



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Observations from Hurricanes' 4-1 preseason win at Tampa Bay

By Chip Alexander

Quick observations from the Carolina Hurricanes' 4-1 win at Tampa Bay on Tuesday in the first preseason game for both teams.

Rod Brind'Amour is 1-0 as a head coach. OK, unofficial, a preseason game, doesn't count, yada, yada. But 1-0.

Andrei Svechnikov now has played against NHL competition, gotten his first good taste of what's to come.

The Russian forward, the Canes' first-round draft pick this year, has the power and showed off some speed. He scored a power-play goal in the third period and earned an assist on Lucas Wallmark's power-play score in the first. The kid's on his way.

"I thought he got better as the game went on," Brind'Amour said. "It looked like he was getting more confidence as the game went on."

Brind'Amour wanted a good first game from Petr Mrazek and got it. The goalie was quick on his skates and sharp on his angles in playing a little more than half the game, stopping all nine shots before Alex Nedeljkovic took over in net.

"It wasn't the saves he made, it was the other stuff for me," Brind'Amour said. "He looked real confident in playing the puck."

It will be Scott Darling's turn Wednesday against the Lightning at PNC Arena, but Mrazek saw a lot of Tampa Bay's best players.

Brind'Amour has a lot of skating early in camp and it showed Tuesday. The Canes appeared to have their legs from the start and had more jump than the Lightning, getting in quickly on the forecheck and beating the Bolts to a lot of pucks.

Brind'Amour said before the game he was looking for a high "compete level." He got it, and from a young lineup. The only lapse: a third-period power-play score by Tampa Bay.

"It was great. The guys played really hard. That was the key," Brind'Amour said afterward. "Great start to finish. We didn't really have a lull. Everyone contributed, which was great, too."

Who would have thought the Canes' first goal, preseason or otherwise, would be scored by Michal Cajkovsky?

The defenseman has been in training camp on a professional tryout offer, having earned the PTO opportunity with some solid play in the KHL and for Slovakia's national team in the Olympics and 2018 World Championship.

Cajkovsky scored in the first period on a shot from the left circle and had a few more looks, not hesitating to take his shots. He did have two third-period penalties.

Net-front presence? It's been a spotty thing for the Canes the past few years but was constant Tuesday. Valentin Zykov, hard to dislodge in front, got the Canes' third goal with a tip off a Patrick Brown shot.

It's going to continue to be tough competition on the back end during camp as the top six are sorted out. Haydn Fleury, a rookie last season, is slimmer, quicker and played with confidence Tuesday.

Carolina Hurricanes hosting Hurricane Florence Relief Drive

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

The Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday began accepting items donated to a Hurricane Florence Relief Drive.

Anyone donating items to the drive will receive vouchers for two tickets to either the Canes' Sept. 19 preseason game against Tampa Bay or the Sept. 21 game against Washington. The Hurricanes also announced Tuesday that they will offer a limited number of \$40 lower-level tickets to two regular-season games -- Oct. 7 against the New York Rangers and Oct. 9 against Vancouver -- with proceeds benefiting the State of North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

Items, to be accepted at the PNC Arena box office, include: Gift cards to national big box stores (Walmart, Target, etc.); baby items, including diapers, wipes, etc.; non-perishable dry goods and canned goods; cleaning supplies including bleach, Lysol, Clorox wipes; hygiene products including

soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, floss, feminine products, deodorant; paper towels, tissues, toilet paper; pet supplies, including dog and cat food; new pillows, sheets and towels; and plastic storage bins. No clothing will be accepted.

Hurricane Florence Relief Drive item donations will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday.

Hurricanes players will assist with the collection of items from 5:45-7 p.m. on Wednesday and from 6:15-7:30 p.m. on Friday. Owner Tom Dundon will also assist with the collection on Wednesday.

Anyone wanting to make financial contributions may contribute directly to the State of North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, a partner of the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation, is also accepting financial donations for those affected by Hurricane Florence.



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Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho wants to have a 100-point season - but not all for himself

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Sebastian Aho of the Carolina Hurricanes wants 100 or more points this season, which is ambitious and probably not what you think.

It's not 100 points for Aho, as in goals and assists. It's 100 points for the Hurricanes, a team left out of the Stanley Cup playoffs the last nine years.

"That's my No. 1 goal," Aho said in an interview at training camp. "I want our team to win more. I don't want to be that team that tries to get that last playoff spot. I want our team to be a team that's in the last four and has over 100 points."

Last season, the Vegas Golden Knights put together a team not entirely of castoffs but from an expansion draft and reached the Stanley Cup final before losing to the Washington Capitals. In their first year of existence, the Golden Knights finished with 109 points, winning the Western Conference championship.

"Anything can happen," Aho said. "And we're better than we were last year. We just have to trust ourselves and work hard."

The Hurricanes start the preseason Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. at Tampa. And having Rod Brind'Amour as head coach makes the Canes better, Aho said. Having one team captain, Justin Williams, makes it better.

And Aho wants to be better -- a lot better. The Finnish forward, in his first two years in the league, has gained a lot of admirers in the way he approaches the game, the way he plays it.

"I like Sebastian's tenacity, I like his attitude," Williams said. "I think he's a really good person and I think he genuinely wants to be the best player on this hockey team."

At 21, Aho may be close to being that, if not already the Canes' best. A year ago, he had team bests with 29 goals and 65 points, playing 78 games.

And consider this: Aho did not score in the first 15 games. He had 45 shots on net in those games and missed on all 45, then shot 18.7 percent the rest of the season.

As a rookie in 2016-17, Aho had a similar start, going the first 13 games and taking 26 shots before scoring his first NHL goal. It was his first season playing on North American rinks, with the tighter confines than European rinks, but he finished with 24 goals after making the adjustment.

"The first year I didn't play that well at first," Aho said. "I think I was trying to get used to the smaller rink and all that stuff."

"The second year I think I played all right. I had like 10 points but I just didn't score. I had lots of chances, so I knew it was coming. I was more confident about that. I was getting so many chances every game that I wasn't worried."

The Canes were 6-5-4 in the first 15 games and held to two or fewer goals in five of the losses. A few more goals, by Aho

and others, could have made for a better start for a team that finished with 83 points and a 36-35-11 record.

Brind'Amour, who handled the forwards as a Canes assistant under former coach Bill Peters, is a little at a loss to explain Aho's early goal-scoring droughts.

"I don't look at it as there was any one thing," Brind'Amour said. "We talked about that a lot the last couple of years, why he starts like that. I don't know there is a real reason."

"I don't want to waste a lot of time trying to figure that out. If he didn't come into camp in shape, I'd say that's why. But he does, so I'm not going to worry about that too much, and hopefully it doesn't become an issue."

Aho doesn't believe it will be. And like Brind'Amour, he said he would not overanalyze it.

"For sure, I just want to put the puck in the net earlier because it's easier to build some confidence," he said. "If you get 45 shots before you score your first goal that's not good, so so I'll just try harder. It's all about confidence, you know."

"But I'm really not thinking about that. I just want to be ready, try to find some connection with my line mates."

Brind'Amour isn't convinced Aho is best-suited to play center in the NHL -- not yet. But with center Victor Rask now sidelined indefinitely after hand surgery, that decision likely has been made: Aho will stay in the middle for now.

Many centers in the NHL are built along the lines of the Canes' Jordan Staal, who is 6-4 and 220 pounds. Aho is listed at 5-11 and 172 pounds, although he does play stronger than his size would suggest.

Aho has taken some hard knocks. He was carrying the puck through the offensive zone in a game last season when he was leveled by defenseman Mark Giordano of the Calgary Flames. He injured a knee and suffered a concussion on the play -- Giordano received a match penalty -- although missing just four games.

"Usually, a prototypical center is 6-3, 220, big guy, skates well," Williams said. "You need to have that arrogance, that being strong on the puck, the ability to win face-offs and the ability to be counted on. That's a big responsibility, playing center, and we'll see if he can handle it."

Aho has become one of the team's most recognizable, marketable players, one that owner Tom Dundon has said he'd like to sign to a long-term contract extension. Negotiations continue, and the Canes also would like to sign another Finn, forward Teuvo Teravainen, to a new deal.

The Hockey News recently released its list of the top 50 players in the league. Canada's Sportsnet put out a list of the top 100. Aho didn't make either.

Added motivation, perhaps?

"That's media. I've got nothing to say," Aho said.

Does he feel underrated as a player?



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"The media can write whatever," Aho said. "It doesn't affect me or my team. I just want to be a better hockey player. I want to be a better hockey player all around, not just score goals.

"I want to step up and take a bigger role for my team. I want more wins."



Hurricanes gameday notebook: Preseason an opportunity to meet some new players

By Adam Gold

The Carolina Hurricanes are headed to Tampa tonight to take on the Lightning at 7:30. Coverage starts with Alec Campbell and Storm Watch at 7:00 on 99.9 the Fan. The first five preseason games will all be on the radio, including Wednesday and Friday games at PNC Arena.

The Hurricanes are not exactly bringing a stacked line up to Amalie Arena for tonight's game. In fact, the team had to get permission from the league because they fell one "veteran" player short from rules regarding preseason line ups. Petr Mrazek will start in goal and is expected to play at least the first 30 minutes with Alex Nedeljkovic scheduled to take over from there.

Here are the lines and defensive pairings for tonight's game.

Zykov — Wallmark — Svechnikov

McGinn — Martinook — DiGiuseppe

Saarela — Bishop — Pu

Geekie — McKeegg — Brown

Fleury — van Riemsdyk

Bean — McKeown

Cajkovsky — Renouf

The Bolts are planning on starting most of their regulars tonight, so expect Steven Stamkos, Victor Hedman, Brayden Point, Nikita Kucherov, Ryan McDonagh, Andrei Vasilevsky and others pose a daunting challenge for a pretty inexperienced Hurricanes outfit.

With the Hurricanes in search of depth at the center position Jordan Martinook will move to the middle, where he did play a fair amount earlier in his career. After practice, he was among several centermen who was attending an impromptu "Face Off School" with guest lecturer head coach Rod Brind'Amour. The face off circle was a strength for the

Hurricanes last year, but with Rask's injury and the fact that Elias Lindholm and Derek Ryan are now taking draws in Calgary, the Canes could use the practice.

There are at least five forward spots up for grabs during training camp with maybe twice that many players feeling as though they have a chance to make the opening night roster. Even though the rosters appear to be lopsided in favor of the home team this will be a first impression for the likes of Valentin Zykov, Lucas Wallmark, Andrei Svechnikov, Jordan Martinook, Phil DiGiuseppe and Aleksii Saarela.

Granted, centers like Wallmark and Martinook (he's lining up at center tonight) have an inside track at a spot, but assuming Sebastian Aho stays in the middle, and Svechnikov and Martin Necas are locks for Opening Night (October 4 vs New York Islanders), there are just four spots unclaimed. Keep in mind that Janne Kuokkanen, who made last year's opening night roster, and Warren Foegele are each scheduled to play tomorrow and both are in the mix as well.

Be ready, Petr Mrazek. Not a lot of experience in front of you, so there figures to be a lot of rubber thrown your way by a high-powered Tampa line up. With that said, this is a really important training camp for 2016 first rounder Jake Bean. To be fair, regardless of what happens tonight and the rest of training camp, Bean needs a full season in the American Hockey League. But, he wasn't great for Canada in the World Juniors and his play was spotty earlier this month at the Traverse City prospect tournament.

van Riemsdyk and Fleury are the top pair tonight with Trevor having the inside track at the opening night line up. It would be an interesting discussion regarding what the organization should do with Fleury should the rest of the group stay healthy. Would he be better served playing heavy minutes in Charlotte than hanging out in the press box? So, just like his fellow 1st rounder Bean, this really becomes a big couple of weeks for the 7th overall pick in the 2014 draft.



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Recap: Canes Win Preseason Opener

Svechnikov, Wallmark tally two points each in 4-1 win

by Michael Smith

TAMPA - A young but hungry Carolina Hurricanes squad topped the Tampa Bay Lightning, 4-1, in their preseason opener.

Andrei Svechnikov and Lucas Wallmark each tallied two points nights (1g, 1a), helping the Canes best a more veteran Lightning group.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's preseason opener.

One

Sure, it's just preseason. But a win's a win, and the Hurricanes played a hard-working, aggressive game, very similar to what we've seen so far in training camp.

"We were talking before the game, saying if we really work hard and do what we've been talking about in the last couple of days, we're going to have a good game," Wallmark said.

"We did that from the start. We were skating a lot, and everyone worked really hard. I thought we were all over them. It was really fun to play."

"We had a good game and we won. That's the important thing," Svechnikov said.

"The guys played really hard. That was the key. Competitive from start to finish. It felt like we really didn't have a lull," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I thought everyone contributed, which was great, too."

And, hey, it's just preseason, but Brind'Amour is 1-0 behind the bench as head coach.

"It didn't really feel any different," he said. "It was fun. I get what this game really means in the big picture of things, but I'd rather it go that way than another way. We played hard, and that's what I was looking for."

Two

Svechnikov has a bright future ahead of him, and in tonight's preseason opener, he tallied the first of what will surely be many goals with the Hurricanes. On the power play in the third period, Wallmark worked the puck from the near wall to Phil Di Giuseppe in the slot. Di Giuseppe spun and hit Svechnikov in stride for the easy goal to give the Canes a 4-1 advantage.

"It was a great pass," Svechnikov said. "It feels good to score my first goal. It doesn't matter because it's an exhibition game, but it feels really good."

Svechnikov was a threat on the ice at numerous points tonight. In one specific five-second blip in the third period, he stripped a defender of the puck at the blue line, drew a penalty and nearly set up the Canes' fifth goal of the game.

"I thought he got better as the game went along,"

Brind'Amour said. "I started noticing him making plays, and he looked really good right at the end. He just looked like he was getting more confidence as the game went along. That's a good sign."

"Bigger guys and a more physical game, but that's my style of game. I like it," Svechnikov said. "Guys know where you're going, and I know where guys are going. In Traverse City, everyone is just running trying to hit you. Here, it's a smarter game."

Three

On the Canes' first power play of the preseason, Wallmark beat a leaning Andrei Vasilevskiy with a quick wrist shot to make it a 2-0 game in the first period. He added the secondary assist on Svechnikov's third period goal to finish the night with two points.

"The whole team was really good today," Wallmark said. "We created a lot."

Wallmark figured to be in the mix to play center for the Hurricanes this season. Now, with Victor Rask on the shelf indefinitely, perhaps the door is open a bit wider for the young Swede.

"We've got spots. We don't know. We need guys to step up and play. There are opportunities for players," Brind'Amour said. "I thought [Wallmark] was good tonight. He's got to keep that up. That's the key."

"I want to make the team," Wallmark said. "I have to show that and work hard out there every day. I felt I did that tonight. It was a step in the right direction for me."

Four

Another player competing for a spot with the big club is Valentin Zykov, who impressed in an abbreviated stint in Raleigh at the end of the 2017-18 season. With just under a minute left in the second period, Patrick Brown let go of a clapper from the point. Zykov had net-front presence and got a stick on the shot to make it a 3-0 game.

Then there's Michal Cajokovsky. He's with the Hurricanes in training camp on a professional tryout offer, but he made his presence known in the early going of the preseason opener. After having his initial shot blocked, defenseman Cajokovsky tossed a puck at the net through traffic that squibbed through Vasilevskiy to get the Canes on the board.

"This is what happens sometimes in preseason, right? You've got veteran guys who don't really want to play. They know they have 82 games that count. They've made the team. They're just getting through it," Brind'Amour said. "Then we've got how many guys who might not make the team, and they're trying to survive and prove that they



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deserve another day. That happens. ... I just like the effort we had."

Five

Petr Mrazek made nine saves on nine shots in just over 30 minutes of work before surrendering the net to Alex Nedeljkovic, who made seven saves on eight shots in the second half of the game.

"It wasn't the saves he made, for me; it was the other stuff. He just looked real confident in playing the puck. He did a nice job in a lot of the breakouts we had," Brind'Amour said of Mrazek. "For me, that's so huge. That's something we definitely need."

Preseason Gameday: Hurricanes at Lightning

by Michael Smith

It may just be the preseason, but the Carolina Hurricanes are back in action tonight in Tampa.

The Hurricanes kick off their six-game 2018 preseason schedule with a back-to-back, home-and-home set against the Lightning.

"I think everybody in this room is pretty excited. It's been a long summer," Brock McGinn said. "When you're just training, you feel like you're not playing for anything. Just to get out there and play in a game is a big jump for this team."

Among other debuts, tonight will mark Rod Brind'Amour's first game behind the bench as head coach of the Hurricanes.

"I think everybody wants to play well for him," McGinn said. "When he played, he battled. If we go out there and use the energy he'll bring on the bench, it will definitely benefit us."

What is the first-year head coach looking to take away from preseason game No. 1?

"I want to see, number one, that we're competitive on all pucks and a couple little things we've talked about all training camp. That's the number one focus," Brind'Amour said. "And then, again, we're looking for individuals to stand out a little bit. That's really, at the end of the day, what we need to find out: Who can play?"

Training camp is a step up from summer training, but preseason is another step up from that. After all, it's tough to replicate game action in the structured confines of a practice.

"You can't really simulate it," McGinn said. "So, it's just getting out there, getting into the play and getting hit every once in a while. When you get out and do that, it benefits the team, and everyone gets going."

The Canes will send a young group to Tampa, a lineup that features just a handful of NHL "veterans." Jordan Martinook, who has played in 247 games, is the most experienced of the group up front, while Trevor van Riemsdyk, who has 237 games under his belt, is the leader on the back-end.

Look for Scott Darling to play 30-40 minutes on Wednesday, as well.

Up Next

The Hurricanes will host the Tampa Bay Lightning on Wednesday night. Expect to see the Canes ice a more veteran lineup.

"It looked like some of the things we've been trying to do in the first four days of camp were actually, guys were getting it," Brind'Amour said. "There were times when it was a disaster, but that's what you expect. We'll just keep trying to get better."

"I'm sure it will be eye-opening for our guys, and the pace will be good," Brind'Amour said. "It will be nice to get one under our belt and get some clips of our guys so we can start teaching off of live stuff."

Andrei Svechnikov will make his Hurricanes preseason debut, skating on the right wing on a line with Valentin Zykov and Lucas Wallmark.

"I remember the nerves and everything. Hopefully he has a good start, but one way or another, how it goes, it's not going to be the be-all-end-all," Brind'Amour said of Svechnikov. "He's a young kid with a lot to learn. It's a process."

The team's second line, featuring Brock McGinn, Martinook and Phil Di Giuseppe should bring an element of physicality paired with the threat to score.

"I'll just go out there and play my game, not change up the way I play," McGinn said. "Just go out there and lead by example. I think that will really help out the young guys."

Petr Mrazek will make his first appearance for the Hurricanes in net. Alex Nedeljkovic will serve as the back-up and could see time in the crease, but that game plan is still to be determined.

"We need to get [Mrazek] going, so whatever he needs," Brind'Amour said.

Lineup

Zykov-Wallmark-Svechnikov
McGinn-Martinook-Di Giuseppe
Saarela-Bishop-Pu
Geekie-McKegg-Brown

Bean-McKeown
Fleury-van Riemsdyk
Cajkovsky-Renouf

Mrazek
Nedeljkovic



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Add the C to Your Williams Jersey for Free

New Canes captain will cover the cost through Opening Night

by Michael Smith

Justin Williams had the letter C sewn on his sweater. Now, get it sewn on your Williams jerseys, and the new captain of the Carolina Hurricanes will cover the cost.

From now through Opening Night on Oct. 4 (which also happens to be the veteran forward's 37th birthday), you can purchase a new Williams No. 14 jersey or bring a previously owned Williams jersey by The Eye and have a C sewn on the front for free, courtesy of Williams.

"I think one of the most important things that I'll take into this is to not change myself or be anybody that I'm not.

Leadership comes naturally and comes from years of watching other great leaders," Williams said after the captaincy announcement. "Certainly, my current coach is one of them. I'll be taking little things from his leadership and instilling them in mine. It's something I'm very humbled by and very proud of and something I don't take lightly."

As noted in the above image, both the C and A will be located on the right side of the Hurricanes' new third jersey.

The Eye is located on the south end of PNC Arena next to the box office. The team store is open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday and 12-4 p.m. on Saturday. Click here for more information.

TriangleSportsNetwork

Koutroumpis – What to expect from the Carolina Hurricanes this season

Many personnel changes bring a range of expectations

By Peter Koutroumpis

RALEIGH, N.C. – As Day 5 of training camp has arrived, and will be capped off by their first NHL exhibition contest of the season, the Carolina Hurricanes present myriad questions as to whether this will be the year.

The year to break the league's longest-running streak of missing the postseason – nine consecutive seasons to be exact.

This is not a narrative to dump on a team that has tried, tried, tried but has just not had enough to break through a barrier and past a line that other teams keep moving on them.

Just when it seems they've gotten better, others teams have too.

