Is he going to be signed?'" added Chabot. "Now that it's over, we've all moved on from that. We've got some new players cracking up the lineup and it's just exciting."

The toxicity in Ottawa has been replaced by an aura of cautious optimism, as the Senators try and make the difficult transition from an embarrassment – to an organization with an embarrassment of riches.

"I think if the players step up to the plate, we can surprise some people. I think the worst is behind us. I've said that many times," said general manager Pierre Dorion, who hired former Toronto Maple Leafs assistant D.J. Smith as his new head coach in May after the firing of Guy Boucher in March. "We've had some ups and some downs but with the new players that we've brought in we've got a new enthusiasm around this group."

Dorion believes worst is behind Senators



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Pierre Dorion says that he is feeling positive with the new players and coaching staff coming into camp. The Sens GM believes that the worst is behind them, and if the players step up to the plate, they can surprise some teams. Dorion also confirms that there will be no captain this season, and that it will be a big camp with three teams taking part.

The Senators are loaded with young talent with the likes of Tkachuk, Chabot and Colin White leading the way. The club is optimistic that Alex Formenton and Drake Batherson will take the next step forward and become productive NHL forwards this season. Erik Brannstrom will be given every opportunity to make this club in training camp, as the organization is eager to show off their return for Mark Stone. Other young stars like Logan Brown, Christian Wolanin and Josh Norris could also leave their fingerprints on this team this season.

Pre-season 7: Is Colin White the answer to Sens' thin middle?

With the Sens looking thin up the middle entering the new season, will Colin White be able to step up to the plate? Who will become Thomas Chabot's new right hand man? How many rookies could crack the roster? TSN Senators reporter Brent Wallace joins Gino Reda to discuss in the latest edition of the Pre-season 7.

Coupled with the fact the Senators have two first-round picks in the upcoming 2020 NHL Draft – their own and San Jose's via the Karlsson trade – many people are convinced the Senators have the necessary pieces to be a contender down the road.

But after consecutive seasons in which they've finished 30th and 31st respectively in the overall standings, most experts are also picking the Senators to finish in that same part of the standings in 2019-20. And for the players, it's a potential rallying cry inside the dressing room that the hockey world is dismissing them as a potential playoff team in 2020.

"Play with a chip on your shoulder – you'd be stupid not to," Borowiecki said about his team's playoff chances. "There's no expectations on this group, so why play tight, why play scared and timid? Just go out and play.

"Look what Carolina did last year. Nobody expected that," said White. "There are a lot of teams that weren't expected to do well that came out hot and had good years. I think it's something we want to do this year."

Sens Ice Chips: Who will play alongside Chabot?

As training camps start to take shape, the biggest question in Ottawa is which one of the former Maple Leafs' defencemen will start alongside Thomas Chabot. Brent Wallace has more.

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USA TODAY / Capitals star Alex Ovechkin plays grocer for a day to promote pending release of his cereal brand

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY Published 10:31 p.m. ET Sept. 10, 2019 | Updated 10:58 p.m. ET Sept. 10, 2019

Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin is best known for skating down the ice at breakneck speed, checking opponents and one-timing shots past helpless goalies.

He can add temporary supermarket employee to that list.

Ovechkin will have a limited-release cereal brand coming out next week, so he took up shop at an area Giant Food

supermarket Tuesday to tout Ovi O's as part of a promotional tour.

His job included stocking shelves with the cereal, which will hit real shelves on Sept. 17, and working the checkout aisle as surprised shoppers and local media recorded him and his impish style of humor.

As a stock person, he did well, though he did knock some of the competition out of the way like a true hockey player.

Stocking the shelves in aisle 8. He accidentally knocked a few other boxes off the shelf pic.twitter.com/xC2Ez3jArh

— JJ Regan (@JJReganNBCS) September 10, 2019

Still sporting the nicks and scrapes from a recent bike fall, he made his way to the checkout aisle and worked as a cashier.

He carded someone who was buying beer and made an announcement over the PA system about where to buy his cereal, but the \$10 million player also took a while to make change for a customer.