Or when the Hurricanes just needed to seize the moment to make their move in the standings, familiar issues swirled at the same time including multiple-player scoring droughts, questionable goaltending performances, injuries, or simply a perceived lack of toughness and grit in character to get the job done.

Of course, that is one way that skeptics, longtime fans included, will look at how this team's performance will turnout.

Trading away 29 percent of its offensive output, specifically goal production, from last season leaves many following Carolina once again shrugging their shoulders with hands in the air and simply saying, 'I don't know what to expect – let's wait and see'.

Then you have the eternal optimists who are more excited that such drastic changes, almost derived from a knee-jerk reaction to say 'we're changing things to change things', including making trades, altering the coaching staff, even front office staff, were made to let everyone take a deep breath and reset.

At least that's the thinking so far.

The buzz of seeing an overdose of images of the team's leading scorer Sebastian Aho on social media channels all summer, thrown in with the introduction of second overall draft pick Andrei Svechnikov and new besty, Martin Necas, the team's top pick in 2017, has many fans running to purchase new t-shirts, jerseys, and other gear to adorn the ice backdrop at PNC Arena.

As they should.

The promise of unrealized potential always brings eternal hope and optimism.

So, what happens tonight against the Tampa Bay Lightning in the first of six exhibition contests that first-year head coach Rod Brind'Amour has to assemble this team into a functioning group that will move the needle farther in Carolina than it has previously?

There are so many variables that will be in play, the most significant being a new coaching staff that is figuring out how to work together and leading a group of players who are trying to do the same.

Unity and the belief that "we are all in this together" has been Brind'Amour's rallying cry from Day 1.

During these early days of camp, the skating and hard reps put in, back-and-forth between the side boards and longer-length end lines, will hopefully make this a better conditioned



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team that will play with structure, but will be expected to read and react to situations.

In former head coach Bill Peters' overly-controlled system, the odds and percentages were often played and took away from individual players' abilities to make plays.

Not that Peters didn't want them to use their natural skill and talent to make a play, but eventually the negative reinforcement of coloring outside the lines eventually resulted in a loss of motivation that seemed to 'paralyze' numerous players.

What Brind'Amour notices and openly shares, is his read of the players' effort, particularly following a lackluster session.

"Guys are getting anxious now, they want to actually go play," he said on Monday.

"They're tired of systems and all the boring stuff, which I get and remember very well. It's not the most fun stuff to do. I think they're just anxious to get started playing."

From a structure point of view, you'll see puck movement on the breakout from D to D, up the boards into the neutral zone with an entry that will continue along the same side towards the corner until the opposing defense commits.

That is when the magic hopefully happens with a quick pivot away and a drop pass, or a feed cross-ice finds trailing

forwards flashing to the net for a low shot and rebounds that eventually end up in the net.

Sounds simple, right?

Well, it is, if it's done the right way with the talent that this team is working with.

The depth of that talent is debatable.

So much potential exists, that is the thinking at this time of year.

With captain Justin Williams leading, Brind'Amour likes the group's bonding off the ice.

"I really like what's goin' on with the group as a whole," he said.

"They're together – you really feel a positive vibe. I love walkin' through the room – a big change."

On the ice though, he's still waiting to see what will happen.

"I don't see it yet, but right now it doesn't really matter," he concluded.

"We'll start seeing stuff in games and start making more of an assessment that way."

As we all will.



Hurricanes' Svechnikov & His Potential Paths

By Tyler Leli

There is understandable optimism coming out of Raleigh as the Carolina Hurricanes prepare for the 2018-19 NHL season. Justin Williams was named team captain, ending an odd multi-captain situation between Jordan Staal and Justin Faulk. Rod Brind'Amour has transitioned from assistant to head coach, which helps to explain why Williams is now captain and assures that the team will play with the intensity that once got Rod banned from the Michigan State weight room for going too hard. Dougie Hamilton is new in town. Sebastian Aho is another year older, and should improve upon his impressive sophomore season.

Okay, you get it. The Hurricanes had a good offseason, and preseason preparations have been equally inspiring.

The Hurricanes does have one particular issue that they need to solve after this run of rosy news. That issue is what they should do this season with Andrei Svechnikov.

The Russian was drafted second overall in the 2018 NHL Entry Draft, led the Hurricanes with four points at the 2018 Traverse City Prospect Tournament, and has both a big frame and an impressive all-around skill set. But he is not an automatic guarantee to spend the entire season on the roster.

Here are the two options the Hurricanes possess in regards to Svechnikov, followed by a look at what route the organization should be expected to follow.

Path #1: Brief Showcase and a Return to OHL

There is no doubt that Svechnikov will suit up in at least nine regular-season games at the NHL level, but a tenth time suiting up would trigger his three-year entry-level contract. Svechnikov may be physically superior to the competition in the Ontario Hockey League, but it also might make sound financial sense to have him spend an extra year with the Barrie Colts regardless. Let's take a look back at the Hurricanes results in their first nine matches over the last four seasons to see why.

2017-18: 4-4-1

2016-17: 2-4-3

2015-16: 3-6-0

2014-15: 1-6-2

You can't win the Stanley Cup in October, but you can certainly play your way out of the playoff picture. The Hurricanes have been experts in doing this, and it is no secret why. The organization is locked out of its home for a



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minimum of ten days in mid-October every year due to the North Carolina State Fair, and the organization will see a run of four away matches in nine days from Oct. 13 to 22.

Carolina had a combined away record of 58-79-27 over the last four years. You may scream out that was during the Bill Peters era, and Brind'Amour is now in charge! There is genuine reason to be happy with the direction that the organization is heading in under Brind'Amour, but he is not a magic healer. There are multiple other reasons that lead one to think that the Hurricanes will struggle early in the season.

Victor Rask is out indefinitely after tearing tendons while slicing food in his kitchen, and reports are that he could be out for multiple months. That leaves Jordan Staal as the Hurricanes top center, and leaves little to salivate at behind him.

There is the prospect of moving Sebastian Aho from the wing to center, which Brind'Amour initially put the quash on after watching Peters try it out in 2017-18. Others want to throw in Lucas Wallmark or Martin Necas, but genuine Stanley Cup contenders typically have centers that are worth roughly 2.0 WAR. Neither player is going to be a well-above-average player in 2018, and the Canes depth up the middle should hurt them immediately.

There are also still massive doubts about what Scott Darling is going to provide this year, given that he was the worst starting goaltender in the NHL last season. Questions remain as to whether he can overcome the mental and physical barriers that Darling acknowledged held him back last year. To his credit, Darling has vowed to overcome his poor season and put in a lot of work over the summer, but workout warriors are not always stars on the ice. We should know very early whether or not Darling is going to be a liability for the Hurricanes again.

Carolina Hurricanes goalie Scott Darling (Tom Szczerbowski-USA TODAY Sports)

Why, you may ask, would it make any sense to deprive the Hurricanes of yet another talented player by sending Svcchnikov to the OHL? Well, the NHL is a business, and the biggest assets in that business are superstar players. Svechnikov will likely not be one in the 2018-19 season, and the Hurricanes are not going to be a competitor for the Stanley Cup.

So it may be most prudent to let him continue to play a full slate of games in the OHL, and to work on the nuances of the game that the win-now nature and lack of practice time in the NHL do not allow. Then, he can come back one year smarter, stronger, and more polished while contributing to a team that is ready to compete for a playoff spot.

Path #2: A Full Season in Raleigh

This is the path that fans would most like to see. Svechnikov is in camp with the big boys, and he just lit up the OHL with 40 goals and 32 assists in 44 games with the Barrie Colts. Both the goals and assists tallies led all rookies in the OHL, and one gets the impression that Svechnikov would learn most from practicing with and playing against grown men every day.

A deeper dive into his statistics proves that Svechnikov really was in a class of his own in the OHL. Among all players who participated in at least 10 OHL games, Svechnikov ranked tenth in the OHL in first-assists per 60 minutes, sixth in shot-percentage and points per game, and led the league in goals per game and primary points per game.

RALEIGH, NC – JUNE 30: Carolina Hurricanes Andrei Svechnikov (37) skates the puck up the ice during the Canes Prospect Game at the PNC Arena in Raleigh, NC on June 30, 2018. (Photo by Greg Thompson/Icon Sportswire via Getty Images)

As I noted before, Svechnikov just lit up the 2018 Traverse City Prospect Tournament. As THW's Stephen Ground wrote, "Svechnikov showed some of the skills that made him the second pick in the draft: size, speed, hockey IQ, and a tremendous shot."

If Aho does indeed make the switch to center, Svechnikov may very well end up as the Hurricanes top right-winger. Although he may not be there yet, Svechnikov has the potential to be a 40-goal per season contributor. NHL.com projected that he would tally 28 goals and 24 assists before Jeff Skinner was sent out of town, and the youngster has the talent to put up 30 goals this year.

Players who contribute 30 goals per season do not grow on trees. In fact, there were only 32 players who put that many pucks in the net in 2017-18, and none of them played for the Hurricanes. Brind'Amour specialized in the power play unit as an Assistant Coach, and it can be assured that he is going to utilize his newest asset well. If Svechnikov is not overwhelmed physically by the demands of the NHL, he will put up goals, and that is going to make him a hard player to ship out of Raleigh.

Why Not Ship Svechnikov Out to Charlotte?

You may be wondering what would happen if the Hurricanes decide that they want to send Svechnikov to the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League.

After all, there are many benefits of playing in the AHL as opposed to the OHL. Svechnikov would be working under the Hurricanes' coaches, allowing him to become immersed in the hockey philosophy that Brind'Amour is bringing to Carolina. He would also be under the direct supervision of the Hurricanes' strength and conditioning team, and playing a full schedule against grown men has proven to be good for the development of many young players.

Unfortunately, there is an agreement between Canadian Hockey League organizations and NHL teams that age 18 and 19 players that do not make the big club will be sent to their CHL clubs rather than to the AHL.

That agreement does not apply to players who were taken in the CHL Import Draft from an organization in Europe. This loophole has allowed European-born players such as the Boston Bruins' David Pastrnak, the Toronto Maple Leafs' William Nylander, and the Colorado Avalanche's Mikko Rantanen to split time between the AHL and NHL as 18-year-olds.

Unfortunately, again for the Hurricanes, Svechnikov was with the Muskegon Lumberjacks of the United States Hockey



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League when he was taken number one in the 2017 CHL Import Draft. Therefore, he will not be allowed to play in the AHL until the age of 20.

Final Thoughts

The Hurricanes will almost surely allow Svechnikov to play in the nine games that are allowed before they have to make a decision on whether or not to send him to the OHL. If Carolina does not decide after the ten game mark that they want to send Svechnikov back north, they will need to be cognizant of the 40-game mark.

Upon playing in a 40th game, prospects accrue a year of service and are thus one year closer to the seven years that must be accrued before a player can enter unrestricted free agent.

Based on all that we have seen thus far, the benchmarks that I have mentioned will be irrelevant because Svechnikov will be staying in Carolina for the full 82-game schedule. The Hurricanes need to win now in order to get fans back in the stands, give owner Tom Dundon a boost of confidence in the Carolina market, and allow Brind'Amour to fulfill his potential as a head coach. Having Svechnikov in the lineup gives the organization its best chance to accomplish these goals.



Hurricanes Off and Running with 4-1 Win in Preseason Opener

Svechnikov doesn't disappoint, neither do Canes in return to Hockey Season

By Andy House

For most looking in on the preseason opener, the main attraction of Tuesday night's game was the first NHL-level appearance from second overall draft pick Andrei Svechnikov, who is expected to break camp with the Canes and be a critical piece in enhancing what has been a stale offensive club for a number of years. Canes fans were not disappointed in the team, or in Svechnikov, as he produced a goal and an assist in his NHL preseason debut as the Hurricanes toppled the Tampa Bay Lightning by a 4-1 score.

The Canes were able to get the season going in style as Michal Cajkovsky, in camp on a tryout basis, slipped one through traffic and past Andrei Vasilevskiy just over four minutes into the game. Later in the period, which was mostly controlled by the Canes, Lucas Wallmark, who my colleague Brett Finger noted faces a big opportunity with the recent Victor Rask injury, put home a power play tally on a wrist from the left circle. Svechnikov tallied his first point with a secondary assist.

Both teams traded Power Plays in the early going of the second period, with neither denting the scoreboard. Around the halfway point, Petr Mrazek wrapped up his Hurricanes debut, as he stopped all nine shots he faced in the first 30

minutes. Finally, after controlling another period, the Canes added another goal inside the final minute as Valentin Zykov got a stick on a Patrick Brown shot to make the score 3-0 at the end of two periods.

As the third period commenced, Cajkovsky entered the penalty box for the Canes after a delay of game call, and the Bolts made them pay immediately as Mathieu Joseph beat Alex Nedeljkovic to bring Tampa within two at 3-1. Then finally, the show everyone was waiting for. At 7:11 of the third period, Svechnikov received a feed from Phil Di Giuseppe and slammed one into the back of the cage on the Power Play for what the Canes hope will just be the first of many.

The Canes were in charge of the game despite Tampa carrying more veterans on the roster for the contest. Carolina more than doubled the Bolts' shot output with a 35-17 edge.

An interesting side note from Tuesday night's game is that both the Lightning and Hurricanes wore solid-colored sweaters (Tampa in blue, Canes in red). (Not sure how interesting that is to others, but I get to write this, so you're gonna hear about it anyway.)

All in all, it was a successful debut for Svechnikov and Hurricanes bench boss Rod Brind'Amour. The Canes and Lightning return to the ice again tomorrow night in the preseason home opener at PNC Arena.

Carolina Hurricanes announce donation drive for Hurricane Florence recovery

Here's how you can help the storm victims in eastern North Carolina recover from the recent storm.

By Brian LeBlanc@bdleblanc

In the aftermath of Hurricane Florence, the Carolina Hurricanes are offering an opportunity for fans to donate money, cleaning supplies, food and other necessities for the affected storm victims of Eastern North Carolina. Canes Country and SB Nation certainly encourage fans to donate to

assist in the relief efforts from a storm which has flooded a good portion of the eastern part of the state and will require plenty of time and resources to help rebuild.

Beginning tomorrow and extending through the end of the week, the Hurricanes will be accepting donations at the PNC Arena box office for the following items:

Gift cards to national big box stores (Walmart, Target, etc.)

Baby items, including diapers, wipes, etc.



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Non-perishable dry goods and canned goods (pop top)
Cleaning supplies including bleach, Lysol, Clorox wipes, etc.
Hygiene products including soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, floss, feminine products, deodorant
Paper towels, tissues, toilet paper, etc.
Pet supplies, including dog and cat food
New pillows, sheets and towels
Plastic storage bins

The times when the Hurricanes will be accepting donations are as follows:

Tuesday, September 18, until 5 p.m.

Wednesday, September 19, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Thursday, September 20, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Friday, September 21, 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, September 22, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Hurricanes players will be on hand to assist in collecting donations prior to the home preseason games on Wednesday and Friday nights, beginning at 5:45 on Wednesday and 6:15 on Friday. Owner Tom Dundon will also be on hand during portions of the day on Wednesday. Anyone making a donation by Friday will receive two ticket vouchers to attend either the Wednesday preseason game against the Tampa Bay Lightning or Friday's matchup against the Washington Capitals.

For fans who wish to make monetary contributions to the recovery effort, donations are encouraged to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund or the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina. You can also donate \$10 to the Disaster Relief Fund by texting FLORENCE to 20222.

Later this week, the Hurricanes will be offering special lower-level seats to the home games against the New York Rangers on October 7 and the Vancouver Canucks on October 9. The tickets will be priced at \$40 apiece, with all proceeds benefiting the state disaster relief fund. Further details about these special tickets will be available later this week.

The release from the team is below.

CANES ANNOUNCE FLORENCE RELIEF EFFORTS

Team to hold Relief Drive; offers ticket special with proceeds to Relief Fund

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today

announced that the team will host a Hurricane Florence Relief Drive beginning on Tuesday, Sept. 18, at 3 p.m. All fans donating items will receive vouchers for two tickets to either the team's preseason game on Sept. 19 against Tampa Bay or Sept. 21 against Washington.

In addition, the Hurricanes will be offering a limited number of special \$40 lower-level tickets to their regular-season home games on Oct. 7 against the NY Rangers and Oct. 9 against the Vancouver Canucks, with proceeds benefiting the State of North Carolina's Disaster Relief Fund. The team will distribute full details for how to purchase this special ticket offer via its social media channels and CarolinaHurricanes.com later this week.

Hurricane Florence Relief Drive item donations will be accepted at the box office at PNC Arena from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. Hurricanes players will be on hand to assist with the collection of donation items from 5:45 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday and from 6:15 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. on Friday. Owner Tom Dundon will also assist with the collection efforts on Wednesday.

Accepted donation items include:

Gift cards to national big box stores (Walmart, Target, etc.)

Baby items, including diapers, wipes, etc.

Non-perishable dry goods and canned goods (pop top)

Cleaning supplies including bleach, Lysol, Clorox wipes, etc.

Hygiene products including soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, floss, feminine products, deodorant

Paper towels, tissues, toilet paper, etc.

Pet supplies, including dog and cat food

New pillows, sheets and towels

Plastic storage bins

No clothing will be accepted. The Hurricanes will work directly with the North Carolina State Office of Emergency Management to direct all collected items to the areas with the most need.

Fans who prefer to make financial contributions may contribute directly to the State of North Carolina's Disaster Relief Fund by following this link. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, a partner of the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation, is also accepting financial donations for those affected by Hurricane Florence here.



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THE ATHLETIC

Q&A: Mike Commodore on how a fight led to meeting his girlfriend, his fairy-tale run in Calgary and driving for Uber

By Scott Cruickshank

To an already extensive resume – which includes playing nearly 500 NHL games; suiting up for 15 clubs in 14 professional seasons; joking around with Bill Clinton at the White House after North Dakota won the NCAA title; being teased about his hair by George W. Bush after Carolina won the Stanley Cup; gaining notoriety for #hijinx on Twitter; dabbling memorably as an Uber driver – Mike Commodore recently added one more line: A job in the real world.

Five months ago, Commodore joined forces with Triton Land Services, handling their sales and marketing on a full-time basis.

“Basically, I know nothing about sales, nothing about marketing,” said Commodore, 38, who has relocated to Calgary. “I know nothing about land services, I know nothing about construction. I know nothing about computers, other than sending emails and surfing the Internet. So it’s been interesting. It’s been good.”

Besides, as he pointed out, it was time to enter the work force. Retiring after the 2013-14 season with KHL Vladivostok, he moved to Phoenix and simply relaxed for three years.

“Just hanging out, golfing,” said Commodore. “I wasn’t in a rush or anything. I was just trying to figure out passively what was next.”

Now, however, he is busy. Besides working full time, there’s buzz about an #InOne podcast, in conjunction with Sauce Hockey, a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based enterprise.

“It could be fun. We just need to work out the logistics,” said Commodore, adding that he’ll be joined by fellow wisecracks Tyson Nash and the person behind the original Not Dany Heatley account on Twitter. “It’s going to be a lighter podcast. I don’t want to sit on there and just drone through stats. I don’t really care. I like watching hockey. But it’s a work in progress.”

Despite playing just 38 games for the Flames over parts of two seasons, he remains a familiar face in the city. Big hair and a laid-back attitude turned him into a cult hero. In the eyes of sportswriters he was larger than life, because he delivered.

For instance, the morning after a 2004 playoff game in which Flames fans littered the ice with debris, reporters beelined to Commodore’s dressing-room stall. He didn’t disappoint.

Without hesitation, Commodore reminisced about his college days when North Dakota fans would welcome the Minnesota Golden Gophers in a unique fashion.

“They threw gophers on the ice – dead gophers,” he said. “I remember one time after the game, there was a couple of dead frozen gophers out on the ice. I was out giving an interview on the ice and I just shot one. I was inside my

blue line and I shot it down to the other end. I thought it was just going to go maybe off the far boards along the ice. Well, it flew over the glass and just smoked somebody in the stands. I felt so bad. I was like, ‘I’m out of here,’ and I ducked off the ice.”

The telling of the gopher story does not put a dent in his treasure trove of tales. The other day he happily unearthed a few more howlers.

When’s the last time you laced them up?

I played in a (Sept. 7) charity hockey event called the Ice Breaker up in Slave Lake. It was a fun thing, me and Jamie Macoun and Curtis Glencross went up there. Mark Messier, Glenn Anderson. Actually, I took a stick in the face – I just took the stitches out. With about three minutes left in the third period, I caught a high stick.

And I skated at the Alzheimer’s event in Edmonton at the end of April. Actually, the last two times I’ve laced ‘em up for these charity events, I ended up in the hospital, needing stitches. (Laughs) In Edmonton I got into a fistfight outside a bar. I got jumped ... and I got caught on the chin. Guy just suckered me. I didn’t even see it coming. It wasn’t in the bar, it was outside on the street. I didn’t say a word (to provoke anyone). I was by myself. Actually, I ended up meeting the girl that I’m dating now, so it’s worked out OK.

So she’s a medical professional?

No, she just happened to be watching and she brought the cops over. Because after the guy suckered me ... I wasn’t very happy when I got up. I went after the guy pretty good and got the upper hand on him fairly handily. And the cops kind of tackled me, which was good. It all worked out. I don’t think anyone got too badly hurt.

Obviously, training camps are now in full swing. Do you ever miss this time of year?

I enjoyed training camps a lot more when my spot on the team was established and I was on a one-way contract. When I started in New Jersey (after being drafted 42nd overall in 1999), all you had to do was take a look at the roster. I’m not knocking out Scott Stevens, Ken Daneyko, Colin White, Brian Rafalski, Scott Niedermayer, all these guys.

I can’t say I miss training camps. But I can’t say I hated them, either. I hated the testing part of it ... because I sucked at skating. So any skating test I was terrible at. And I never really knocked it off the charts in weightlifting or anything like that.

Everyone still talks about the 2004 fairy tale. You were in (AHL) Lowell and came up in the spring, but soon you were thrown into action. Toni Lydman and Denis Gauthier got hurt, so you and Steve Montador took over.

The best way to put it, as far as my experience, was how other people viewed it. I get it all the time, people coming up



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to me, "You were great as a Flame. You were awesome here." Most of the time I just say, "Hey, thanks. I appreciate it." But every once in a while I'll be like, "Yeah, thanks – it was the greatest 18 games I ever played." And they're like, "What!" And I'm like, "I played 18 regular season games here." And they're like, "No way. I thought you were here for, like, four years." I was here at the right time and it worked out.

Especially during the postseason, coaches and players can seem pretty anxious, kind of bunged up. So serious, at least around us. But that team? There was Ville Nieminen cracking one-liners. You could tell Andrew Ference dug having a platform. And it seemed like you really enjoyed the process as well.

We had a pretty loose group. We all realized that we played better when we were just ourselves. We had a tough team, too, starting with Jarome. That was one of the reasons we went so far. I think everybody enjoyed the ride.

Just making the playoffs at the time was a huge thing, so we were kind of already playing with house money. When we knocked Vancouver off, the city went crazy. Then we had Detroit – look at their roster. It was a joke how many Hall of Famers and goal scorers ... everybody was on that team. Once we knocked them off, it was like, "Whoa. We have something here. If we can beat these guys, we can beat anybody in the league." Everybody had fun with it. I know I tried to.

I recall a story about you and a few of the fellows attending a Metallica concert during the playoff run.

It was after we beat San Jose. Metallica was in town and I'm a huge Metallica guy. Godsmack played first and then the lights came on during the intermission. We all stood out. I stood out especially because of my hair and my beard. I remember sitting there and going, "Oh my god. Is it just me or is everybody looking at us?" That's how it felt. (Laughs) Then I ended up giving an autograph to a female – an upper-body autograph. So – lights on, Saddledome's packed, lot of people watching, the place went wild. I'm like, "I think I feel like a rock star right now." We ended up going out with Metallica that night – we met them at Cowboys. It was awesome. I remember talking to Lars Ulrich, the drummer. He was sitting on the pool table upstairs at Cowboys and I must have B.S.ed with him for a couple hours.

You got a good laugh during that series against San Jose when you announced that you'd suffered a "mid-face injury." Remember that?

That was after Patrick Marleau ran me from behind, blatantly from behind, and my nose smashed off the ridge of the boards. Broken nose, for sure. I was bleeding. You break your nose and your eyes water up, so I couldn't see anything. All I knew was the puck was in our end and I'm like, "I've just got to get back to the front of the net." So I blindly went back to the front of the net. I couldn't see anything. The puck went out to one of the Sharks and he got a shot on net – a scoring chance. I remember going back to the bench and Darryl (Sutter) just gave it to me. I turned around and I was so mad that I wanted to hit him. I'm thinking, "This guy just blasted me from behind. No penalty. My nose is broken. I'm bleeding everywhere. I can't see

anything." But I knew what he was trying to do. He was trying to get me fired up. So I just took it, which was the right thing to do.

Guys didn't talk too much about this – the flight back from Tampa after losing Game 7. Not a short flight, either. What do you remember about that?

The first hour, it was pretty down. Then everybody kind of loosened up. What can you do? It's over. Everybody tried their hardest. It was a hell of a run. So we enjoyed ourselves.

There was a tonne of people at the (Calgary) airport. I'd had a few beers – my car wasn't at the airport – and Martin Sonnenberg was driving. What was it? Three in the morning? There was all these people and, in my head, I was like, "You know what? Chances are this is never going to happen again. You hope it does. But it might not. It probably won't. So I'm going to sign some autographs." So I went, thinking it would be 20 minutes or something. I was out there for a couple hours. (Laughs) I think Sonny is still mad because he had to sit in the car and wait for me. But it was cool. Definitely a cool time to play here.

And you know what? You better enjoy it, because sooner or later, no one's going to give a shit. So while they care? You might as well enjoy it.

Interesting, having that talk with yourself about a run likely never happening again. Then, sure, enough, the next NHL season (2005-06), you go to the final with Carolina – and win. And, like in Calgary, you reached cult-hero status. For the hair, of course. But also for that bathrobe.

Yeah, in Carolina there was a little brochure in our stall and there were six or seven items – you could pick one thing and it would be your Christmas gift from the Carolina Hurricanes. There were barbecue sets and wine sets, and I'm like, "I'm not going to use any of this stuff." Then I saw this robe. So I got it and by the time it showed up it was March.

So I put it on and Glen Wesley sees it and he's like, "That's awesome." And I go, "Yeah, you think so?" I didn't know if he was making fun of me or not. (Laughs) Then he goes, "Get Bobby (the equipment manager) to sew your numbers into the sleeve." Well, Glen's played about 50 years in the NHL so whatever he says goes.

I wore it in the dressing room. Everybody laughed. The TV cameras caught it. I did an interview in it. It was funny. (One night) in the regular season, I came out and right next to the glass there were a dozen dudes who had wigs on and white bathrobes. I was dying laughing.

Then, as the playoff rounds go by, you've got to find new things to write about – as media, you find new things to talk about. So it took off. They were selling them. It turned into a pretty big thing, actually.

Your massive popularity – in Calgary, too – can you explain it? Maybe the fans see a guy who doesn't take himself too seriously. Is that how you endear yourself to the masses?

I think so. I don't take a lot of things really seriously. I always tried to have fun. Be serious when it's time to be serious, but have a good time doing it.



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When I was doing my interviews, I would try to be honest. I tried not to say the same old thing all the time. I mean, that's painful. I understand why some guys do it. I tried to be myself as much as possible. People enjoyed that, I think.

The popularity seems to have translated to social media. (His Twitter account, @commie22, has more than 115,000 followers.)

It keeps me entertained. I guess if I was looking for a job in hockey, I probably would've toned it down because it would be frowned upon. But no one in the hockey world cares what I'm up to anyways.

One Twitter sensation, especially around trade-deadline time, is your #PackYourShit hashtag. (Commodore predicts which players are on the move.) Are you spinning yourself as an actual insider now?

The first year when I was tweeting that? I was basically just making shit up. (Laughs) But then it caught some steam and I'm like, "People seem to really like this." Then I was getting text messages from friends in the media or guys that are still playing. And they're like, "Hey, I think this is happening," so I would fire it off. Last year I will say I had some inside scoops, to be honest. The first year I think I broke one right at the end. Last year my goal was to break two and I got two. I don't know what I'm going to do this year. Three seems a little heavy, but you never know.

Now #InOne seems to have momentum. What's the origin of that?

I told the story on (the podcast) Spittin' Chiclets. I was in Russia and I ended up getting into a fight, a brawl, in a restaurant. And I just (tweeted): "Me and the Russian guys, we were having a few beers. We were in one." All it means is going out and having a good time, a couple drinks, whatever.

Graham DeLaet, the golfer, he was like, "Why don't you make a T-shirt?" I'm, like, "Really?" And he's like, "I'd buy one." I don't know anything about making T-shirts. Then Sauce Hockey sent me a direct message on Twitter, "Hey, do you want to do some T-shirts? We're right here in Scottsdale." It's turned into kind of a popular thing. Having (PGA star) Ricky Fowler wearing it definitely doesn't hurt.

You mentioned that you're not looking for a job in hockey. Is that kind of liberating? You can say what other people can't, including taking shots at Mike Babcock.

I'm not making anything up. I'm straight up stating how I feel, especially when it comes to that clown. I do catch a lot of heat for it. (People think) I rip on a lot of people on Twitter, but I really don't. I rip on Mike Babcock, Scott Arniel, Pierre McGuire, and that's it. I've got no problems with anybody else.

Speaking of the power of social media, that picture of you in your underwear with all the cash – was that a hard lesson?

The next year, it was Exhibit A on the NHLPA's (lecture about) be careful when you're on the Internet.

That came out when I was in Columbus in a bad economy (in 2008) after I signed a deal for more money than people thought I was worth (\$18.75 million US over five years). But that picture? It was taken eight months prior in Carolina. We

had an early practice the next day, so I was at home, lights out, sleeping by myself. A buddy of mine came in a little bit before midnight. Opens my door and turns the lights on. He's drunk. I'm like, "Get out of here." He won't leave. This goes on for two minutes. You know how in Super Bowl parties, there's squares? I'd won a couple squares so there was \$3,000 in cash sitting on my bedside table. He goes, "Throw that up in the air. I'll take a picture. I'll leave." This is the dumbest thing I've ever heard, but if this guy is going to leave? So I do it. He takes the picture and leaves. I'm asleep within seconds.

Fast forward a couple of months. Now it's the fall. He puts it up on his Facebook account – he's got a few hundred friends or whatever – and he takes it down. It was on there for maybe six hours, eight hours.

A month after that, I'm in Columbus and we got on the bus. I get a message from the p.r. guy in Ottawa, where I'd finished the year before, and it's, "Not sure if you saw this, but I thought I'd give you the heads up." Uh oh. So I open it up and there's this picture on this blog. My stomach fell out of my body. Oh my god. This is not going to come across well at all. It was a gathering storm. It's in the papers in Canada. My mom calls me, crying. The kids at her high school (in Fort Saskatchewan, where she's principal) are cutting it out of the paper and bringing it in. My mom's like, "What are you doing?" Literally bawling. So I got a hold of my buddy, "You have to call my mom right now because she's crying – and she never cries." My dad's pissed off. I'm like, "Dad, this is what happened."

I called the guy at Yahoo Sports and said, "Look, you posted this. I understand. It's fine. I don't care. But at least let me give my side of the story." So I gave my side of the story, but, at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. There's no coming back. It could be the most innocent thing in the world, which this was, but no one's going to believe you anyways.

From that point forward, I knew you could copy-paste pictures on the Internet. I learned that real quick. Definitely a wakeup call. James Wisniewski brought it up to me at Jared Boll's wedding. He's like, "Man, you look like an idiot." I'm like, "Let me tell you the story ..."

OK, let's wrap up with the Uber story. So you're in Phoenix ...

Let's call it two years ago. I had nothing to do. I was single. I was like, "You know what? I'm tired of going out." I need some time off drinking. I just need to relax, but, at the same time, I don't want to sit here in the house by myself. I need something to do that gets me out of the house but keeps me out of the bars.

So Uber? That might be a good idea. I probably did 70 rides. Some funny ones. I picked up some people from Columbus, Ohio, in town for the weekend, and I'm like, "I used to live there." And they're like, "What did you do there?" I go, "Well, I used to play for the Blue Jackets." (Laughs) I could see them in the mirror, sitting there in the backseat, going, "Oh, yeah. This Uber driver played for the Blue Jackets." Then it was, "Do you know Jared Boll? Do you know Rick Nash?" I'm like, "Look, I could go through the whole roster if you want or you could just look me up. I'm not lying." So we kind of had a laugh about that.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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I ended up picking up Doug Weight's niece one time. That was pretty funny. Doug was coaching at the time. We tried to call him.

I never drove late. I was a happy-hour driver. I drove on Halloween – I should've known better. But it was early

enough I thought it wouldn't get too messy. I picked up two couples and one of the girls was no-control-of-her-body wasted and she puked in my car. It took me an hour to get through the whole ordeal. I got paid eight bucks to do it and I'm like, "That was a fun experiment. That's enough for me." I retired from Uber.



Canes holding Hurricane Florence relief drive

NC State Facilities Division employees remove damaged tree branches on Dan Allen Drive on Wednesday, Sept. 12. All classes beginning from noon Wednesday through Monday, Sept. 17 were canceled.

David Tracey

The Carolina Hurricanes are holding a relief drive to help those affected by Hurricane Florence that started Tuesday at 3 p.m., general manager Don Waddell announced.

Fans that donate will get a voucher for two tickets to either Wednesday's preseason game against the Tampa Bay Lightning or Friday's against the Washington Capitals. The team will also sell discounted lower-level tickets to its home

regular-season games on Oct. 7 and 9, the proceeds of which will go to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

The PNC Arena box office will be open for donations Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Friday from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The donation items that will be accepted include gift cards to national big box stores, baby items, non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies, hygiene products, paper towels, tissues, toilet paper, pet supplies, new pillows, sheets and towels, and plastic shortage bins, but not clothes.

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1105246 Carolina Hurricanes

Observations from Hurricanes' 4-1 preseason win at Tampa Bay

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

September 18, 2018 10:02 PM

Quick observations from the Carolina Hurricanes' 4-1 win at Tampa Bay on Tuesday in the first preseason game for both teams.

-- Rod Brind'Amour is 1-0 as a head coach. OK, unofficial, a preseason game, doesn't count, yada, yada. But 1-0.

-- Andrei Svechnikov now has played against NHL competition, gotten his first good taste of what's to come.

The Russian forward, the Canes' first-round draft pick this year, has the power and showed off some speed. He scored a power-play goal in the third period and earned an assist on Lucas Wallmark's power-play score in the first. The kid's on his way.

"I thought he got better as the game went on," Brind'Amour said. "It looked like he was getting more confidence as the game went on."

-- Brind'Amour wanted a good first game from Petr Mrazek and got it. The goalie was quick on his skates and sharp on his angles in playing a little more than half the game, stopping all nine shots before Alex Nedeljkovic took over in net.

"It wasn't the saves he made, it was the other stuff for me," Brind'Amour said. "He looked real confident in playing the puck."

It will be Scott Darling's turn Wednesday against the Lightning at PNC Arena, but Mrazek saw a lot of Tampa Bay's best players.

-- Brind'Amour has a lot of skating early in camp and it showed Tuesday. The Canes appeared to have their legs from the start and had more jump than the Lightning, getting in quickly on the forecheck and beating the Bolts to a lot of pucks.

Brind'Amour said before the game he was looking for a high "compete level." He got it, and from a young lineup. The only lapse: a third-period power-play score by Tampa Bay.

"It was great. The guys played really hard. That was the key," Brind'Amour said afterward. "Great start to finish. We didn't really have a lull. Everyone contributed, which was great, too."

-- Who would have thought the Canes' first goal, preseason or otherwise, would be scored by Michal Cajkovsky?

The defenseman has been in training camp on a professional tryout offer, having earned the PTO opportunity with some solid play in the KHL and for Slovakia's national team in the Olympics and 2018 World Championship.

Cajkovsky scored in the first period on a shot from the left circle and had a few more looks, not hesitating to take his shots. He did have two third-period penalties.

-- Net-front presence? It's been a spotty thing for the Canes the past few years but was constant Tuesday. Valentin Zykov, hard to dislodge in front, got the Canes' third goal with a tip off a Patrick Brown shot.

-- It's going to continue to be tough competition on the back end during camp as the top six are sorted out. Haydn Fleury, a rookie last season, is slimmer, quicker and played with confidence Tuesday.

News Observer LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105247 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina Hurricanes hosting Hurricane Florence Relief Drive

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

September 18, 2018 03:08 PM

RALEIGH

The Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday began accepting items donated to a Hurricane Florence Relief Drive.

Anyone donating items to the drive will receive vouchers for two tickets to either the Canes' Sept. 19 preseason game against Tampa Bay or the Sept. 21 game against Washington. The Hurricanes also announced Tuesday that they will offer a limited number of \$40 lower-level tickets to two regular-season games -- Oct. 7 against the New York Rangers and Oct. 9 against Vancouver -- with proceeds benefiting the State of North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

Items, to be accepted at the PNC Arena box office, include: Gift cards to national big box stores (Walmart, Target, etc.); baby items, including diapers, wipes, etc.; non-perishable dry goods and canned goods; cleaning supplies including bleach, Lysol, Clorox wipes; hygiene products including soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, floss, feminine products, deodorant; paper towels, tissues, toilet paper; pet supplies, including dog and cat food; new pillows, sheets and towels; and plastic storage bins. No clothing will be accepted.

On Tuesday, UNC football coaches Larry Fedora and Robert Gillespie, and a few players dropped by the Tar Heels' Hurricane Florence relief drive to load donations onto their 18-wheel equipment truck for delivery to stricken communities.

Hurricane Florence Relief Drive item donations will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on



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Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday.

Hurricanes players will assist with the collection of items from 5:45-7 p.m. on Wednesday and from 6:15-7:30 p.m. on Friday. Owner Tom Dundon will also assist with the collection on Wednesday.

Anyone wanting to make financial contributions may contribute directly to the State of North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, a partner of the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation, is also accepting financial donations for those affected by Hurricane Florence.

News Observer LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105248 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho wants to have a 100-point season - but not all for himself

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

September 18, 2018 12:08 PM

RALEIGH

Sebastian Aho of the Carolina Hurricanes wants 100 or more points this season, which is ambitious and probably not what you think.

It's not 100 points for Aho, as in goals and assists. It's 100 points for the Hurricanes, a team left out of the Stanley Cup playoffs the last nine years.

"That's my No. 1 goal," Aho said in an interview at training camp. "I want our team to win more. I don't want to be that team that tries to get that last playoff spot. I want our team to be a team that's in the last four and has over 100 points."

Last season, the Vegas Golden Knights put together a team not entirely of castoffs but from an expansion draft and reached the Stanley Cup final before losing to the Washington Capitals. In their first year of existence, the Golden Knights finished with 109 points, winning the Western Conference championship.

"Anything can happen," Aho said. "And we're better than we were last year. We just have to trust ourselves and work hard."

The Hurricanes start the preseason Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. at Tampa. And having Rod Brind'Amour as head coach makes the Canes better, Aho said. Having one team captain, Justin Williams, makes it better.

And Aho wants to be better -- a lot better. The Finnish forward, in his first two years in the league, has gained a lot of admirers in the way he approaches the game, the way he plays it.

"I like Sebastian's tenacity, I like his attitude," Williams said. "I think he's a really good person and I think he genuinely wants to be the best player on this hockey team."

The Carolina Hurricanes' Rod Brind'Amour, about to begin his first year as an NHL head coach, gives an assessment of his team at media session Sept. 4, 2018 at PNC Arena. The Canes open training camp Sept. 13.

At 21, Aho may be close to being that, if not already the Canes' best. A year ago, he had team bests with 29 goals and 65 points, playing 78 games.

And consider this: Aho did not score in the first 15 games. He had 45 shots on net in those games and missed on all 45, then shot 18.7 percent the rest of the season.

As a rookie in 2016-17, Aho had a similar start, going the first 13 games and taking 26 shots before scoring his first NHL goal. It was his first season playing on North American rinks, with the tighter confines than European rinks, but he finished with 24 goals after making the adjustment.

"The first year I didn't play that well at first," Aho said. "I think I was trying to get used to the smaller rink and all that stuff."

"The second year I think I played all right. I had like 10 points but I just didn't score. I had lots of chances, so I knew it was coming. I was more confident about that. I was getting so many chances every game that I wasn't worried."

The Canes were 6-5-4 in the first 15 games and held to two or fewer goals in five of the losses. A few more goals, by Aho and others, could have made for a better start for a team that finished with 83 points and a 36-35-11 record.

Brind'Amour, who handled the forwards as a Canes assistant under former coach Bill Peters, is a little at a loss to explain Aho's early goal-scoring droughts.

"I don't look at it as there was any one thing," Brind'Amour said. "We talked about that a lot the last couple of years, why he starts like that. I don't know there is a real reason."

"I don't want to waste a lot of time trying to figure that out. If he didn't come into camp in shape, I'd say that's why. But he does, so I'm not going to worry about that too much, and hopefully it doesn't become an issue."

Aho doesn't believe it will be. And like Brind'Amour, he said he would not overanalyze it.

"For sure, I just want to put the puck in the net earlier because it's easier to build some confidence," he said. "If you get 45 shots before you score your first goal that's not good, so so I'll just try harder. It's all about confidence, you know."

"But I'm really not thinking about that. I just want to be ready, try to find some connection with my line mates."

The Canes' Sebastian Aho (20) drives between the Lightning's Anthony Cirelli (71) and Anton Stralman (6) during the Hurricanes last game of the season against the Tampa Bay Lightning at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C. on April 7, 2018.