Ovechkin is carding this guy pic.twitter.com/dJz0JMeQvZ

— JJ Regan (@JJReganNBCS) September 10, 2019

Oh no, who gave Ovi a microphone pic.twitter.com/QgjGTTQdu

— RMNB (@russianmachine) September 10, 2019

Someone please help Ovi figure out how to make change pic.twitter.com/qqMVIgmYk8

— elizabeth (@of_ek) September 10, 2019

Ovechkin's wife, Nastya Shubskaya, also bought groceries at his aisle and he paid for them with his credit card.

#Capitals Alex Ovechkin (@ovi8)

"see you at home"

After he rings up AND PAYS for his wife's groceries at @GiantFood!!! @wusa9@WUSA9sports@Capitals pic.twitter.com/UkDWsqXsIT

— Darren M. Haynes (@DarrenMHaynes) September 10, 2019

The Capitals' training camp opens Friday.

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1107877 Websites

USA TODAY / Devils re-sign Pavel Zacha to 3-year, \$6.75 million contract

Abbey Mastracco, NHL writer Published 1:15 p.m. ET Sept. 10, 2019 | Updated 6:26 p.m. ET Sept. 10, 2019

Pavel Zacha is staying in the NHL. The New Jersey Devils resigned the restricted free agent to a three-year, \$6.75 million contract Tuesday, one day after Zacha threatened to sign with the KHL.

The backloaded contract carries an AAV of \$2.25 million. New Jersey will pay Zacha \$1.75 million this season, \$2 million next season and \$3 million in 2021-22. The Devils have \$4.67 million in salary cap space remaining this season.



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"We are happy to have finalized this three-year agreement as Pavel is an important part of our team," general manager Ray Shero said in a statement. "He has established himself as someone who can play in any situation and we are looking forward to his continued growth as a player."

Monday morning, a report surfaced saying the 22-year-old center had come to terms with Avangard Omsk of the KHL. However, the contract was never signed and the team never confirmed the report. Messages to Zacha and his agent, Patrik Stefan, were not returned.

Feb 9, 2019; Newark, NJ, USA; New Jersey Devils center Pavel Zacha (37) skates with the puck during the second period against the Minnesota Wild at Prudential Center.

Shero accused Stefan of posturing with a KHL deal in an expletive-laced interview with reporters in Buffalo at the Sabres Prospect Challenge tournament. Shero said going to the KHL was an ill-advised move and he essentially didn't care where Zacha ended up.

The Devils drafted Zacha with the sixth overall pick in the 2015 draft after a standout junior career with Sarnia of the Ontario Hockey League. The Brno, Czech Republic native has 29 goals and 47 assists (76 points) in 201 NHL games.

There have been questions about Zacha's consistency at times and he was even demoted to the American Hockey League briefly last season. He struggled to put together a solid two-way game, focusing more on his defense and failing to create as much as he was projected to on the offensive end.

However, last season he scored a career-high 13 goals and tied his career-best mark with 25 points. He played in all situations as well as up and down the lineup. Zacha heeded the coaching staff's advice and used his shot to create offense and his speed and size (6-foot-3) proved to be an asset.

The Devils are deep up the middle with Nico Hischier, Jack Hughes and Travis Zajac. Zacha may have to move to out to the wing or compete with Kevin Rooney for the fourth-line center position when training camp opens later this week.

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YAHOO SPORTS / Brett Ritchie ready to bring a little more brute force to the Bruins

Joe Haggerty

Brett Ritchie might just be exactly what the Bruins were looking for last season.

The 6-foot-3, 220-pounder isn't going to be a 30-goal scorer, of course, and it's still very much in question whether he'd be able to consistently handle the top-6 right wing spot where the Bruins have a big opening headed into this year.

But Ritchie is going to bring added size, strength and toughness as a 26-year-old forward that just a couple of seasons ago scored 16 goals for the Dallas Stars. He's brawled with big, bad skaters like Colton Parayko and Tom Wilson and he very clearly brings the kind of size/strength combo that the Bruins just haven't done a good job of developing among their forwards.