Brind'Amour isn't convinced Aho is best-suited to play center in the NHL - not yet. But with center Victor Rask now sidelined indefinitely after hand surgery, that decision likely has been made: Aho will stay in the middle for now.

Many centers in the NHL are built along the lines of the Canes' Jordan Staal, who is 6-4 and 220 pounds. Aho is listed at 5-11 and 172 pounds, although he does play stronger than his size would suggest.

Aho has taken some hard knocks. He was carrying the puck through the offensive zone in a game last season when he was leveled by defenseman Mark Giordano of the Calgary Flames. He injured a knee and suffered a concussion on the play -- Giordano received a match penalty -- although missing just four games.

"Usually, a prototypical center is 6-3, 220, big guy, skates well," Williams said. "You need to have that arrogance, that being strong on the puck, the ability to win face-offs and the ability to be counted on. That's a big responsibility, playing center, and we'll see if he can handle it."



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Aho has become one of the team's most recognizable, marketable players, one that owner Tom Dundon has said he'd like to sign to a long-term contract extension. Negotiations continue, and the Canes also would like to sign another Finn, forward Teuvo Teravainen, to a new deal.

The Hockey News recently released its list of the top 50 players in the league. Canada's Sportsnet put out a list of the top 100. Aho didn't make either.

Added motivation, perhaps?

"That's media. I've got nothing to say," Aho said.

Does he feel underrated as a player?

"The media can write whatever," Aho said. "It doesn't affect me or my team. I just want to be a better hockey player. I want to be a better hockey player all around, not just score goals.

"I want to step up and take a bigger role for my team. I want more wins."

News Observer LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105370 Tampa Bay Lightning

Even if it's just preseason, it matters

By Tom Jones | Times sports columnist

TAMPA — It's a little after 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning.

The NHL's intense regular season is still more than three weeks away. The uber-intense Stanley Cup playoffs are still seven months away.

But, on this particular September day on a sheet of ice in front of a handful of mildly interested spectators inside a quiet practice rink, some of the Lightning's best players are hard at work.

Steven Stamkos, Victor Hedman, Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and a promising prospect named Alexander Volkov are zipping the puck around, refining their power play skills.

Superstar goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy is gliding from side to side, doing what he does best: stopping that little black disc from getting behind him.

A few hours later — Tuesday night — the Lightning began its preseason schedule, at Amalie Arena.

No, the Stanley Cup won't be won because of the 4-1 loss to the Hurricanes. But the habits formed in the fall can have a huge impact in the spring.

So don't tell the Lightning that this time of year doesn't matter. Don't tell the Lightning that the preseason doesn't count. And don't think for a second that these guys don't care about winning.

"I think there's a little pride factor in this," coach Jon Cooper said. "You want to win some of these games. In the end, it's a hockey game."

For players, the preseason takes on a different meaning depending on your level of experience.

"It is the one time during the year that you get to see your prospects play and see how much they've developed since, pretty much, a year ago," Cooper said. "It's always great to see what kind of strides they've made."

Some make enough strides to actually skate onto the NHL roster.

"I don't know if there's one guy in particular," Stamkos said. "But each and every year it seems like there are guys that when their name is called they can come up and step in right away."

Years ago, names such as Tyler Johnson and Ondrej Palat were those players. More recently, it was Point. Last season, it was Anthony Cirelli. Maybe this season, it will be a guy like Volkov or defenseman Cal Foote or wing Mathieu Joseph.

But what about the veterans?

"It's about getting back into game reps," Cooper said.

While preseason hockey is nowhere near as intense as regular-season hockey, it isn't summer goof-around hockey either.

"Now you have to slowly amp it up because you're not going against your teammates," Cooper said. "You're going against other guys, and everybody is trying to make teams. The physicality and everything ramps up a little bit higher."

Okay, so maybe it's not Game 7 of the playoffs. But hockey players are hockey players. If there's a shot to be blocked or a big check to be thrown, they can't help themselves.

"If the score is close late, the game usually amps up pretty good in the third period," Cooper said.

For a veteran such as Stamkos, preseason is about getting his timing back, getting bumped around by an opponent and gaining some confidence.

"Obviously, I am excited to just get out there and play a game," Stamkos said. "But, at the same time, it's about getting a feel for the puck and making sure everything is feeling good."

Ah yes, feeling good. That might be the most important thing in the preseason. You would think a coach holds his breath, just hoping to see his team get through the preseason in one piece.

"If that was the case, you'd be holding your breath 82 times during the year," Cooper said.

True, but there is one aspect of preseason that coaches and veterans must worry about. Often, preseason games are sprinkled with young kids trying to make a name for themselves. And the easiest way to do that is with a thunderous check against an NHL star.

"For the most part, you just try to go out and play," Stamkos said. "That is the tricky part of these preseason games, when you're playing at home, you are usually getting a road team that is filled with guys who are trying to prove themselves."

So always best to keep your head on a swivel and assume that the opponent will always finish his check.

"You're definitely aware of what's going on, on the ice," Stamkos said. "But at the same time you hope the respect is there, which it usually is. You usually don't have to worry about that. But you still want to go out there and play hard."

Defenseman Anton Stralman said, "You have to play hard. You have to treat it like every other hockey game."

That's because it is like every other hockey game.

It might not count. But it matters.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105371 Tampa Bay Lightning

Four Lightning players named to The Hockey News' list of the top 50 in the NHL



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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By Frank Pastor Published: September 18, 2018

The Lightning has one of the biggest collections of talent in the NHL, according to one international hockey publication.

Tampa Bay placed four players — second-most in the league — on The Hockey News' list of the top 50 players in the NHL, including two in the top five.

Right wing Nikita Kucherov ranks highest, at No. 3, followed in short order by defenseman Victor Hedman (No. 5). Center Steven Stamkos is No. 20, goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy No. 25.

Which makes four players in the top 25, when you think about it.

Only the Winnipeg Jets, with five players, have more on the list: center Mark Scheifele (No. 9), right wing Blake Wheeler (No. 15), right wing Patrik Laine (No. 19), goaltender Connor Hellebuyck (No. 22) and defenseman Dustin Byfuglien (No. 29).

Of Kucherov, THN writes, "He bet on himself with a bridge contract, and boy, did he bet right. Kucherov has become one of the deadliest snipers in the league."

On Hedman: "Hedman finally got his first Norris Trophy this summer, and it may not be the last."

On Stamkos: "His transition from shooter to setup man has been intriguing to watch. Stamkos can still fire away, but clicking with Kucherov has opened up new avenues."

On Vasilevskiy: "Vasilevskiy is a top talent with size, so 65 starts shouldn't faze him if he gets his body ready."

Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid tops the list for the second straight year. Pittsburgh Penguins center Sidney Crosby is No. 2.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105391 Washington Capitals

Capitals audition replacements for Jay Beagle in preseason home opener

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

September 18 at 11:32 PM

Stripping away any pretense in the search to replace longtime center Jay Beagle, the Washington Capitals played both Travis Boyd and Nic Dowd in their preseason home opener Tuesday night, two players on the same team but still competing for the one vacancy in the lineup — fourth-line center.

They each played to their strengths in the 5-2 loss to the Boston Bruins at Capital One Arena. Dowd was better in the dot, winning 12 of 17 faceoffs, and showed off his penalty-kill experience, while Boyd had more jump offensively, recording three shots on goal. There will likely be room for both to make the opening night roster, especially because they are both on one-way contracts and would need waivers to be sent down to the American Hockey League. The center the Capitals ultimately decide to dress, though, might depend on the identity Washington wants for its new-look fourth line.

Beagle, who signed as a free agent with the Vancouver Canucks, was a master of faceoffs last season. He won 58.5 percent of his draws, the majority of which were in the defensive zone, and he was the Capitals' top penalty-killing forward. Dowd would seem to best fit that role — "There's no hiding behind the fact that they lost a right-handed centerman who took a lot of faceoffs, and thus I'm here as a right-handed centerman," he said — but Beagle also found ways to chip in offensively. Though he was used in a mostly defensive role, he scored seven goals and had 15 assists in 79 games last season.

General Manager Brian MacLellan said last week that he wants a fourth line with "a little bit more skill, a little more speed." Boyd, who played in eight games last season and was an extra for the majority of Washington's Stanley Cup run, might fit that billing better.

"I think he seems a step quicker than he was last year at this time," Coach Todd Reirden said. "I think he's someone that gained a lot of experience even though he wasn't playing through the Stanley Cup run. I think he got just enough of a taste of it that it really helped him train at a different level. In my discussions with him this summer, he was able to obviously raise the Cup in Vegas, and that's an amazing thing to be a part of it. When you're in that role you want to be a part of something. You want to play a bigger role, and I think that's some things that a guy like that was really able to use as motivation this summer. I liked his game and his ability to add offensively and do some things that way."

But Boyd won just 40 percent of his faceoffs, and he didn't get much shorthanded experience in the AHL last season — he mentioned he wants to improve in both of those areas. The 25-year-old was drafted seven years ago in the sixth round, and he has had to be patient. He made his NHL debut in December, and despite being one of the Hershey Bears' top scorers, this is the closest he has ever been to making the big club's roster out of training camp, much less sticking around for a full season.

"Obviously there's open competition for a spot or two, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to win it," Boyd said on Monday.

Dowd, 28, signed with the Capitals in free agency, and Reirden said he has been "as expected." But after Dowd recorded just three goals and one assist in 56 games with Vancouver and Los Angeles last season, he wants to show his offensive ability is better represented by the six goals and 16 assists he recorded with the Kings during the 2016-17 season. He said he "was trying to think the game too much" Tuesday night, but don't expect that to be the last time he and Boyd go head-to-head this preseason.

"We'll continue to see that competition play itself out here," Reirden said.

Washington Post LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105392 Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin celebrated his birthday with balloons, a fruit tart and Peking duck

By Scott Allen

September 18 at 12:17 PM

After serving as an honorary captain and receiving the loudest ovation at Sunday's Redskins home opener, the ageless Alex Ovechkin turned 33 on Monday. The Capitals captain, whose team is preparing to begin its Stanley Cup title defense after a summer of doing Cup stands and partying around the world, apparently toned things down a bit for his birthday celebration.



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Ovechkin posted a photo to his Instagram account of himself holding balloons and a delicious-looking fruit tart.

As Ian Oland of Russian Machine Never Breaks notes, Ovechkin went to dinner at Peking Gourmet Inn in Falls Church with his wife, Nastya, and his mom, Tatyana, along with his agent, his trainer and a close friend.

Ovechkin's go-to pregame meal may be chicken Parmesan with four different sauces from Mamma Lucia, but he and his family are also longtime fans of Peking Gourmet Inn. A photo of Ovechkin with one of the restaurant's managers hangs on the wall alongside photos of other celebrities who have frequented the Northern Virginia staple, including George W. Bush and family.

Ovechkin is a champion who appreciates the finer things in life, so his party obviously ordered the duck, which former Washington Post food critic Phyllis Richman described as "a hot contender for the best in town" in 1980, two years after the restaurant opened. ("It is plump, juicy, tender and golden, with crisp skin that is elegantly pared off the bird tableside," she wrote.)

During dessert, the restaurant's staff serenaded Ovechkin's table by singing "Happy Birthday."

Ovechkin enters the 2018-19 season 19th on the NHL's all-time goals list with 607. His next goal will tie former Capital Dino Ciccarelli for 18th. Another 49-goal campaign like last season's would move him into a tie for 13th with Brendan Shanahan.

Washington Post LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105393 Washington Capitals

The Capitals' newest Russian has arrived. Now Sergei Shumakov needs to get up to speed.

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

September 18 at 9:58 AM

As if Sergei Shumakov hadn't heard enough about how difficult it would be to move from the Kontinental Hockey League to the NHL, the first hang-up came before he even arrived in Washington. The visa process dragged, and he missed the first two days of Capitals training camp, putting him a bit behind everyone else on the ice.

Then there was the issue of the language barrier, so Coach Todd Reirden grouped Shumakov with other Russians in practice sessions. They served as interpreters, explaining certain drills or showing him around the practice facility.

It was all a whirlwind, one that Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov, a friend of Shumakov's since they were 5 years old and playing together for their hometown club in Chelyabinsk, had already experienced four years ago. After helping convince Shumakov to sign with Washington, he warned him of the tough road ahead.

"The language, the game, the lifestyle, the mentality — it's not easy when you're 26 and you have to change everything in your life," Kuznetsov said. "Some people need it, some people don't need it. The good thing for him is we have a lot of Russian guys on the team and we can really help him, and I really feel like our organization has the time to give him a chance to understand everything and they're not going to force 17 goals right away in one game."

Shumakov had 17 goals and 23 assists in 47 games for CSKA Moscow last season, and he held out from the club's training camp to force the

termination of his contract. Once Kuznetsov heard rumors that the Capitals were interested, he called Shumakov and his agent, just in case Washington brass needed any extra help with their sales pitch. They acknowledged they were talking to several NHL clubs, to which Kuznetsov replied: "What do you mean a couple teams? It's only one team." Shumakov signed a one-year contract with a \$925,000 cap hit Sept. 1.

"I think every hockey player wants to try playing in this league and for a team like the Capitals," Shumakov said in Russian. "I didn't even have to think about it."

But with Shumakov exempt from waivers and on a two-way deal that pays him less if he's in the American Hockey League, there's a chance he doesn't make the opening-night NHL roster. Washington returned the vast majority of its lineup coming off its first Stanley Cup championship, so there's no natural spot for Shumakov to step into. The Capitals were intrigued by the scoring touch that the right-shot left wing displayed in the KHL, but the team is keeping expectations reasonable because that doesn't always translate to North American hockey, where the ice surface is smaller, making the game faster and more physical. General Manager Brian MacLellan acknowledged the organization isn't sure what it has in Shumakov yet.

"What will be, will be," Shumakov said. "I'm not planning to go back to Russia for now."

"If you're going to give him a lot of time to feel comfortable and to understand the game, he can play very well in this league," Kuznetsov said.

With his late arrival to training camp, Shumakov won't play in Tuesday's preseason home opener against Boston at Capital One Arena, and it's unlikely he'll make his debut Thursday against Montreal in Quebec City, either. The Capitals have a vacancy at fourth-line center, but they return all of their wingers from the Stanley Cup finals. They will find room for Shumakov if he impresses in training camp.

"I think to be fair and to set him up for success, we've got to continue to work with him and show him some system stuff," Reirden said. "It's something new for him, and he's excited about it. There's a little bit of a learning curve from that standpoint, but also just with the English and stuff; we're working through that as well. I would not expect to see him for another few games until we get him up to speed."

"For me, it's all about setting him up for success here and giving him the best opportunity to help us."

Washington Post LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105394 Washington Capitals

Capitals fall to Bruins in preseason bout at home

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times

Tuesday, September 18, 2018

The Washington Capitals will not hang their Stanley Cup champion banner for another two weeks, but they got in some competitive hockey Tuesday night at Capital One Arena. Stanley Cup-caliber hockey? Well, not quite yet.

The Boston Bruins handled everything Washington tried on the ice and won 5-2 in the Capitals' first home preseason game of the year. Riley Barber scored in the first period and led the Capitals with nine shots, and Matt Niskanen added a power-play goal.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

It was the first preseason action for veterans Braden Holtby, Nicklas Backstrom and T.J. Oshie, while many of the other Capitals players who dressed were rookies and minor leaguers. Most of the Bruins organization is away playing in the NHL International Games in China, so they sent out a lineup of less familiar players.

The Bruins scored early and often, taking a 4-1 lead into the second intermission before the Capitals were able to rebound.

"I think if you look at our first period you could definitely tell that a lot of guys had some nerves, but again it's your first time playing in a while," center Travis Boyd said. "Everyone in here gets excited and everyone in here wants to play. Everyone kind of came out a little jittery, but like I said I think our third period was our best and I thought we got better as the game went on."

Tuesday was also new head coach Todd Reirden's first time behind the bench at Capital One Arena.

"That was an amazing experience and something I've been working hard for for a number of years," Reirden said, but "it probably won't dawn on me that much until we get to Oct. 3 (the first regular season game)."

Boston needed less than two minutes to open scoring when winger Cameron Hughes deflected a shot high past Holtby's reach. But the Capitals came back with a goal in the fifth minute of action.

2018 first-round pick Alexander Alexeyev fed Barber in the slot. With his back to the net, Barber had to lift his right skate and re-directed the puck under his legs, over the goalie's shoulder, off the bottom of the crossbar and in.

Barber, who last saw NHL regular season action two seasons ago, stood out in particular to Reirden.

"I thought he had a really strong showing tonight, (had) a number of opportunities and chances and was able to make a real nice play on the first goal," Reirden said. "I liked his game in particular. He's someone that was able to show us a little bit more of an offensive flair than maybe he has done in the past."

Later, Bruins forward Jakub Lauko was sent to the box for holding, but the Capitals fell flat on the power-play chance. Lauko scooped up the puck when he left the box for a breakaway goal in the final minute of the first period.

Goalie Ilya Samsonov, the Capitals' first-round draft pick in 2015, came on for Holtby mid-second period to make his preseason debut. He went on to save seven shots, but only after allowing a goal just a few seconds into his ice time. He made a stick save on Boston's Zach Senyshyn, but Senyshyn snagged the rebound and rifled it behind Samsonov's back.

Senyshyn struck again in the final minute of the second from the right circle. Capitals defender Colby Williams appeared to catch the shot in the crease, but if he did, he didn't hold on and the puck fell in.

A Boston tripping penalty at the start of the third let the Capitals back in the game. During the power play, Niskanen received a loose puck in the left circle and slapped it home.

But that was all the Capitals could muster, even though they went on three more power plays in the final frame. Boston's Sean Kuraly added an empty-net goal in the final minute.

Backstrom and Oshie played with rookie forward Axel Jonsson-Fjallby on the top line. The veterans had to use the opportunity to knock off their rust without overshadowing other players, who were either competing to make the 23-man roster or looking to get comfortable in their preseason debuts.

"You try to play a good game and hopefully that feeds into (Jonsson-Fjallby's) game," Oshie said. "I think some of my mishandles early maybe hindered his opportunities in the first two periods. But in the third he was flying. Even the first two periods he was going pretty good. In practice for sure, and tonight, he can really fly."

The Capitals have off Wednesday and travel to Quebec City, Canada, for their next preseason contest against the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday.

Washington Times LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105395 Washington Capitals

Capitals fans in midseason form as Stanley Cup champs start preseason

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times

Tuesday, September 18, 2018

Since the Stanley Cup parade in June, the Perry family from Rockville, Maryland has looked forward to the return of hockey season.

The season ticket-holders were lined up outside Capital One Arena early for the Washington Capitals' first home game of the 2018 preseason Tuesday, eager to catch a glimpse of the defending champions in game action once again.

"We've seen (the Capitals) at practices and they're much more relaxed than we've ever seen them," Carlos Perry said. "So I think it's gonna be a lot of fun."

Tuesday's game against the Boston Bruins was the Capitals' first time playing at Capital One Arena since Game 4 of the Stanley Cup Final. F Street was not blocked off for a roving cadre of red-clad fans and the set of NBC Sports' telecast, as it was in June. But the palpable excitement in Chinatown for what was only a Tuesday exhibition game reflected the return of the city's biggest champions.

Season ticket-holder Lotta Danielsson thinks the Capitals will attract more fans than ever now that they've won a Cup.

"D.C. loves a winner," she said.

Danielsson, who was born in Sweden, wore a T-shirt bearing an illustration of popular Swedish rookie Axel Jonsson-Fjallby, a forward with a long, blonde hairdo famous among Capitals diehards. Because it is still preseason, players like Jonsson-Fjallby are matched with a handful of selected veterans like Nicklas Backstrom and T.J. Oshie.

But the absence of top players like Alex Ovechkin and Evgeny Kuznetsov did not matter to the thousands of fans in attendance. They erupted in cheers when Capitals prospect Riley Barber scored in the fifth minute of the game just as if Ovechkin sent the puck in.

Tuesday's game was also the first time sports fans could experience the \$40 million renovations Capital One Arena underwent this summer, which will be fully complete before the regular season opener Oct. 3. The upgrades include digital signage around the concourse, allowing more seamless transition between Capitals and Wizards theming, as well as a new sound system, 3D projection system and DJ stage.

"The one that I'm really excited about is the sound system getting better, because if you were up in the 400 level, you couldn't hear anything," Danielsson said.

The in-arena music was noticeably louder Tuesday. Many of the cupholders were updated, and a bus will be added to the Capitals' Olympia ice resurfacers to allow more fans to ride it during intermissions.

At a moment in time when Washington sports fans are bemoaning the game-day experience at the Redskins' FedEx Field, the atmosphere in Chinatown serves as a positive contrast for some.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

"We are committed to putting on the best show possible for every fan who comes to a game at Capital One Arena," Jim Van Stone, Monumental Sports and Entertainment's president of business operations, said in a statement in July.

The Perry family plans to go to at least two-thirds of the 41 home games, including the season opener Oct. 3, when the Stanley Cup champion's banner is unfurled in the Capital One Arena rafters, and on Oct. 19 to celebrate son Aden Perry's 10th birthday.

"We love the people that work here. The ushers, security team," Perry said. "Aside from the hockey and the game, the people that work here are great. We just love the staff."

Washington plays two more preseason games at home — Sept. 28 against Carolina and Sept. 30 against St. Louis — before the regular season kicks off and the Capitals officially begin their title defense in front of their dedicated fans.

Washington Times LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105396 Washington Capitals

Where the Capitals' only two position battles stand at start of preseason

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times

Monday, September 17, 2018

ARLINGTON, Va. — It's a luxury to return so much of a core group from a winning season, particularly a Stanley Cup-winning season.

The Washington Capitals begin their Cup defense in October, and Jay Beagle and Philipp Grubauer will be the two most notable faces from last year's team not to join them. Their departures, one by free agency and the other by trade, correspond with the team's two position battles in training camp and preseason this month: fourth-line center and back-up goalie.

The Capitals' lone free agency signing, Nic Dowd, is competing with Travis Boyd and Chandler Stephenson for the center spot. Dowd scored three goals in 40 games for the Vancouver Canucks after being traded there mid-season from the Los Angeles Kings.

Dowd knows exactly what factors will be important in taking over Beagle's place.

"Faceoffs are gonna be crucial. Penalty kills are gonna be crucial," Dowd said. "I think we have so many elite players on this team, it's gonna be important for everyone to do their role. I think with that role, the important things that need to stick out are what I mentioned, but it's gonna be nice, because I believe with how they play it's gonna allow for creativity in our offense."

Boyd only accumulated eight games at the NHL level last year, so he enters 2018-19 as a rookie. He was also called on to play in the Capitals' triumphant Game 6 against Pittsburgh in the second round of the playoffs while the team was particularly thin at forward.

Stephenson is the wild card in the battle, because the Capitals have used him as both a winger and a center. He scored 18 points in 67 regular season games and added seven more in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, cementing himself as one of the Capitals' bottom-six forwards wherever they line him up.

The competition means Boyd does not assume he has made the 23-man roster yet.

"I played with Chandler for a couple years in Hershey so I know he's well aware of being a centerman," Boyd said. "It's just added motivation and added — not stress, but it's just another person that you're out there competing with. There's a group of guys that all want that spot."

On the other hand, general manager Brian MacLellan said he "enjoys" Stephenson more at wing, and feels people are split 50-50 on where he's better suited.

To that point, new coach Todd Reirden said it's still too early to make judgments on how the fourth line will look.

"The players are going to decide it," Reirden said. "We're going to put them in situations where they're gonna have competitions, and at the end of the day the players will make the decision for me. They're all gonna be given ample opportunity to do their thing and show us what they can do."

Unlike fourth-line center, the backup goalie race is more or less decided. Pheonix Copley, the No. 3 goalie in the organization last year, is being asked to make the jump to No. 2. Copley made 21 saves in 32 minutes of the Capitals' preseason opener at Boston Sunday.

"He knows the challenge that's in front of him and I thought he was real solid yesterday," Reirden said. "A number of big saves early on. We were a little bit slow to get going in the game, so we needed him in the beginning of the game. He was there for us and I thought he really sent the message in game one that he's prepared for that opportunity."

Copley's main competitor for the job was Russian 21-year-old Ilya Samsonov, the Capitals' first-round draft pick in 2015. Samsonov has professional experience from the KHL, but the consensus seems to be that he needs some more time.

Copley has only started two games at the NHL level, both for St. Louis, and none since January 2017. For context, Grubauer made 28 regular-season starts as the Capitals' No. 2 last year.

But the Capitals have long believed in Copley. They signed him undrafted out of Michigan Tech, and although they dealt him in the 2015 trade that brought T.J. Oshie to Washington, they got St. Louis to send Copley back in the Kevin Shattenkirk trade less than 20 months later.

"I was really familiar with the staff and the players here that I played with before while I was in this organization," Copley said. "The Blues organization was good and treated me well, but this organization has had a lot of faith in me and I feel that that kind of speaks for itself."

Copley thinks Capitals goaltending coach Scott Murray understands his game really well. He was happy to have the extra time to work with Murray last spring, when the Capitals called Copley up from Hershey as a "black ace" and emergency goalie during the playoffs.

Starting goalie Braden Holtby certainly has noticed Copley.

"With Pheonix, I'm sure if anyone watched through the playoffs last year or anything, his work ethic is phenomenal and I think that's something very important to what we try and preach with our goalie department," Holtby said. "He's big, he's strong, patient. He's going to fit into the mold of what we're trying to do really well."

Washington Times LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105397 Washington Capitals

4 players who impressed in the Capitals home preseason opener against Boston

By J.J. Regan



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

September 18, 2018 10:00 PM

Capital One Arena saw its first action of the season on Tuesday, albeit in a preseason game, as the Capitals fell 5-2 to the Boston Bruins. T.J. Oshie looked like he wanted to hit everything that moved every time he was on the ice. Matt Niskanen also scored a power play tally, but both he and Oshie's spots on the team are already secure. There were plenty of other players with a lot on the line looking to make an impression in the home preseason opener.

Here are four players who impressed.

Riley Barber

The Caps scored less than five minutes into the game thanks to a nifty deflection by Barber on a quick shot by Alex Alexeyev. Barber was Washington's top offensive threat on the night and was all over the net with nine (!!!) shots on goal and another four attempts. His goal was a dirty one, but Barber also showed some soft hands and good stick work as well throughout the night.

"I thought he had a real strong showing tonight and a number of opportunities and chances and was able to make a real nice play on the first goal," head coach Todd Reirden said. "I liked his game in particular and I think he was someone that was able to show us a little bit more of an offensive flair than maybe he has done in the past."

At 24, Barber is at a critical point in his career as he is battling to make the NHL and not become a career AHLer. Right now he still looks like a long shot to make the roster and will likely need a few more efforts like Tuesday's game to really give himself a shot to stick around in Washington.

Nic Dowd

Dowd is in a battle for the fourth line center job to replace Jay Beagle. Tuesday was a good dress rehearsal for him in terms of winning the job. Dowd was the team's best player in the face-off dot, took 17 draws and won 12 of them, by far Washington's top face-off man on the night (not counting Jayson Megna who won the one draw he took).

"It's a big part of everyone's game in the National Hockey League," Dowd said. "You lose possession of the puck, you're chasing it for 30 seconds. So, I will continue to work on that and continue to make it a big part of my game."

"That's an integral role to any team's success," Todd Reirden said.

"Certainly we were able to benefit from having faceoff success especially in that dot with a right-hand centerman taking those draws. I put him in situations to take a lot of those draws tonight. He did a good job of that, he did a good job on the penalty kill. He continues to be as expected in what we've researched and seen from him and he was all of that tonight. I liked his game tonight."

Dowd also drew two penalties on the night.

The biggest competition for Dowd at fourth line center looks to be Travis Boyd who also played Tuesday. With both players in action, Dowd had the greater impact on the game. The offensive upside looks much higher for Boyd, but Dowd looks like he provide more of those little things that Beagle provided such as face-off wins and penalty killing.

Connor Hobbs

Hobbs took exception to a hit delivered to him by Tanner Pond and the two dropped the gloves. Liam O'Brien dropped the gloves as well and took on Mark McNeil, but Hobbs gets the shout out here because it was a pretty darn good bout with Hobbs delivering several pretty nice rights to Pond.

Connor Hobbs took exception to a hit from Tanner Pond and the two dropped the gloves.

Braden Holtby

Just in case you were wondering, yes, Holtby is going to make the team. While you could put him in the same category as Oshie, Holtby makes the list for having the top play on the night.

In the first period, former Cap Daniel Winnik looked like he had an empty net to shoot on, but Holtby stretched out the toe to make the fantastic save and somehow deny Winnik.

Braden Holtby is already in midseason form as he stretches the toe to deny Daniel Winnik the empty net!

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105398 Washington Capitals

New head coach Todd Reirden gets nothing by rave early reviews from Caps players

By J.J. Regan

September 18, 2018 1:17 PM

A defending champion will face a number of obstacles in its quest to repeat.

But for the 2018 Stanley Cup champion Capitals, the path back has an additional hurdle.

Gone is Barry Trotz, the head coach who helped lead the team to its first Stanley Cup. A team hoping to overcome a long postseason and a short offseason will now also have to do it with a new head coach.

Among all the challenges the Caps will face this season, however, no one seems to be worried about the transition to new coach Todd Reirden.

"This is probably going to be the smoothest transition of any coaching change that I've ever heard of," T.J. Oshie said. "Everyone respects Todd, respects the way he coaches, respects how he treats people."

Reirden was a member of Trotz's staff as an assistant coach whose primary duty was working with the defensemen. His ability to develop relationships and bring out the best in the team's blue-liners certainly endeared him to the players.

"Even with all of the D he worked really closely with, from day one, he sat us all down and kind of mapped us all out -- what you need to get better at, what's holding you back mentally or physically, your game, D-zone, O-zone, whatever," John Carlson said.

"I think he's a good reader of people and really detailed about certain things that I know changed my game -- just little things to think about that you do so many times, but maybe you never work on them or you never think about improving in that area."

Reirden's coaching was on display last season when he took a fringe NHL defenseman in Michal Kempny at the trade deadline and turned him into a top-four defenseman for the Caps' Cup run.

The expertise and proven results have players like Madison Bowey excited for how they can grow with Reirden now the man in charge behind the bench.

"I think we all just want to learn from [Reirden], myself included," Bowey said.

"Last year was just a big learning curve for me and he helped be tremendously along that way. I just want to keep learning from him."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

Barry Trotz and Todd Reirden

Rave reviews from the defensemen should be expected given that is the main area of his experience and expertise. Since taking over the team, however, it is not just the defensemen who have taken notice.

Not to be outdone, the forwards appreciate both his hockey expertise and the personal relationships he develops with the players.

"He's got really good ideas and the way he's approaching us which I like," Nicklas Backstrom said.

"[Reirden] is so good at creating relationships with people and talking things out," Oshie said. "And that's the thing that I think I like the best. He likes to hear from the players, what they think."

Many players were also quick to point out that, while Trotz may have been the head coach and the main voice that helped the Caps reach the ultimate prize, Reirden had a big hand in that championship run as well.

"He was a huge influence on our success," Tom Wilson said. "The whole coaching staff the last few years has been second to none. Todd is well deserving, he's well qualified, he's been right in the thick of things throughout the ride the last couple of years and I expect nothing less moving forward. He's a smart guy, a passionate coach and I think a lot of the guys are excited to get moving with it."

"What a guy Trotz is," Oshie said.

"He's going to be missed. But he's on the other side now. We got a new year going and I'm excited to play for [Reirden] and just see what he has in store for the guys. It's going to be a fresh voice for us – even though he had a lot of say before. But like I said, I'm excited to get going here with [Reirden] at the helm."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105399 Washington Capitals

Capitals vs. Bruins preseason Game 2: Time, TV Channel, Live stream, how to watch

Staff Report

By NBC Sports Washington

September 18, 2018 10:43 AM

Hockey season is back, and the reigning Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals continue their preseason schedule against the Boston Bruins, this time at Capital One Arena.

While the banner-raising ceremony is still a month away, the Capitals play their second preseason game against the Bruins Tuesday night, after their opener Sunday in Boston.

The Bruins are one of the four teams the Capitals will face in preseason play, along with the Canadiens, Hurricanes, and Blues.

The Bruins will then return to the nation's capital early next month to take on the Caps in the first game of the 2018-19 NHL regular season. But first, it's time to get back on the ice for Game 2 of the seven-game preseason schedule.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105400 Washington Capitals

The only question in net for the Caps is not who the backup will be, but how much he will play

By J.J. Regan

September 18, 2018 10:00 AM

As excited as fans may be about prospect goalie Ilya Samsonov's first season in North America, it was Pheonix Copley who entered the preseason as the No. 2 goalie behind Braden Holtby.

After a strong performance in the Capitals' first preseason game on Sunday in which he turned aside 21 of the 22 shots he faced, Copley is doing his best to cement himself as the Capitals' backup for the upcoming season.

"He knows the challenge that's in front of him and I thought he was real solid [in Sunday's game]," head coach Todd Reirden said to reporters Monday.

"A number of big saves early on. We were a little bit slow to get going in the game, so we needed him. We needed him in the beginning of the game. He was there for us and I thought he really sent the message in game one that he's prepared for that opportunity."

Copley, 26, has only two games of NHL experience in his career. He does not generate the same buzz as a player like Samsonov who is believed to be the team's starter in net. Add in a rough season for Copley in Hershey in 2017-18 and it has led many to believe there is an open competition for the backup goalie this season.

The reality is, however, that this has always been Copley's job to lose.

As he tries to make the transition from the KHL to the North American game, getting Samsonov as much playing time as possible in the AHL will be better for his development than sitting him on the bench behind Holtby.

While Copley prepares for the NHL, Holtby will have to adjust as well to having a backup not quite as established as Philipp Grubauer to rely on. The relationship between Holtby and Copley, however, is already a strong one and Holtby is excited for the opportunity this preseason brings for his new backup.

"It's his first chance to get a few good starts in, and my job's just to be there to support him, make sure we can work through things together," Holtby told reporters on the first day of camp. "I can learn things from him, he can learn things from me and vice-versa."

Regardless of how Copley plays in the preseason, however, there is risk involved with pinning such an inexperienced goalie as the team's backup. Until he gets a few starts at the NHL level playing against NHL competition, we ultimately do not know how good he will be. Until that question is answered, we also do not know how much he will play.

Grubauer played in 35 games last season as Holtby struggled. Regardless of how good the Caps may feel about Copley as the backup, it seems safe to assume the team is not expecting Copley to see quite that much action this season. If they believed he would need to, the team likely would have considered other options.

Holtby, for his part, said he is ready to take on a larger load again as the starter.

"Hopefully I play a few more games or something like that would be nice," he said, "But whatever it is, we're just trying to make sure that our goalie department is as good as we can be from top to bottom."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

Holtby seemed to benefit from the extra rest as he elevated his game in the postseason, but he disputes that. Instead, he said it was the heavy workload of the postseason that helped him settle in.

"I'm not a guy that likes time off," he said. "Through the playoffs was the best I've felt because I was playing every day. That's just the way I like to do it. I find it easier when I'm playing. I find it really difficult when I'm not. That's just the way I work."

With no Grubauer backing him up and Samsonov still developing, Holtby is likely to get his wish of more games.

But while Copley was a major question mark for the Caps heading into the season, Sunday's game could go a long way towards assuaging those fears and justifying the confidence the team has put in him to be their No. 2 this season.

1105314 Nashville Predators

Predators murals popping up on buildings in Nashville area

Paul Skrbina, Sept. 18, 2018

Some new graffiti has begun to appear in and around Nashville.

So far, Bridgestone Arena and the Ford Ice Center in Antioch have been tagged with Predators murals.

The team posted a time-lapse video Tuesday afternoon of the team's logo being painted on a wall at Bridgestone, with a message hinting there might be more to come.

The post also asked for suggestions.

The Predators will hold an informal scrimmage at noon Wednesday at Centennial Sportsplex, which hasn't yet been tagged, that will be open to the public.

The team's first home exhibition game of the season is set for 7 p.m. Friday against the Lightning at Bridgestone.

Tennessean LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105315 Nashville Predators

After more than a decade, Pekka Rinne, Predators face an uncertain future together

By Adam Vingan Sep 18, 2018

On Pekka Rinne's 29th birthday, the Predators gifted him with a seven-year contract.

It was an appropriate present for a franchise goaltender who navigated an improbable path from eighth-round pick to top-tier starter.

"To me, when I signed that long-term deal, it was a huge burden on me," Rinne said. "I was so scared if I'm ever going to be worth it. You put a lot of everything on one player, and I wasn't sure if I was ready for that."

But here he is, six years later, still going strong as a catalyst of the Predators' rebirth as Stanley Cup favorites and long-overdue Vezina Trophy winner.

"I could have never believed all the things that (have) happened along the way," Rinne said.

As another season begins, there's no question about Rinne's place on the roster, but it's time to start thinking about life without him.

It's hard to imagine someone other than Rinne manning the Predators' crease (or him manning another team's), but it's a reality he and the Predators must prepare for as he enters the final year of his \$49 million contract.

"Obviously I realize that this year I'm going to be 36 (on Nov. 3)," Rinne said. "This league is so competitive, and this team is going to be competitive for years to come, I'm 100 percent sure. I would like to be part of it, but also it is important that it's the right fit for everybody."

MOST STARTS BY NHL GOALTENDERS BETWEEN 2008-17

Henrik Lundqvist (NYR) 602

Pekka Rinne (NSH) 555

Marc-Andre Fleury (PIT/VGK) 550

Jonathan Quick (LAK) 546

Ryan Miller (BUF/STL/VAN/ANA) 520

At some point during training camp, Rinne and Predators general manager David Poile will discuss Rinne's future and how he fits into the team's plans. Poile is open to re-signing Rinne during the season if their viewpoints align.

"I want to talk to Pekka first and lay out everything that I can see in our organization and specifically with our goaltending," Poile said. "As a veteran player, I would probably tell him a little bit more than others in terms of what I see in the next two to three years. I don't want to put a number to what I think his timeframe is. He's going to be (36). There's not a lot of goalies that have played in the National Hockey League from that age going forward.

"I can tell you that, bottom line, my goal would be, along with Pekka's agreement, to have him play his entire career here. That would be my goal. ... We have to find a way to make that work for both of us."

Pekka Rinne (right) feels he has more good hockey in him, but Juuse Saros is younger and getting better every year. (Photo: Christopher Hanewinkel / USA Today)

Rinne has largely succeeded in defying his age, but 23-year-old heir apparent Juuse Saros won't wait forever. Saros, who signed a three-year contract in July, figures to get more playing time this season and frankly needs more to prove himself as a worthy successor.

"When you're talking about contracts, when you're talking about jobs, being a goalie, there's two spots," Rinne said. "I feel like I have good years left still. At the same time, I'm super excited for (Saros), who's up-and-coming. He's ready and more ready every year. I look at him now, and he's a year older and he looks really good. I understand that part of it, too. I don't know, maybe at some point my job is to be the mentor or something else. But I don't want to go too far ahead."

There's no rush. Rinne will be the Predators' workhorse this season, just as he has been for the past decade.

But for how much longer after that?

"I've been so fortunate to be here for all my career," Rinne said. "You can figure what's my goal. It's no secret that I'd like to stay here, but also it has to be a good fit for everybody."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105410 Websites



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

The Athletic / Meet Gina Kingsbury, the manager tasked with re-establishing Canada as the dominant power in women's hockey

By Jonathan Willis

Sep 18, 2018

DAWSON CREEK, B.C. — It's a cold September day and an overnight snowfall has left the streets white, as Gina Kingsbury and the women's national team gather in northern British Columbia for Hockey Canada's annual Fall Festival.

For the 50-odd attendees, it's a chance to impress the brass at the start of a new four-year cycle which will ultimately peak at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. For Kingsbury, newly responsible for managing the entire women's program, it's a chance to assess and develop the players who will try to re-establish Canada as the dominant power in women's hockey.

Kingsbury laughs that she's gotten soft when asked about the weather, but points out that she grew up in Rouyn-Noranda, Que.: "So I know about snow, I know about north."

Eight months after Kingsbury was born, her family was forced to move from Uranium City, Sask., due to mine closures that turned a community of nearly 5,000 into a ghost town virtually overnight. This meant that Kingsbury grew up in one of Canada's greatest hockey communities, an undersized town that has produced a disproportionate number of future stars, including Dave Keon and Pierre Turgeon. Some of those players went on to have careers as coaches, like Jacques Cloutier, or executives, like Dale Tallon.

Kingsbury might be unique in that she's been all three.

A 10-year veteran of Canada's national team and five-time gold medalist (two at the Olympics, three at the world championships), Kingsbury retired as a player at the relatively young age of 28, but had no plans to leave hockey.

"I knew that I – the game is a huge part of you – so I knew that I wanted to be involved in the game in some capacity," she explained. "But the only capacity I knew at the time was coaching."

She joined BC's Okanagan Hockey Academy as a coach in their women's program, and then later moved on to NCAA hockey at the University of Minnesota Duluth as an assistant to the legendary Shannon Miller. Kingsbury was there one season, but lost her job in the summer of 2015 when the contracts of the entire staff were not renewed. (Miller, who had coached there for 16 years, later sued on the basis of discrimination and had a jury find in her favour, awarding her a \$3.74 million decision.)

For Kingsbury, who at that point had been coaching five years, it was a fork in the road. She had other opportunities in college hockey, but while working as a skills coach for Hockey Canada her former Olympic coach Melody Davidson made her an offer that was too good to pass up.

The timing caught Kingsbury off guard, she remembers, laughing as she retells the story.