Ritchie was excited to sign with the Bruins in free agency on July 1 because he believes that his rough and tumble game will

translate into exactly what's traditionally been the Black and Gold style over the years.

"There's definitely a size and strength aspect that's still there in the league even though it's getting faster," said Ritchie. "It's more skilled, but you definitely need that presence. I think I'm a well-rounded guy but I can definitely bring that physical side. St. Louis was in our division and I've played against those big and physical teams for my entire career."

Moore (shoulder) to miss start of training camp

"You grow seeing and thinking of the Big, Bad Bruins and [Boston] is a bigger market than I'm used to in Dallas. The winning culture [of the Bruins] is the feel you get playing against them all the time, so it's definitely exciting."

Sure, the Bruins still have Zdeno Chara, Kevan Miller and David Backes on their roster for size, strength and toughness, but those players absolutely needed more help, particularly among the forward group. The lack of true size, strength and NHL nastiness was on display in the Stanley Cup Final when the B's were pushed around by the St. Louis Blues, and ultimately wore down against the Blues over the course of a long, physical seven-game playoff series.

The brute physicality is something Bruins fans clearly didn't get enough of last season as attested to by the 29 percent of Bruins fans in the 2019 New England Sports Survey that thought the B's needed bigger, stronger and tougher players on their roster. Hopefully Ritchie can help in that area a bit and perhaps Trent Frederic as well if the physical bottom-6 center can stick with the Bruins this season after getting a cup of coffee, and his first NHL fight, at the NHL level last season.

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YAHOO SPORTS / Brett Ritchie, Par Lindholm ready to compete for top spot with Bruins

NBC Sports Boston Staff

Brett Ritchie and Par Lindholm probably aren't names you've heard before, but they're ready to make a splash for the Boston Bruins this coming season.

Both Ritchie and Lindholm were able to meet their new teammates this week as they joined the Bruins for the team's annual charity golf tournament at The International. Among other things, the pair noted they're excited for a new opportunity in a city where hockey is idolized.

"It's a team that you look at and say, 'Wow, that would be cool to play with them,'" Ritchie told BostonBruins.com's Eric Russo. "I think it was an easy decision for me."

How Werenski's contract impacts McAvoy

Although the league is moving towards a faster, more skilled game, the 26-year-old noted that a physical presence is still needed to succeed in the NHL. With the departure of tough-guy Noel Acciari to the Florida Panthers, Ritchie's physical presence will be relied on more heavily in the coming months.

While Ritchie is a big-bodied physical player, Lindholm stressed that his defensive game is what sets him apart from other players when describing his on-ice presence. If you know the Bruins, you know that they heavily rely on their forwards to



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contribute to the defensive side of the game as much as they produce offensively.

"Solid, especially defensively," said Lindholm. "I think I have a lot of offense in me too. I haven't shown that the last year, but I think it's there and hopefully I make things happen this year."

Like fellow newbie Ritchie, Lindholm is also excited for a fresh start with an original six franchise.

"A winning team, a team that went to the Finals last year. It's a good team," said Lindholm. "A lot of players who have been around for a long time and know what they need to do to make things happen. I'm excited to be on this team."

Lindholm spent last season (his first full NHL season) split between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Winnipeg Jets, where he notched 13 points (one goal, 12 assists) through 65 games. Ritchie spent the past five seasons with the Dallas Stars organization, where he tallied 54 points (33 goals, 21 assists) in 241 games played. Both were acquired by Bruins general manager Don Sweeney the day NHL free agency opened on July 1.

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1107880 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / Charlie Coyle hopes for bigger role with Bruins during upcoming season

NBC Sports Boston Staff

Boston Bruins hometown hero Charlie Coyle is ready for his rather short summer away from hockey to be over.

The 27-year-old Weymouth, Mass. native is looking forward to the 2019-20 NHL season, and he's set some pretty high standards for himself heading into the upcoming year. Coyle noted that he would like to play a bigger role with the Bruins during the upcoming campaign in a recent interview with NHL Network's Brian Lawton on "NHL Tonight."