"I was doing one of my crazy runs where I was thinking and running and whatever, and I could tell (Davidson) was waiting for me around the track. She coached me for 10 years; I'm still a little scared of her, so I kept on running, because 'what is she going to talk to me about?' I didn't want to stop! After 10 miles and really out of breath, so I had no choice but to stop, and she finally caught up to me."

Davidson wanted Kingsbury to work for her in a new position which would be responsible for player development within the national program.

"Honestly at that point I didn't know that was even possible. It's getting more and more possible to play different roles in our game. That was

kind of the first time that I realized that. You always think growing up that you're either a player or you're a coach and there are no other opportunities around that," she said.

Although player development roles often focus on younger athletes – and that was part of Kingsbury's job – the situation is a little different in women's hockey. For older athletes no longer playing at the college level, it can be difficult to get the ice time and training necessary to stay at an elite level, so a key component of Kingsbury's new role was in ensuring those players could maintain their skills.

"We had to find a way to create a training environment that is similar to what they would be receiving in college, more ice time or similar to what they receive when they come to our camps and events. The CWHL at that time, and still does, only offers two ice times a week," Kingsbury said.

"The idea was also to create hubs – Montreal, Toronto, Calgary – and create skill sessions for our athletes that are out of college, so they can keep training at the level they need to be to be their best. That was my duty, to create that across the country, as well as coach the Calgary-based athletes (as an assistant with the CWHL's Inferno) and be on the ice with them for skills."

It was a role which made Kingsbury a key point of contact for players across the country with the Canadian national team. Her three years in that job afforded her a uniquely detailed perspective on those athletes. It also meant another trip to the Olympics, this time in Pyeongchang.

"I was just trying to learn as much as possible on the other side of the game, the other side of coaching as well, the management side of things," she said. "I did end up going to the Olympics as a team lead and was able to kind of shadow Mel in that role and see what she does."

Despite her varied experience and firsthand knowledge, Kingsbury was initially unsure about the prospect of succeeding Davidson in the top job. Yet it was Davidson's mentoring that helped her decide to take on the role.

"She was in the back of my mind when I was making a decision when Hockey Canada approached me to take this role on," Kingsbury said. "Mel's there, 'you'll never feel ready, so do it; jump in the deep end and you'll figure it out.' You'll always be like, 'one more year, give me more experience.'"

Managing a national team is a massive undertaking at the best of times, but Canada faces some unique challenges as Kingsbury settles in. Once the dominant power in women's hockey, the Canadians have been eclipsed by the United States.

They've lost four consecutive world championships and seven of the last eight. They've been runners-up in three straight iterations of the 4 Nations Cup, and in five of the last seven. In 2018 came the inevitable end to a run of four straight gold medals at the Olympics, with the Americans claiming that ultimate prize by the narrowest of margins in a 3-2 shootout victory.

Kingsbury believes that an honest assessment of the situation is the only way for Canada to regain the upper hand.

"We have to be honest with ourselves, and we were during this last opening camp meeting," she said. "We were very honest and blunt. I don't know if we've ever been that honest with our athletes. We put forward basically a result board in PowerPoint and it had a lot of silver. A lot of silver in big, important games. If you look at our record against the Americans it's close to 50 per cent, but those are games that don't necessarily matter, they don't count for gold medals."

"So we are second-best right now and we have to be open and honest in admitting that for us to move forward in the right direction ... What we do next is up to us, but we have to first and foremost admit where we stand."

It's a realization that may seem obvious, given the trend at the world championships, but as long as Canada won gold at the Olympics there was a natural counterargument.



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Kingsbury sees the disappointment of Pyeongchang as a moment which might do for today's young core what the loss in Nagano in 1998 did for a previous generation of Canadian talent.

"Just taking the perspective of this last Olympics, this was the first time that there was no one on that blue line that had the bad taste of '98 in their mouth," she said. "I think in the last 20 years that has allowed us to push the limits, to push the boundaries, having players that lived losing an Olympic game against the Americans. Now we have a full team, a full staff that have that bad taste in their mouth. How do we use that energy to our benefit, to compel us to the next level of commitment, the next wave of success?"

Much of the answer to that question must come from Kingsbury, now that she is entrusted with managing the national team, and she can rattle off a laundry list of items. Strength and conditioning. Sports psychology. Integrated support teams, managed through the Own the Podium program but working with the women's side of Hockey Canada. Perhaps most importantly, resources and strategies which allow players to continue making gains even when they aren't at national team camps or events, building directly on what she did on the player development side while working under Davidson.

One of the trickier aspects to supporting the players is finding the balance between developing people who once played for the women's team, people like Kingsbury herself, while at the same time borrowing expertise from the more established and better-funded men's pro level. Kingsbury pointed to Perry Pearn, a 40-year coach with two decades of experience in the NHL, as the kind of person who could impart wisdom to not just the players but also Canada's up-and-coming coaches.

"With Perry Pearn being on the ice, a perfect example, he's able – and part of his mandate with us – will be to develop young coaches and to provide that critical experience, that knowledge that he's learned on the men's side, to filter that down into our up-and-coming female coaches," she explained. "That's part of the mandate, that's part of the vision: in 2026 or 10 years down the road we have a huge pool of female coaches that have come from our game from the playing side, or come from a student side of the game, but that were provided more guidance from maybe the men's side, or not even the men's side, just coaches that have that experience and if it happens to be the men's side because they've been around longer. It's just the way it is."

"But we have to find a way to speed that process up, to be able to bring these coaches, these strength and conditioning coaches up to the level that we need them to be, so that in 12 years' time it might all be alumni or all females that are running our program. That is the long-term vision, to constantly think down the road and make sure we are growing and developing our people for sure."

It's still a work in progress, but Kingsbury herself is an example of a shift in hockey that has seen more women move into leadership roles after their playing careers end. It's happening at Hockey Canada, where Davidson was instrumental in bringing in Kingsbury and other alumni to play key support roles.

But it's also happening elsewhere, with women like Jayna Hefford and Sami Jo Small stepping into CWHL leadership roles this past summer. The Toronto Maple Leafs also attracted attention this summer with the hiring of Hayley Wickenheiser and Noelle Needham. The possibility of a woman behind an NHL bench now seems entirely plausible, even inevitable.

For Kingsbury, one of the greatest strengths of the players she oversees is the degree to which they have collectively embraced their leadership role in the game.

"The one phenomenal thing about this group is that they're very self-conscious and aware of the impact they have on others from a role model standpoint," she said. "Last year they were asked to create an identity as a team, and the identity had to do with the legacy that they leave behind, the footprint that they leave behind, the impact that they have on others. To me, that's a strength. Knowing that it's a group that

wants to give back, it's a group that sees the bigger picture is definitely a strength of this core group that's moving on with us.

"They have to figure out their way of bringing themselves forward to succeed, and they will."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105411 Websites

The Athletic / Jamie Langenbrunner, Jordan Leopold to square off as coaches in prospects game

By Jess Myers

Sep 18, 2018

When the puck drops in St. Paul on Wednesday for the first USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game to be played west of Pennsylvania, behind the benches for the respective teams will be two old teammates. Just barely.

The game's celebrity coaches are former defenseman Jordan Leopold and former forward Jamie Langenbrunner, who were both members of the 2012-13 St. Louis Blues. But their time actually sharing a locker room was brief.

"We maybe played two games together because he was injured most of the time I was in St. Louis," Leopold said. "But I'd known about him for a long time."

Langenbrunner was well on his way to becoming a Minnesota high school hockey legend 25 years ago, helping his Cloquet team make two state tournament runs and being named the state's AP Player of the Year after his junior season. Drafted by the Dallas Stars in the summer of 1993, Langenbrunner headed toward his senior year as the front-runner for the Mr. Hockey Award and one of the most sought-after recruits on the college scene.

But the Dallas brain trust had other plans for their prized prospect, and he abruptly left the Minnesota hockey world, becoming one of the first state preps to head to Ontario and play major junior hockey.

"It was a difficult decision. It had never crossed my mind until I was drafted into the NHL," said Langenbrunner, now 43 and the player development coordinator for the Boston Bruins. "I didn't know anything about major junior hockey. It's one of those things that I don't regret. I enjoyed my time there. It was the right choice for me at that time."

Indeed, just two years after being drafted, Langenbrunner made his NHL debut, and was a member of the Stars' team that won the 1999 Stanley Cup. He would add his name to the trophy a second time in 2003 as a member of the New Jersey Devils.

Major junior was never a consideration for Leopold, who was a high school standout at Robbinsdale Armstrong, and had his sights set on college hockey, and a college education.

"My family was always encouraging of going to school and if someone else was going to pay for it, I was going to do it," said Leopold, 38, who also volunteers with the youth hockey program in Champlin. "Like a lot of people, I grew up in a separated home, so whatever I could get for myself I was going to go that route. College was always on my mind and I loved watching the Gophers as a kid."

In his four seasons at Minnesota, Gophers fans loved watching him too. He capped off his senior year with a dream weekend in St. Paul, claiming



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the Hobey Baker Award on Friday and helping Minnesota win the 2002 NCAA title on Saturday.

After just three games in the AHL, Leopold became a mainstay on the blue line for the Calgary Flames, and just two years later was within an overtime goal of putting his own name on the Cup, as the Flames took the Tampa Bay Lightning to seven games in the 2004 final.

He would play for seven more NHL teams over a 12-season pro career, retiring in 2015 after 18 games with the Wild.

And then, life got even more interesting.

"My wife and I own and operate an 11,000-square-foot event center and we have five kids. Four of the kids are in activities, and then we have a 1-year-old and we give back to our hockey community. So we're just surviving," said Leopold.

He famously came to the Wild after his daughter Jordyn, then 11, penned a hand-written letter to then-Minnesota general manager Chuck Fletcher imploring the team to acquire her father so he could be closer to home.

"My life would be a lot simpler and more structured if I kept playing," he said. "Now I'm all over the map."

Thankfully, considering their respective schedules, neither he nor Langenbrunner will need to waste much time prepping their respective teams in advance of the prospects game, which has been played seven times previously, but always in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh or Buffalo. Their first meetings with 40 or so of the top high-school-age American players will be on Tuesday, and the game is Wednesday night.

Oddly, Langenbrunner's roster features four future Gophers, while Team Leopold has none.

"Maybe they're punishing me," Leopold joked.

Having played in a few big events when he was young, Langenbrunner wants his team to forget about the scouts and NHL locker rooms and the bright lights and just have fun.

"The danger in an event like this is you think you've got to do more and show something special in that regard. The reality is if you do what you do and do it more consistently than anybody else, you'll find a way," said Langenbrunner, who moved back to Cloquet after retiring in 2013, due in part to a hip ailment. He frequently commutes to the East Coast for his job with the Bruins. "This is a unique opportunity for me in this realm and a great chance to be around a bunch of kids that are trying to get to the next level and to the NHL. I'll hopefully be able to share some of my experience with them about what worked and maybe what didn't work, and they can learn from both."

It's not the first time either man has heeded the call of USA Hockey, with Leopold skating in the 2006 Olympics in Turin, Italy, and Langenbrunner earning a silver medal at the Vancouver games in 2010.

Although this time, when Leopold's cell phone rang with USA Hockey's John Vanbiesbrouck on the line, asking him to coach one of the teams for this game's debut in Minnesota, the long-time blueliner knew that he was ready.

"I've been waiting for that call for about three years," Leopold said. "I've been prepping by putting on about 30 pounds and getting a little less hair, so I'm more than ready to be behind the bench."

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1105412 Websites

The Athletic / Pronman: Ranking NHL teams by their U23 core

By Corey Pronman

Sep 18, 2018

When I did my farm rankings and breakdowns of all 31 NHL organizations, I decided to throw at the end a ranking of that team's best NHL and non-NHL players who are age 23 and under to give fans some context. It was much more popular — and divisive — than I anticipated, and many readers asked me to rank those cores relative to other teams. I am a man of the people, and thus a new ranking was born.

My same preferences and ranking philosophies exist from previous pieces but, with the addition of proven NHL players, extra value is given to players who have established themselves in the league and especially if they have proven themselves to be good players.

The pool of players considered are solely the top 10 players who are 23 and under as of Sept. 15, 2018. It's an arbitrary cutoff, but I'm trying to get to the team's core young talent and farm system. I don't think most team's depth players would change a lot, though, outside of systems which get a lot of value from having a ton of bubble prospects.

If you disagree with any of these rankings, instead of typing out an angry comment below, just yell at your computer screen instead.

1. Edmonton Oilers

U23 Core: Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Darnell Nurse, Jesse Puljujarvi, Kailer Yamamoto, Evan Bouchard, Ryan McLeod, Tyler Benson, Ethan Bear, Cooper Marody

I'm seeing the eyeballs roll already, and yes, I know the Oilers haven't exactly been a role model organization in recent years. However, they have the best player in the league. They have one of the league's best young centers in Draisaitl. Darnell Nurse and Jesse Puljujarvi are good pieces, and their farm is OK. It's hard to screw up McDavid. They're really, really, really trying, but at the end of the day, they have that major piece to go along with several other good pieces, and assuming they don't really screw it up, the Oilers could be competitive in the near future.

2. Buffalo Sabres

U23 Core: Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt, Rasmus Ristolainen, Sam Reinhart, Alexander Nylander, Tage Thompson, Brendan Guhle, Rasmus Asplund, Marcus Davidsson

The past decade has been a struggle for Sabres fans, but you're starting to see pieces put together that could build a competitive team. Eichel and Dahlin are foundation players, combined with Mittelstadt, Reinhart, Ristolainen, Nylander and Thompson is a great core of talent. Few of those players are without questions, but Eichel is a star, Dahlin will likely be one soon, Mittelstadt has the potential to be an impact guy and those other guys could round out the roster very well.

3. Columbus Blue Jackets

U23 Core: Seth Jones, Zach Werenski, Pierre-Luc Dubois, Alexander Wennberg, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Kirill Marchenko, Sonny Milano, Alexandre Texier, Vitaly Abramov, Jonathan Davidsson

It feels like he's been around forever, but Jones is 23 and one of the best defensemen in the NHL. Werenski isn't that far behind. Dubois has the potential to be a top-line center, and the Jackets have some other nice young pieces on their roster like Wennberg, Bjorkstrand and Milano. Their farm isn't loaded, it's just OK, but their top NHL pieces are major talents that could be or already are stars in the league.

4. Toronto Maple Leafs

U23 Core: Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, William Nylander, Kasper Kapanen, Timothy Liljegren, Travis Dermott, Andreas Johnsson, Semyon-Der Arguchintsev, Jeremy Bracco, Carl Grundstrom



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Toronto has emerged from its rebuild with an elite young core and a chance to compete for a title. Matthews is one of the best forwards in the NHL, with Marner and William Nylander also being dynamic forwards with the ability to impact a game. Kapanen and Dermott, who moved up to the NHL ranks late last season, could be solid long-term pieces for Toronto. And the Leafs have an average, but deep farm, too.

5. Florida Panthers

U23 Core: Aleksander Barkov, Aaron Ekblad, Henrik Borgstrom, Owen Tippett, Grigori Denisenko, Denis Malgin, Aleks Heponiemi, Jared McCann, Serron Noel, Logan Hutsko

Florida has a strong farm system with top talents on the way, in particular Borgstrom, but it also has two pillar-type young players in Barkov and Ekblad. Barkov has become one of the best players in the NHL and is an elite two-way center. The Panthers' U23 group may not be as deep as others near the top, but they get a lot of value from their top guys, who could be impact players for a long time.

6. Winnipeg Jets

U23 Core: Patrik Laine, Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers, Josh Morrissey, Jack Roslovic, Kristian Vesalainen, Mason Appleton, Dylan Samberg, Nic Petan, Sami Niku

The Jets are one of the top contenders in the NHL with several young players in significant roles. Laine is one of the best goal-scorers in the league, Connor and Ehlers are great top-six forwards, and Morrissey a top-four defenseman. Roslovic is intriguing, as well, and they have a few pieces in their farm, even if they've graduated most of their top pieces lately. They don't have a ton of young centers in the pipeline with the so-so development of Petan, but overall this is a great core of talent that can make them competitive for years.

7. Colorado Avalanche

U23 Core: Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen, Cale Makar, Tyson Jost, Samuel Girard, Conor Timmins, Vladislav Kamenev, Martin Kaut, J.T. Compher, Shane Bowers

Colorado is in the midst of a long rebuild, but things seem to be trending in the right direction as it has accumulated talent and started to see some of its top young players perform. MacKinnon is one of the best players in the league, Rantanen isn't that far behind, Makar is a high-end prospect and both Jost and Girard have potential to become very solid players for the Avs.

8. Vancouver Canucks

U23 Core: Brock Boeser, Quinn Hughes, Elias Pettersson, Bo Horvat, Adam Gaudette, Kole Lind, Olli Juolevi, Thatcher Demko, Nikolay Goldobin, Jonathan Dahlen

The Canucks rebuild has had some bumps on the road, but generally speaking they seem to be on the right track. Boeser is an NHL star, Hughes and Pettersson have the potential to be, Horvat is a great two-way center and their farm system has solid depth after that. They may not have that true foundational piece you project to be a top 10-20 player in the NHL, but they have a lot of the other pieces you need to be a good NHL team.

9. Calgary Flames

U23 Core: Matthew Tkachuk, Sean Monahan, Elias Lindholm, Noah Hanifin, Sam Bennett, Oliver Kylington, Juuso Valimaki, Andrew Mangiapane, Rasmus Andersson, Dillon Dube

While the Flames didn't have many picks in the 2018 draft, they've had a strong young base formed over the years from high picks and a big trade with Carolina this past offseason. Tkachuk and Monahan are high-end forward talents, Lindholm and Hanifin are good players and the Flames have some depth coming at defense from their system.

10. Boston Bruins

U23 Core: David Pastrnak, Charlie McAvoy, Jake DeBrusk, Danton Heinen, Ryan Donato, Urho Vaakainen, Anders Bjork, Jack Studnicka, Brandon Carlo, Jakob Forsbacka-Karlsson

The Bruins, a current Cup contender, have graduated a number of young players lately, several of whom are playing key roles for their team. Pastrnak is one of the best young wingers, and McAvoy one of the best young defenders in the league. After them there's a decent group of young players who will or already are playing in the middle of the B's lineup, albeit nothing outstanding.

11. Arizona Coyotes

U23 Core: Clayton Keller, Jakob Chychrun, Dylan Strome, Christian Dvorak, Barrett Hayton, Christian Fischer, Brendan Perlini, Nick Merkley, Lawson Crouse, Pierre-Olivier Joseph

The Coyotes rebuild has had its up and downs. On the positive, Keller looks like a star in the making, Chychrun has shown well in the NHL and has a lot of potential, while Dvorak and Fischer have proven to be very good picks. On the other hand, what Strome turns into is unclear and it's unclear whether Arizona will get fifth-overall value out of Hayton.

12. Detroit Red Wings

U23 Core: Dylan Larkin, Filip Zadina, Anthony Mantha, Joe Veleno, Michael Rasmussen, Filip Hronek, Jonatan Berggren, Tyler Bertuzzi, Dennis Cholowski, Evgeni Svechnikov

The Red Wings' first rebuild in a long time is underway. They're going in the right direction and have added a lot this past summer to go with a top young center in Larkin, but they still have a ways to go before they rank among the top teams in the league. Many of their top young talents are still prospects but, for guys like Zadina and Rasmussen, we might see soon how they perform in the NHL.

13. Carolina Hurricanes

U23 Core: Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho, Martin Necas, Janne Kuokkanen, Adam Fox, Brett Pesce, Nicolas Roy, Julien Gauthier, Jake Bean, Lucas Wallmark

Carolina has been building well the past few years, with a great young group and great young depth through their lineup, but has struggled to find the impact players. With Aho, possibly in Andrei Svechnikov and plausibly in Necas, the Hurricanes could have those players to complement the rest of their team and have a top farm system.

14. New York Islanders

U23 Core: Mathew Barzal, Oliver Wahlstrom, Anthony Beauvillier, Noah Dobson, Kieffer Bellows, Ruslan Iskhakov, Ryan Pulock, Bode Wilde, Joshua Ho-Sang, Ilya Sorokin

While it's been mostly a summer of pessimism for the Islanders, Barzal, a current star in the NHL, there are some reasons for optimism. He hasn't put up big numbers yet, but I'm a big believer in Beauvillier and I think he has the potential to be a good top-six forward for a while. Pulock has also developed well and could end up a nice middle of the lineup option.

15. Philadelphia Flyers

U23 Core: Ivan Provorov, Nolan Patrick, Travis Konecny, Travis Sanheim, Philippe Myers, Morgan Frost, Joel Farabee, Carter Hart, Oskar Lindblom, Mihail Vorobyev

The rebuild that started under current GM Ron Hextall has slowly begun to show results, as the Flyers have quite a few young players playing large roles on the team. Provorov is one of the best young two-way defensemen in the NHL, Patrick looks like a potential No. 1 center and Konecny did very well last season despite not getting a ton of power play time. They have a deep farm system, too. For the most part, their core pieces are either in the NHL or close to making it.