"I obviously want to be better for my team," Coyle told Lawton. "You know, the whole contract thing and being unrestricted coming up, yeah it's in the back of your mind and you want to play well but I want to be a better player for the team. I know we have a team that can make another run and I want to be a bigger part than what I was last year and I want to do that right from the start."

"So I'm really looking forward to playing with this team right from the getgo, right from the season start rather than coming in halfway through," said Coyle. "Like I said, we have the team to do something again and I want to be a bigger part of that and make sure I'm doing the right things for the team."

How Wrenski's contract impacts McAvoy

Considering he wants to make a splash with the Bruins this coming season, Coyle needed to put in extra training this summer, and he did just that.

"I took a few weeks off, and then slowly got back in the gym," Coyle said. "You know, obviously you go through body work and make sure you're working properly and fix any aches and pains. Get into the weights and getting stronger, the usual stuff and a few weeks after that I got on the ice mid-July and you start to crank it up a little bit and, you know, make sure you're prepared and work on some things that you need to work on in your game to become a better player this year."

Through 21 games with Boston last season, Coyle tallied two goals and four assists for six points while exploding in the playoffs, tallying 16 points (nine goals and seven assists) through 24 games. With an open roster spot on David Krejci's right wing, the veteran very well could get a shot to prove himself as a top-six forward and see increased ice time before he becomes an unrestricted free agent at the close of the season.

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YAHOO SPORTS / Wrenski contract a pretty obvious blueprint for getting McAvoy deal done

Joe Haggerty

For most of the summer, the talk has been that Bruins restricted free-agent defenseman Charlie McAvoy was looking for a long-term team with the B's on his second contract. Certainly, it was encouraging from the perspective that McAvoy, 21, wants to remain in Boston for a long, long time and loves being a member of the Bruins.

The former Boston University standout said as much at Bruins breakup day back in the middle of June.

"I don't want to go anywhere. [Boston] is the best place on earth," said McAvoy back in June. "This is home for me now. I live here in the summer. I love it here. I want to be here forever."

Bergeron's groin injury still lingering with camp just days away

But there was also a common-sense belief that a shorter bridge deal would make a lot more sense for both sides. After all, McAvoy has missed almost 50 games with injuries and health issues in his first two NHL seasons and really hasn't put together the kind of dominant season that precedes a monster, maximum-term contract, particularly for a player coming out of his entry-level deal.

McAvoy certainly appears on track to be a No. 1 defenseman and has averaged seven goals and 30 points his two NHL seasons. He kicked it up a notch in the run to the Stanley Cup Final when he averaged 24:30 of ice time and posted two goals and eight points in his 23 playoff games. But the Bruins admittedly would like to see McAvoy put together a healthy, strong and consistent season before they shell out the huge term and megabucks similar to the eight-year, \$60 million contract Aaron Ekblad signed with the Florida Panthers.

Bruins President Cam Neely said as much in his sit-down with NBC Sports Boston this summer when asked about McAvoy.

"You look at a player that's had some health issues two years in a row at a young age," said Neely to NBC Sports Boston, referencing McAvoy. "You look at that and say 'Okay, is that going to stay the same or is it just bad luck?' We all can see what Charlie is capable of doing. You'd like to see a bigger sample size, obviously. Since the cap has come into effect we've all seen deals that have been signed where three years down the road you say it's not as good as you anticipated it would be."

"Charlie has had three playoff years and two full seasons where he hasn't been healthy. A lot of times obviously that's not his fault, but it's nice to have a better sample size of where a player is going to go. You see the skill set that [McAvoy] has. We want both Charlie and Brandon [Carlo] to be Bruins for their whole career, but we also have to do what's right for the organization."



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Similarly from McAvoy's perspective, if he were to take a two-to-three-year deal for \$5 million to \$6 million per season now then he'd set himself up for a massive payday a couple of years down the line provided he plays up to his major talent.