16. St. Louis Blues



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U23 Core: Robert Thomas, Jordan Kyrou, Robby Fabbri, Dominik Bokk, Vince Dunn, Klim Kostin, Samuel Blais, Ville Husso, Ivan Barbashev, Scott Perunovich

I really like the Blues farm system. I ranked it top five, and I think it's very possible this group could outperform several the teams I ranked ahead of them here, but there's a lot of projection with this group versus teams ahead of them which have established, good, if not very good, NHL players. If guys like Thomas, Kyrou, Kostin and Bokk hit their potential, to go along with Fabbri, the Blues will have a hell of a forward group, but that's to be determined.

17. Montreal Canadiens

U23 Core: Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Jonathan Drouin, Max Domi, Nick Suzuki, Jesse Ylonen, Ryan Poehling, Victor Mete, Artturi Lehkonen, Nikita Scherbak, Noah Juulsen

Montreal's young group is very interesting. It's a mixture of top prospects and good young NHL players. Kotkaniemi is divisive, Drouin is divisive, I think the jury's still out on what Mete will ultimately be in the NHL. There's a lot of intriguing guys in this group, but it remains to be seen whether any of them turn into true stars.

18. New Jersey Devils

U23 Core: Nico Hischier, Jesper Bratt, Pavel Zacha, Will Butcher, Ty Smith, Jesper Boqvist, Miles Wood, Michael McLeod, Steve Santini, Joey Anderson

New Jersey's young core got a huge boost over the past 12 or so months after lucking into the first overall pick and adding Hischier, along with the surprise emergence of Bratt. It's debatable whether Hischier ends up a solid No. 1 center or a star (I lean to latter) but he's a major piece regardless. After him there's questions that remain with Zacha, but the talent continues to make him at least somewhat intriguing. Butcher is a great offensive weapon who is TBD on if he can handle tough minutes, and Smith looks like a keeper on the farm.

19. Vegas Golden Knights

U23 Core: Cody Glass, Shea Theodore, Lucas Elvenes, Alex Tuch, Erik Brannstrom, Ivan Morozov, Nicolas Hague, Jack Dugan, Stanislav Demin, Jonas Rondbjerg

Vegas, due in part to being so new as a franchise, is rather thin in depth, but I've liked how the Knights have drafted, and even after trading a good first-rounder in Nick Suzuki, some talent is left behind. I think Glass is going to be a big part of their future, and they have some very good prospects behind him. Vegas also has to be pleased with how the development of Theodore and Tuch went in their first seasons with the Golden Knights.

20. Tampa Bay Lightning

U23 Core: Brayden Point, Mikhail Sergachev, Alexander Volkov, Cal Foote, Boris Katchouk, Anthony Cirelli, Mathieu Joseph, Taylor Raddysh, Erik Cernak, Otto Sompfi

Tampa had a giant wave of quality youth a few years ago that helped propel it to contender status. It still has some nice young pieces. Point is a great top-six center, and Sergachev is a dynamic talent with upside. The farm system has a lot of guys who I think will play, but probably won't be major parts of a good team.

21. Chicago Blackhawks

U23 Core: Nick Schmaltz, Alex DeBrincat, Adam Boqvist, Dylan Sikura, Henri Jokiharju, Jake Wise, Ian Mitchell, Niklas Nordgren, Gustav Forsling, Artur Kayumov

Chicago has been in win-now mode for a while, so you wouldn't expect them to have a top young core, but a talented 2018 draft class, positive development from Schmaltz, and DeBrincat turning into everything his most bullish supporters from his OHL days thought he would be, lends to an OK group of young talent. There's work to do here to get back to

contender status, but this group could produce several quality players to Chicago.

22. New York Rangers

U23 Core: Vitaly Kravtsov, Filip Chytil, Pavel Buchnevich, Lias Andersson, Igor Shesterkin, Neal Pionk, Brett Howden, K'Andre Miller, Tony DeAngelo, Libor Hajek

Most of the Rangers' top young players are future NHL players as they just recently began their rebuild. It's going to take a few years to get more premium assets and hope some of these players develop into premium NHLers. I think players like Kravtsov and Chytil could be big-time players for example. For now, they're going in the right direction (if I did this list one or two years ago, they're likely right at the bottom), but it's going to take some time.

23. Los Angeles Kings

U23 Core: Gabriel Vilardi, Rasmus Kupari, Adrian Kempe, Kale Clague, Jaret Anderson-Dolan, Daniel Brickley, Michael Amadio, Akil Thomas, Mikey Eyssimont, Dominik Kubalik

This is a decent spot for this team to be in given how many picks and prospects the Kings traded in the past five years. The past two years have seen a focus on building the farm up, and I've liked a lot of what they've done in the draft, particularly with Vilardi and Kupari in the first round. On the NHL team there isn't a ton. I like Kempe, but he's just a decent middle-six player for me.

24. Ottawa Senators

U23 Core: Brady Tkachuk, Thomas Chabot, Logan Brown, Alex Formenton, Filip Chlapik, Drake Batherson, Colin White, Josh Norris, Rudolfs Balcers, Christian Wolanin

The Ottawa rebuild has officially begun with the trade of Erik Karlsson and it's going to take some time to return this franchise to a top team. Fourth-overall pick Brady Tkachuk is a big piece, but most of the Senators' top young players are non-NHL players who need to prove themselves and even at the prospect ranks they are very good but not amazing.

25. San Jose Sharks

U23 Core: Ryan Merkley, Timo Meier, Kevin Labanc, Alexander Chmelevski, Dylan Gambrell, Mario Ferraro, Jeremy Roy, Maxim Letunov, Ivan Chekhovich, Joachim Blichfeld

The Sharks recently moved two guys who would have been part of this core to Ottawa in the Karlsson trade, but the core components remained in Merkley, Meier and Labanc. Merkley is a highly talented, albeit divisive, player. Meier is a very quick power forward, and Labanc has a high skill level and was a regular on San Jose's power play last season. The Sharks' strength is depth in their system, but the quality depth isn't amazing.

26. Nashville Predators

U23 Core: Kevin Fiala, Eeli Tolvanen, Juuse Saros, Dante Fabbro, Ryan Hartman, Frederic Allard, Patrick Harper, Anthony Richard, Yakov Trenin, Grant Mismash

Nashville is one of the top teams in the NHL and in win-now mode. As part of that process, it moved picks and young players. And prior young stars like Filip Forsberg and Ryan Johansen are now in their mid-20s. Guys like Fiala and Saros have provided nice returns, though, for the big club, and Tolvanen looks like a good bet to provide value on a late first-round pick.

27. Dallas Stars

U23 Core: Miro Heiskanen, Ty Dellandrea, Jason Dickinson, Julius Honka, Valeri Nichushkin, Roope Hintz, Riley Tufte, Denis Guryanov, Jake Oettinger, Colton Point



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The Stars' future hopes are hinged a lot around Heiskanen, who is a fantastic prospect, but it falls off after him. I think most of this core will become NHL players, but I don't see many impact guys. Dallas hasn't looked amazing on the draft floor in the first round. I still want to believe in Honka's immense talent, but he needs to deliver at some point. Nichushkin and Tufte are likely bottom-six guys in the NHL, and Guryanov has been just fine in the AHL.

28. Washington Capitals

U23 Core: Andre Burakovsky, Jakub Vrana, Ilya Samsonov, Madison Bowey, Lucas Johansen, Alexander Alexeyev, Connor Hobbs, Shane Gersich, Jonas Siegenthaler, Garret Pilon

The defending Stanley Cup champions enter the season with an older core. In terms of future pieces, Burakovsky and Vrana are intriguing with dynamic skill sets, and Samsonov is the best goalie outside the NHL. After that, first-round picks Johansen and Alexeyev will play but how good they will be is debatable to me and the system thins out quickly.

29. Anaheim Ducks

U23 Core: Sam Steel, Troy Terry, Ondrej Kase, Isac Lundestrom, Nick Ritchie, Maxime Comtois, Jacob Larsson, Antoine Morand, Max Jones, Blake McLaughlin

The Ducks lost Shea Theodore in the expansion process to Vegas, which was a tough blow. Despite being a competitive team for years, they've made a lot of first-round picks. But there's debate about how good guys like Jones, Larsson and Ritchie will be. I like Steel and Terry a lot, and I've been a Kase fan since his amateur days. I'm not sure how many true impact guys come out of this group, though I know scouts who think Steel and Terry could be those kinds of players.

30. Pittsburgh Penguins

U23 Core: Jake Guentzel, Daniel Sprong, Jordy Bellerive, Calen Addison, Filip Hallander, Tristan Jarry, Kasper Bjorkqvist, Justin Almeida, Clayton Phillips, Jan Drozg

The Penguins' young group is thin, but they have some interesting top names. Guentzel has established himself as a quality top-six forward, Sprong very well could be that soon, and WHL teammates Bellerive and Addison have good potential. After the first six or so names it drops off quickly in terms of guys with real shots to be quality NHLers.

31. Minnesota Wild

U23 Core: Kirill Kaprizov, Luke Kunin, Joel Eriksson Ek, Jordan Greenway, Ivan Lodnia, Jack McBain, Mason Shaw, Gustav Olofsson, Andrei Svetlakov, Filip Johansson

That former great young Wild core of Mikael Granlund, Charlie Coyle, Jonas Brodin, Jason Zucker and Mathew Dumba have grown up into their mid 20s. Since then, they've made some first-round picks, traded some other picks in an attempt to win and traded Alex Tuch. Kaprizov is a big piece (when he does come over to North America) and I think the Wild have a few decent NHLers in this group, but I don't see many other impact guys.

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: The Bizarro-meter evaluates the offseason moves of the Eastern Conference teams

By Sean McIndoe

Sep 18, 2018

On Monday, we dusted off the Bizarro-meter to begin our annual look at which NHL team had the weirdest offseason. We covered the west, going through the Central (not all that weird) and the Pacific (significantly more weird). Today, it's on to the Eastern Conference.

Before we begin, we'll repeat the reminder: "Bizarre" is not a synonym for "bad." Sometimes, a quiet and predictable offseason is the last thing a team needs, and sometimes getting creative or even outright strange is just what the doctor orders. At the very least, weird offseasons are entertaining, and there's usually value in that.

One more quick note: I've been doing this feature for five years now, adding up to over 150 team rankings. In all that time, I've never handed out a perfect 10/10 rating. I've never come especially close – only four teams have ever so much as reached 9/10.

Why do I bring this up? Uh, no reason. Onto the east.

Metro Division

New York Rangers

The offseason so far: Did they even have one? The Rangers may have been as quiet as anyone in the league, with most of their focus spent on re-signing a handful of pieces. Hiring David Quinn as coach was obviously a big move, but roster-wise he'll inherit pretty much the same group that finished last year.

But their strangest story was: The ongoing debate over whether or not they're really rebuilding. Recent signs pointed pretty conclusively to yes – you don't trade Ryan McDonagh for futures if you want to win now, nor do you write letters to your fans about how you're "building the foundation for our next Stanley Cup contender." But then they go and trade picks for Adam McQuaid, and you see something like Henrik Lundqvist insisting that "next year has to be about winning and nothing else," and you wonder. That's just a case of a veteran saying the right thing, right? The Rangers still know they're rebuilding, yes?

Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.5/10. Yeah, I'm pretty sure they know – and Lundqvist does too.

Philadelphia Flyers

The offseason so far: They didn't do a ton, although they made a big splash on July 1 by landing James van Riemsdyk on an expensive (yet reasonable) deal. They also parted ways with Valteri Filppula, which may or may not be a loss.

But their strangest story was: Heading into camp without an extension in place for Wayne Simmonds. Most GMs see a star player head into the last year of his deal and rush to hand over whatever he wants for eight more years. So far, Ron Hextall is playing it cool.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.8/10. I remain completely and utterly frustrated that this guy refuses to do anything crazy.

New Jersey Devils

The offseason so far: They lost a handful of free agents, although nobody you'd consider a major difference-maker.

But their strangest story was: Not really adding anybody. When your big acquisition is Drew Stafford on a PTO, it's been a quiet summer.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 4.1/10. On the one hand, you can see what the Devils are thinking. They're rebuilding, and last year was already a big step forward, so they're staying the course. Still, most playoff teams add... someone.

Washington Capitals

The offseason so far: Not surprisingly, their focus was on keeping as much of the roster together as possible. They paid big to keep John



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Carlson away from the UFA market and figured out a way to have Brooks Orpik bought out and still return. Other than backup goalie Philipp Grubauer and depth forward Jay Beagle, they're bringing everyone back.

But their strangest story was: The departure of Barry Trotz, who exercised a contract clause none of us knew he had to hit free agency and eventually make his way to the Islanders. You have to figure that didn't exactly break Brian MacLellan's heart, given that he's had Todd Reirden pencilled into the job forever. But it was still pretty weird.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.8/10. What do Capitals players think about Trotz leaving? Honestly, given how most of them spent their summer, I doubt any of them know about it yet.

Pittsburgh Penguins

The offseason so far: The salary cap continued to play havoc with a very good team, which in theory is what it's supposed to do. In this case, it cost them Conor Sheary, who was strapped to Matt Hunwick's contract and sent to Buffalo.

But their strangest story was: Signing Jack Johnson to a five-year deal, in a move just about everyone seems to hate. Seriously, there may not have been an offseason move that was more widely criticized.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.0/10. The Johnson thing is weird. I mean, Jim Rutherford didn't get dumb overnight. But five years? The numbers – and most nights, the eye test – don't offer up much of a defense.

Columbus Blue Jackets

The offseason so far: They got a little better, adding a couple of nice pieces in Anthony Duclair and Riley Nash while saying goodbye to Johnson. That was apparently enough to earn extensions for just about all the key decision-makers.

But their strangest story was: The Artemi Panarin contract stalemate, which could be read as a de facto trade request, threatens to derail what was shaping up as a make-or-break season. Or maybe it just adds an extra sense of urgency.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.4/10. Don't forget, Sergei Bobrovsky remains unsigned too. For a franchise that's never won a playoff round, the stakes this year are starting to feel excruciatingly high. The Blue Jackets weren't the league's most interesting team this summer, but they're shaping up to be the early favorites to earn the regular season title.

Carolina Hurricanes

The offseason so far: They traded one of their best forwards, sending Jeff Skinner to Buffalo in a deal that was widely panned. They also have a new goaltender (Petr Mrazek), coach (Rod Brind'Amour) and GM (Don Waddell), and may have pulled off the biggest trade of the summer by landing Dougie Hamilton in a five-player deal. Other than that, not much.

But their strangest story was: The whole Tom Dundon experience. He came in sounding like a guy who was ready to rethink the way NHL teams operate. And early on, he lived up to the hype, personally handling player exit interviews and parting ways with beloved franchise legend Ron Francis. But since then, it's been pretty paint-by-numbers, hiring yet another former player as coach and going with the safe GM choice in long-time executive Waddell. Meanwhile, the Hurricanes are going all-in on grit and grind. That's about as old school as it gets.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.6/10. After nine years and counting of playoff misses, you can't accuse the Hurricanes of standing pat. Are they new wave or old school? Maybe both.

New York Islanders

The offseason so far: They fired their coach and GM, then landed two huge names in Trotz and Lou Lamoriello. They found a new starting goalie in Robin Lehner. Then they set about assembling an all-star roster of castoffs and depth pieces from around the league. Then they gave all those guys long-term contracts. And that wasn't even the bad part.

But their strangest story was: Losing their franchise player in his prime to free agency, if only because they're the first team in the salary cap era we can say that about. As much as Lou might try, there's no nice way to spin it – seeing Tavares bolt was a disaster.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 8.5/10. The Lamoriello era is going to be fascinating; some of those offseason additions make you wonder if he hasn't just lost his fastball, but his entire pitching arm. Then again, the Islanders have spent so much of the summer getting dumped on, you could forget that they've still got some decent talent (including the reigning Calder winner in Mathew Barzal).

And you have to admit, the Tavares situation has at least a little Ewing Theory potential. Can you get better by replacing your best player with a bunch of guys nobody else even seemed to want? It wouldn't make any sense at all, so in today's NHL, it will probably happen.

Atlantic Division

Boston Bruins

The offseason so far: They signed seven players on July 1, but with all due respect to Jaroslav Halak and maybe John Moore, none project as difference-makers. They also lost Rick Nash to quasi-retirement, although they hadn't been expected to re-sign him, and various other depth pieces who didn't make headlines but could add up a problem somewhere.

But their strangest story was: They were one of the teams to pitch to John Tavares and were reportedly in on Ilya Kovalchuk, so clearly Don Sweeney was looking at doing something big. Maybe he still will, although now it will have to come through a trade.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 3.6/10. Nothing to see here, really. It feels like it was only a few years ago that the Bruins were dominating these rankings. Oh wait, it was.

Florida Panthers

The offseason so far: They named Aleksander Barkov captain, but didn't do much at all in terms of trades, signings or personnel moves. Then again, they also didn't do much in terms of giving good players away to expansion teams, so... progress!

But their strangest story was: The Mike Hoffman trade. Well, the one that they were involved in, at least. That ended up being the more expensive of the two Hoffman deals, thanks to some clever work by Doug Wilson and whatever it is the Senators were doing. But as strange as that whole scenario was, the Panthers got themselves a good player.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.1/10. Other than Hoffman, it's basically Radim Vrbata out and Troy Bouwer in. Is that enough? In the Atlantic, yeah, it probably is.

Detroit Red Wings

The offseason so far: Is this a rebuild? We're still not sure. They got a break at the draft when winger Filip Zadina dropped to them, and locked down Dylan Larkin. But they also loaded up on veteran free agents, re-signing Mike Green and adding Thomas Vanek and Jonathan Bernier. They also took the unusual step of hiring their next head coach while the old one was still on the job, bringing in Dan Bylsma as Jeff Blashill's assistant.

But their strangest story was: The ongoing Henrik Zetterberg saga. First, we were told he hadn't been able to train and might not make it to camp. Then his career was over. The fact that all this coincides with the back-diving portion of his contract hasn't escaped notice.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.2/10. They haven't exactly been bizarre, but man, there are a lot of unknowns in Detroit right now. It's going to be a big job for Steve Yzerman to sort it all out next year.

Buffalo Sabres



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The offseason so far: As you'd expect for a team that's been underperforming for years, they had a lot of work to do. They addressed the goaltending, they hope, by replacing Lehner with Carter Hutton. They also pulled off a pair of blockbuster trades, shipping Ryan O'Reilly to the Blues and then adding Jeff Skinner from Carolina, not to mention getting Sheary out of Pittsburgh.

But their strangest story was: Winning the draft lottery. Wait, Buffalo is allowed to do that?

Bizarro-meter ranking: 5.5/10. Not many teams made bigger headlines, and Rasmus Dahlin and the rest of the new faces will be fun to watch. But bizarre? Only marginally, aside from Sabres fans being happy about something for once.

Toronto Maple Leafs

The offseason so far: They made what may have been the biggest move of the entire offseason by landing John Tavares, although they also said goodbye to James van Riemsdyk and Tyler Bozak, among others.

But their strangest story was: The front office drama. Brendan Shanahan found himself staring down one GM who wanted to stay and two more who wanted the job. He chose Kyle Dubas, letting Lamoriello depart for the Islanders and Mark Hunter head back to the OHL. That's what you call a gutsy call, and time will tell if it was the right one. Nailing the Tavares sweepstakes wasn't a bad debut for Dubas, though.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 6.8/10. This one should almost read TBD, since we still don't know how William Nylander's new deal or extensions for Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner will turn out, not to mention whether they've ironed out any sort of Matthews/Mike Babcock feud that may or may not have existed. The Leafs are never boring.

Montreal Canadiens

The offseason so far: They got off to a decent start by drafting Jesperi Kotkaniemi, then found out that Shea Weber would miss the first half of the season (but forgot to tell anyone). Then they traded away two of their best players in Alexander Galchenyuk and captain Max Pacioretty.

But their strangest story was: I'm tempted to write "making all those moves and still not landing a top NHL center," but at this point, that's par for the course in Montreal. So instead, I'll just go with the fact that Marc Bergevin is still the one making these decisions, and seems to have the full confidence of ownership.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 7.9/10. The Canadiens are clearly rebuilding, but don't want to use that word. They're making moves to get younger and clear cap space, but don't seem to have any interest in trading either of their two remaining expensive veterans. The NHL roster desperately needs a center, but they never trade for one. I don't know, maybe it works. Stranger things have happened. But if there's a clear plan in play in Montreal, a lot of us are missing it.

Tampa Bay Lightning

The offseason so far: The biggest player-related news may have been what they didn't do: Make the long-rumored trade for Erik Karlsson that would have given them one of the best one-two blueline combos in recent history. Given how loaded they are everywhere else in the lineup, that's good news for the rest of the league.

Oh, and they signed MVP candidate Nikita Kucherov to yet another very reasonable contract. I mean... Kucherov knows what others players make, right? Somebody please show him how CapFriendly works before 2027, please.