As camp looms, so does Game 7 to Bruins

Enter the three-year, \$15 million contract signed by Zach Werenski and the Columbus Blue Jackets this week that's exactly the kind of bridge deal envisioned for McAvoy and the Bruins. Werenski, 22, has averaged 13 goals and 42 points in his first three NHL seasons, has missed just nine games in those three seasons and played in all 82 games last season while averaging 22:54 of ice time.

On paper, Werenski has done a ton more than McAvoy to this point in his career and stayed healthy while doing it for Columbus. Werenski is an obvious, direct comparable contract to McAvoy and Flyers RFA Ivan Provorov and should set up the template for both of those contracts to be in a very similar neighborhood when they are finally signed. McAvoy may want a six-to-eight-year contract and perhaps someday he'll get it once he's played like a franchise defenseman for an extended period.

Still, the precedent has now been set this fall and now it's up to McAvoy to sign for fair market value without missing too much training camp. The longer he holds out for something that simply isn't there will become a problem for the player and the team.

Don Sweeney was asked about it at the Prospects Challenge tournament in Buffalo and referenced that the Werenski deal is going to have an impact on the McAvoy talks.

"I haven't checked my phone since you and I started talking, I think the deal just came down," Sweeney said Tuesday afternoon in Buffalo to a group of reporters. "Every deal allows things to continue to take shape. We'll be in touch, as we have been, with Charlie and Charlie's group, as well as Brandon's group."

It's the way of the Bruins. Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak all took market value, or a little less, in order to set up Boston's salary cap structure for years to come. Now, it's up to McAvoy to come to terms with the way the restricted free-agent market is playing out and get a bridge deal done with both sides that could lead everybody involved to greatness in the near future.

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1107882 Websites

YAHOO SPORTS / Morgan Frost showing his hands, Chuck Fletcher praises Egor Zamula, more on Flyers rookie camp

Jordan Hall

VOORHEES, N.J. - The games are about to begin.

Day 4 of Flyers rookie camp wrapped up Tuesday, setting the stage for Wednesday's prospects game at PPL Center in Allentown, Pennsylvania, against the Islanders.

Let's get into our latest five observations:

1. Chill in the air

Morgan Frost will be fun to watch Wednesday night and throughout the preseason.

When the 20-year-old center has time and space, he's super dangerous. But even when he's in tight and around the net, his

hands are so impressive. He's brisk, instinctual and accurate, and it will be fascinating to see how quickly those strengths translate at the pro level.

In camp, he has centered two of the Flyers' other top prospects Joel Farabee and Isaac Ratcliffe. The trio's chemistry looks natural and don't be surprised to see that line in the rookie game.

"It should be awesome," Farabee said. "Playing with some really elite guys in our group here."

Joel Farabee and Morgan Frost, impressive defensively and offensively. pic.twitter.com/uqZhVhMXxy

— Jordan Hall (@JHallNBCS) September 10, 2019

Good combo: Isaac Ratcliffe and Morgan Frost. pic.twitter.com/jOkjS8y1aI

— Jordan Hall (@JHallNBCS) September 10, 2019

2. Don't ignore Egor

When general manager Chuck Fletcher was asked if any prospect has jumped out at him during camp, he mentioned Egor Zamula.

The 6-foot-3, 172-pound defenseman continues to turn heads with his progress.

The one guy, to me, that just keeps getting better every day is Zamula. He's an impressive young man. He has another year of junior, so he's not a candidate to make our team this year in Philadelphia. But I saw him last year play junior, watched him play in training camp with the Flyers last year and he just continues to get better and better. He has a tremendous package of size, skill and skating, and as he matures and gets stronger, he's going to be a pretty impressive player.

- Fletcher

Zamula (who said there's no Y needed in his first name) was an excellent discovery by Flyers amateur scout Mark Greig (see story). The 19-year-old went undrafted last summer, was invited to 2018 Flyers training camp and earned an entry-level contract.

He is no longer a raw prospect as he skates smoothly, covers ground and possesses great reach. The lefty shot scored 56 points over 61 regular-season games in 2018-19 with the WHL's Calgary Hitmen.

"Coming in here, he looks really comfortable," AHL affiliate Lehigh Valley head coach Scott Gordon said. "Obviously it's a nice find."

3. 'The best way to evaluate players'

A rookie game is a lot different from a preseason game.

However ...

"A lot of these kids are coming in, they want to make an impression and games are the best way to evaluate players," Fletcher said.

The Flyers' GM has been pleased with the showing in camp.

"It's been great for Scott to start to work with them on some of the habits and things that we want our players in Lehigh to do this year," Fletcher said.

This is a talented rookie camp considering it features seven players with a shot at winning a season-opening roster spot on the big club.

4. On the Laberge of more?

The Phantoms will be loaded with experienced and young forwards in 2019-20.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 11, 2019

One of those forwards to keep an eye on is Pascal Laberge.

The 2016 second-round pick has battled injuries throughout his early career, but in the 15 games he did play last season with Lehigh Valley, he scored five goals.

There's some offensive potential in the 21-year-old's game.

Pascal Laberge, top shelf. pic.twitter.com/Z7ZnyJGuNr

— Jordan Hall (@JHallNBCS) September 10, 2019

5. The game

Gordon, who will coach the Flyers in the rookie game, said the team will dress 19 skaters and two goalies.

The Flyers will hold a morning skate from 10-11 a.m. at Skate Zone in Voorhees, New Jersey, so we'll know more than about the lineup.

The game is at 7 p.m. and will be broadcast on NBC Sports Philadelphia+ (no live stream).

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YAHOO SPORTS / 'Pretty important day' in Flyers' contract negotiations with Ivan Provorov, Travis Konecny

Jordan Hall

VOORHEES, N.J. - Flyers general manager Chuck Fletcher classified Tuesday as a "pretty important day" for the contract negotiations of Ivan Provorov and Travis Konecny.

Both restricted free agents remain unsigned with training camp set to begin Friday morning. At around 11 a.m., Fletcher said he expected to speak with the representation of both Provorov and Konecny on Tuesday.

"We're getting to a point where we need to see some progress if they're going to be here on Friday on the ice," Fletcher said.

How positive is he that deals can get done before camp opens?

"That's hard to say," Fletcher said. "I've been through so many of these. I've been in situations where you seem like you're a long way away and it comes together very quickly and then there are other times it seems like you're right there and you can't get to the finish line.

"So I don't think I'm positive or negative. I still think there's an opportunity to get both of these guys signed and in camp."

On Monday, Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski re-signed on a three-year, \$15 million contract. It was significant in a few ways. Firstly, the bridge deal for the 22-year-old Werenski opened some eyes. What will be the preference for Provorov's camp and the Flyers? We'll see. Secondly, Werenski's \$5 million average annual value should give both sides a much better idea of the market (see story).

You'd think a longer-term deal would be the goal for Provorov's agent Mark Gandler (see story). Has the 22-year-old already proven himself? Provorov has been handed the responsibilities of a No. 1 defenseman and hasn't missed a game over the past two seasons. Among all NHL blueliners during that span, he has played the 11th-most minutes per night (24:38), the ninth-most shorthanded minutes (449:51) and has scored the 18th-most goals (24).

Now that Werenski has a \$5 million AAV, Provorov's camp could shoot for \$6 million.

"I think we're open to either - shorter or longer with Ivan, just whatever makes sense," Fletcher said. "Werenski is a very good young defenseman and a very comparable player to Ivan, so it certainly sheds some light on where the market is. But we're not wed to a shorter-term deal. If something makes sense in a long-term deal, we'll explore that."

Konecny, an important 22-year-old forward, is coming off back-to-back 24-goal seasons and has 30-goal potential. His role will continue to grow in 2019-20. Proving himself over a bridge deal might make the most sense for Konecny and could lead to a larger payday down the road (see story).

Tuesday was an important day. Friday is a big one, too, and quickly approaching.

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