But their strangest story was: Last week's out-of-nowhere announcement that Steve Yzerman was stepping down as GM. Julien BriseBois should do fine, but this isn't the sort of thing that typically happens to Cup contenders on the eve of training camp. (Also, BriseBois's first major move as GM was to pick what could end up being a major fight with the NHLPA.)

Bizarro-meter ranking: 8.3/10. Was a September exit really the plan all summer, as Yzerman and the Lightning tried to tell us? Is he headed to Detroit, like we all assume? Is there something else going on? We don't know yet, but it put a major exclamation point on what had been a pretty standard offseason.

Ottawa Senators

The offseason so far: Alexandre Burrows was bought out and retired. That was about it.

But their strangest story was: The ugly news of cyberbullying allegations made by Erik and Melinda Karlsson against Mike Hoffman's fiancée Monika Caryk. That story broke publicly in June, although it was apparently already known within the organization and had contributed to problems in the Senators' dressing room. Hoffman and Caryk have denied the allegations, and the legal case is ongoing.

Or maybe it was: The Senators quickly trading Hoffman to San Jose for an underwhelming return, only to see the Sharks turn around and immediately flip him to the Panthers for a better deal. Ha, guess that's the last time Pierre Dorion will ever make a deal with Doug Wilson, we all said before taking a big sip of water.

But we can't forget about: The Karlsson trade drama lasting all the way to the eve of camp – including the team's curious public stance that they couldn't offer their star an extension until July 1, even as guys like Drew Doughty and Oliver Ekman-Larsson were already agreeing to new deals – at which point Dorion sent him to San Jose in exchange for Six Assets. Nobody seems to like the deal for Ottawa, and it's hard to escape the conclusion that Dorion and Eugene Melnyk misplayed the whole situation from day one.

I haven't even mentioned: That they decided to do a full rebuild in February, but still voluntarily surrendered next summer's first-round pick to the Avalanche. Or the harassment charges that led to the resignation of assistant GM Randy Lee. Or Mark Stone only signing a one-year deal, potentially paving the way for a trade or UFA exit. Or Matt Duchene's ominous comments about John Tavares and free agency. Or that their starting goaltender reportedly asked for a trade, then didn't get traded, and now everyone has apparently decided to just forget that ever happened. Or all the awkward town halls. Or Melnyk's quasi-feud with Ottawa's mayor over a new arena deal. Or when the franchise's most popular former player let it slip that he wants a new owner. Or that video. Good lord, that video.

That's not even a complete list, but at this point it feels cruel to include everything.

Bizarro-meter ranking: 10/10. History is made, and honestly, it might not be enough; the Senators' offseason from hell probably breaks the Bizarro-meter scale. The concept was meant to capture stuff like a questionable trade here and an overpaid free agent there. The Senators went to another level this summer, and there's no sign that it will all end anytime soon.

This is the part where we might normally say something like "At least it can't get any worse," but that would be tempting fate. If you see a Senators fan, give them a hug. They could use it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Tavares, Marner find quick chemistry in Leafs pre-season debut

Chris Johnston



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 19, 2018

LUCAN, Ont. – You normally can't count on things falling into place quite so quickly.

Even though Toronto Maple Leafs brass first started envisioning John Tavares and Mitch Marner creating sparks on the ice together several months ago – it was a huge part of the pitch used to land Tavares in free agency – some teammates cautioned that they'd need more than a few days to light the match.

"The offensive talent is just off the charts for them two," Nazem Kadri said over the weekend. "[But] you can't expect crazy results off the start. They've got to feel each other out, they've got to start to understand where each other are going to be."

As it turns out, Tavares and Marner needed fewer than six minutes in Tuesday's pre-season opener to connect on a goal. And before a memorable evening inside the intimate Lucan Community Memorial Centre was over, they'd found two more as the Leafs beat the Ottawa Senators 4-1.

It was a dream start for a couple key pistons expected to drive this team's offensive engine.

Yes, it's only exhibition. That context is important. Tavares did some of his best work against Pat Sieloff – a 24-year-old defenceman with two NHL games on his resume – and handed minutes to a couple other "Senators" that aren't truly in the running for jobs on the big team.

But if you're Leafs coach Mike Babcock, there had to be some comfort in seeing Nos. 91 and 16 confidently finding each other in traffic and controlling the puck down low after only a couple days of scrimmages under their belts.

"Yeah, there's another guy on the line [too]," Babcock reminded. "His name's [Zach] Hyman, he keeps getting the puck for them there. Obviously, they had a good night."

Tavares admitted feeling some jitters before his first game in a Leafs sweater. He hadn't played since the New York Islanders season finale on April 7 – a night that must feel like a lifetime ago after getting married, choosing to move back to his hometown and cashing a \$15.25-million signing bonus in the five months since.

"The first game of the year is always that same type of butterfly excitement," said Tavares.

There was also the unfamiliar setting of this small community which won the Kraft Hockeyville contest. Tavares posed for selfies and signed autographs on his way into the rink – "Will you sign my arm?!" one young boy yelled as he made his way through the receiving line – and then stepped onto a compressed ice surface that fell short of the NHL's typical 200 feet in length.

That made the game feel even tighter and more scrambly. There wasn't much room.

Yet somehow Tavares snuck free of defenders during an early Leafs power play and got sent in alone on goalie Mike Condon thanks to a pass from Marner. He wasted no time in roofing the shot, providing an early strike for a potentially lethal PP1 expected to also include Kadri, Auston Matthews and Morgan Rielly once the games count for real.

"I think when you have more than five guys that have the ability that I think that we have, everyone's dangerous," said Tavares. "It's hard to really take all the options away when you've got one extra guy and everyone's multi-dimensional. Being able to make plays or shoot the puck, you now score goals from the perimeter or being able to get on the inside and then find rebounds and crash the net and make plays around the net."

At 5-on-5, the Hyman-Tavares-Marner trio felt a little off sync early on. Tavares didn't think he was distributing the puck fast enough and finding Marner when he popped into openings. Those two had a conversation

during the second intermission that proved helpful because it left Tavares with the understanding his linemate would be lingering around the top of the offensive zone when he found himself below the goal-line after a solo surge up the ice.

He put a bullet pass on Marner's stick and it was soon in the net with a ping off the post for good measure.

Marner has had all summer to think about his role on this new line and decided he needs to shoot more often than in the past. What excites him most about playing with Tavares is the fact the centre does such a good job of controlling the puck along the boards and winning battles, which should create plenty of opportunities for him to get open.

"Just his down-low strength, how smart he is with the puck when he gets it down low, how he can make plays out of nothing," said Marner. "I think just how deceptive he is with the puck as well. I'm excited to have all those things and I look forward to playing with him."

What we saw Tuesday was only a glimpse of what might be, but it won't temper the hype machine building around the Leafs.

We're talking about just one of three potentially dangerous scoring lines and they looked awfully tough to handle. Remember that they've also got two weeks of work ahead before the season starts for real at Scotiabank Arena on Oct. 3.

"We know we're still feeling each other out, still trying to get comfortable," said Tavares. "I'm still getting used to the system. Just keeping things simple, talking to each other and then just be predictable for one another."

"It's a small step."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' Elias Pettersson dazzles fans in pre-season debut

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

September 19, 2018, 1:54 AM

VANCOUVER – As memorable Vancouver Canucks debuts go, it wasn't exactly Pavel Bure versus the Winnipeg Jets in 1991. No, Elias Pettersson actually recorded a point on Tuesday.

In this embryonic stage for Pettersson in the National Hockey League, you can compare him to Bure – the two most exciting Canucks prospects of the last 30 years. But you can't really compare their first games.

Technically, Tuesday's pre-season opener doesn't even count as a game played for Pettersson. Bure, by contrast, made his NHL debut amid the full intensity – and rosters – of a regular-season game in November.

But Pettersson's flashes of brilliance against the Edmonton Oilers were enough to excite everyone on the West Coast, even if the score did not. Without their top players, the Oilers were better than Canucks goalie Anders Nilsson, whose nightmare last season still echoed in his doggy performance Tuesday.

Edmonton won 4-2 at Rogers Arena despite being outshot 37-28. But the crowd still crackled over Pettersson, the fifth-overall draft pick from 2017 who as a teenager won scoring and MVP titles in the Swedish Hockey League last season.

Pettersson collected a second assist on Nikolay Goldobin's third-period, power-play goal for Vancouver. But the Swede, expected to drive the



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Canucks' second line this season as a rookie, was more impressive on another handful of plays that illustrated his slick hands and impressive poise.

He looks, at age 19, like an NHL scorer.

"I had a lot of opportunities to score," Pettersson said. "The more chances I missed, the more I wanted to score. Hopefully I save them for another game.

"I got more confident during the game. I was a little nervous before the game. As soon as the puck dropped and I had my first shift, I felt good. It's good for me that I know I can create chances out there. First game in the pre-season, I think the team played good but we just didn't score."

Oilers goalie Cam Talbot robbed Goldobin in the first period after a no-look drop pass across the slot by Pettersson. The centre later dangled veteran penalty-killer Ryan Strome to the ice, split the Edmonton defence to take Ben Hutton's breakaway pass, only to be stuffed by Talbot, and calmly skated inside stick-less defenceman Matt Benning on another point-blank chance.

Pettersson looked most dangerous on the power play, where he set up for left-shot one-timers above the right-wing circle.

"He created a lot," teammate Sven Baertschi said. "He played with a lot of poise. He always seemed to find the right play."

Ty Rattie scored twice for Edmonton, while Bo Horvat assisted on Vancouver goals by Baertschi and Goldobin. Pettersson finished with one assist, three shots on net on six attempts, a 4-for-4 faceoff record and 7:47 of power-play time in his total ice time of 16:24.

Asked what went through his mind on his first shift, Pettersson said: "To be honest, I was thinking of when I was younger and playing video games of the NHL and I was dreaming to play here. To play my first game here in Vancouver, it was a dream come true."

The Oilers, who visited Vancouver without Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, among others, improved to 2-0 in the pre-season. The 0-1 Canucks play the Calgary Flames' split-squad Wednesday at Rogers Arena.

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Sportsnet.ca / Kailer Yamamoto could score his way onto needing Oilers

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

September 19, 2018, 1:24 AM

EDMONTON — Everybody wants to be Nashville, a franchise that can strut around and talk about how every prospect — no matter how highly touted — goes through AHL Milwaukee on his way to the NHL.

The way the Detroit Red Wings once were, so stacked with veteran talent there was neither need nor space for some 20-year-old right out of junior hockey.

The fact is, most clubs don't have that luxury. Or, the cap has them in search of talented players who make less than \$1 million.

The Edmonton Oilers qualify for all of the above, as they search for their Conor Shearys and Jake Guentzels to flank the \$21-million consortium of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl.

"I brought in the right-wingers the other day," began head coach Todd McLellan, "and discussed where we are at camp, before we'd played any exhibition games. There may be room for two of those individuals, and there were five or six of those guys in there. They'll sort it out."

Those players had names like Kailer Yamamoto, Jesse Puljujarvi, Ty Rattie, Tobias Rieder, and perhaps a Scottie Upshall or a Drake Caggiula. Of that group, only Rieder (\$2 million) and Caggiula (\$1.5 million) are scheduled to make more than \$1 million in base salary this season.

The Oilers need that productive player on his entry-level deal to be a difference-maker this season, which is why Yamamoto's early spike in production becomes so intriguing. The 20-year-old (OK, he's 19, but his birthday is Sept. 29) came to camp last season and posted five goals and seven points.

Two games into his second camp he has two goals and four points off the right side, a position that is so wide open in Edmonton that Rattie — a veteran of just 49 NHL games — is lining up on the Oilers first line alongside McDavid and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins.

"It's nice to score," said Yamamoto, "but (it's about) just playing the right way every day. Doing the little things right. Putting in the work, and showing you're dedicated and you want to make the team."

Of course it is. But we'll guarantee you one thing: At this camp, Yamamoto could do all those responsible things — but not score — and he'd get a one-way ticket to AHL Bakersfield before the final cuts were made.

Last pre-season, as an 18-year-old, Yamamoto's production earned him nine NHL games. He kept getting scoring chances once the season started, but the puck stopped going in, and he was on his way back to WHL Spokane.

During his NHL stint he missed a couple of Grade A chances one night in Pittsburgh, and the Oilers lost a close game to the Penguins. One of them still kicks around the back of the kid's head, a year later.

"(McDavid) threaded about five sticks, and it came right to me. I had a wide-open net," he said. "It was a tough angle, but I went cross-crease and I missed. I was like, 'Oh, my' That one was a little bit engraved in my head. But I'm trying to put it behind me, but, uh ..."

Sorry to remind.

"No problem."

Here's the deal on Yamamoto: He's earmarked for the AHL, where this organization would like to see him show some dominance before handing him the keys to an NHL roster spot. But like we said, the Oilers are light on the right side, which means Yamamoto could score his way on to this team.

No one will say it on the record, of course.

"Scoring comes after the forechecking, tenacity, the read-and-react, the effort. Putting yourself in the position to score," said McLellan. "He's doing all of those things."

After what happened here last season, there is early desperation in Edmonton. There is no appetite for breaking in a kid who could be making mistakes in Bakersfield, when jobs are dependent on getting this thing going in the right direction this season.

"We can't pick our team based on convenience, on guys who have to clear waivers and that kind of stuff," McLellan said. "We've got to win games early — we've got to win a lot of games. We've got to get some confidence in our team, and we have to pick the guys who give the Oilers the best chance of winning. If it's Yamo, it's Yamo."

Yamamoto crashed the net early in Tuesday's 4-2 win at Vancouver, paving the way for Rattie's first of two goals. The points are coming for Yamamoto now, the prerequisite for this 22nd-overall pick to hang around the NHL, in this, his first pro season.



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"It's nice to score, but (it's about) just playing the right way every day," he repeated. "I think I've got a shot, but it's not my call. Just try to put those chances in, and see where it takes me."

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1105417 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / John Tavares debut has Maple Leafs fans thinking Stanley Cup

Mike Johnston | @MikeyJ_MMA

September 18, 2018, 11:20 PM

Anticipation had been building since he put pen to paper on July 1 as the NHL's top available free agent, and John Tavares did not disappoint in his official Toronto Maple Leafs pre-season debut Tuesday night.

The star centre scored two goals and added an assist in a 4-1 victory over the Ottawa Senators, sending Leafs Nation into a frenzy.

It took Tavares little more than five minutes to bury his first goal in a Maple Leafs uniform, tying the game at one goal apiece thanks to a power-play marker assisted by Mitch Marner and Travis Dermott. Tavares took a pass from Marner down low, worked his way to the front of the net and out-waited Mike Condon before firing one blocker side.

Kyle Dubas was on hand to witness what went down in Lucan, Ont., at the Kraft Hockeyville-hosted game and liked seeing No. 91 hit the back of the net.

"I think anytime you go to a new team, whether you're a draft pick or signed or traded there, it's always nice to get that first one even though it's an exhibition," the Maple Leafs general manager told Sportsnet's David Amber and Nick Kypreos during the first intermission. "His reaction is the same as it's always going to be. Not much."

It was merely a 1-1 tie in the first period of the pre-season opener, but Maple Leafs fans saw Tavares score one time and visions of a Stanley Cup began dancing in their heads.

Tavares — who signed a seven-year, \$77-million contract with the Maple Leafs after nine seasons spent with the New York Islanders — was back at it in the third period.

The 27-year-old outmuscled Sens blueliner Patrick Sieloff in front of the Ottawa net to tap in a rebound for his second of the game.

Marner assisted on that one as well and in the third period Tavares returned the favour by setting up Marner for his first of the pre-season.

Those two played on a line with Zach Hyman, a trio tentatively dubbed the "GTA Line" because all three hail from the Greater Toronto Area. Hyman didn't register a point but Tavares and Marner combined for a six-point night.

If Tuesday's game, and the performance of Tavares' new line, is a sign of things to come then Maple Leafs fans could have plenty more to celebrate this season.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.19.2018

1105418 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs GM Dubas updates Nylander contract negotiations

Mike Johnston | @MikeyJ_MMA

September 18, 2018, 9:31 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs hit the ice Tuesday night in Lucan, Ont., for a Kraft Hockeyville pre-season game against the Ottawa Senators.

Restricted free agent forward William Nylander still needs a new contract, so he wasn't dressed for the contest, but Maple Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas spoke to Sportsnet during in the first intermission to update how negotiations are going.

"I still have the same level of confidence that we can accomplish what we set out to do," Dubas told David Amber and Nick Kypreos. "It's our full intention that all these young guys are here for a long time and the impediment right now is we're trying to go through a process with them, with [agent] Lewis Gross and William Nylander and their camp and we'll continue to work away at it."

Dubas remains hopeful the team can sign Nylander prior to the team's Oct. 3 regular-season debut at home against the rival Montreal Canadiens, but the GM isn't losing sight of the franchise's long-term goal of winning its first Stanley Cup championship in more than 50 years.

"We've got to be very mindful of our process here because of the impact that it's going to have on all of our young, core pieces and we're trying to make it all fit and sustain this as long as we can and they all know that," Dubas added.

The Maple Leafs currently have more than \$13 million in cap space to utilize in 2018-19. Whatever Nylander's new cap hit ends up being will eat into that figure but different challenges begin to emerge when you look to next season.

Forwards Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, Kasper Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson are among the team's pending RFAs, while defenceman Jake Gardiner is entering a contract year before being eligible to hit the open market next July 1.

Matthews, Marner and Gardiner should garner sizeable cap hits on their next deals so every dollar the team saves on Nylander's contract can be put towards next season and beyond.

"We're continuing to have dialogue with them and it's obviously our goal to have William here as soon as possible," Dubas added. "They've been very good throughout the process and we'll continue to work away at it. Obviously we're a better team with William here and it's our goal to get him here."

Nylander is among five notable RFAs still in need of a contract — forwards Sam Reinhart of the Buffalo Sabres, Nick Ritchie of the Anaheim Ducks, Miles Wood of the New Jersey Devils, and Vegas Golden Knights defenceman Shea Theodore are the others.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' Ben Hutton looking to re-launch NHL career under Travis Green



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

September 18, 2018, 6:24 PM

VANCOUVER – Conditioning was not Ben Hutton's biggest problem last season, but merely his most public and embarrassing one.

The Vancouver Canucks defenceman's gravest problem was that he utterly lost the confidence of coach Travis Green, who finally ousted Hutton on his unsatisfactory conditioning when pressed by reporters demanding why a 24-year-old player previously viewed as a future core piece could become a regular healthy scratch.

"I'd like to see his conditioning be higher," Green said last spring. "We talk to lots of our guys about becoming good pros and making sure they're ready to play every day. That's part of being in the league."

Even Green's late-season disclosure that Hutton's injured foot had become infected seemed like a veiled indictment. What was Hutton doing while injured that allowed the infection?

At one point, Green pointed out that Hutton was supposed to be an offensive defenceman and yet had only six assists. That was Hutton's entire offensive output for 61 games – just two seasons after he made the Canucks straight out of the University of Maine and posted 25 points in 75 games as a 22-year-old NHL rookie.

Truly, if you had to name a Canuck last April, still under contract, least likely to be back in Vancouver in September, Hutton would have been an overwhelming favourite.

And he probably wouldn't have been back had his game not cratered so deeply that Hutton had no trade value. Less than two years earlier, the Canucks had balked at including Hutton in a trade package for former Buffalo Sabre Evander Kane. And this off-season the team couldn't give away Hutton and the \$2.8-million salary bestowed on him after his rookie year.

Now here he is, back with the Canucks, noticeably leaner and lighter after spending the summer in an Ottawa gym with training partner Claude Giroux of the Philadelphia Flyers. And on Tuesday night, in Vancouver's first pre-season game, Hutton was expected to be on the Canucks' first-unit power play against the Edmonton Oilers.

After Hutton fulfilled his pledge to get in shape, Green promised him a "clean slate" and a fair chance to make the Canucks lineup this fall. So far, so good.

"Since the first day I came back in here, I feel like it has been a clean sheet," Hutton said Tuesday morning at Rogers Arena. "It's up to me to earn my ice and opportunity. That's fair."

Asked whether it was harder last season not playing or having his issues made public, he said: "Both were obviously tough. I want to be on the ice, so I'd say that was the hardest thing. Coming to the rink and not being able to go on the ice and battle with the guys, that hurt a lot.

"But with things coming out (in public), the media is never easy on you. That was tough. It was a tough year all around. I didn't produce, I was getting scratched for the first time, and the media was blowing up all over the place. I've just got to put it behind me. Every player faces adversity and it's how you handle it."

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.

There's a sound theory that Hutton's relative lack of adversity his first couple of seasons under former head coach Willie Desjardins left him unprepared mentally to handle the demands of Green.

Think about it: Hutton was a fifth-round draft pick out of Nepean of the Central Canada Hockey League who at his first NHL training camp

played his way on to an awful Canucks team, and a couple of months into his second season was awarded a two-year, \$5.6-million extension.

The Canucks essentially handed Hutton the keys to the defence, and then Green came in and wanted them back.

"I kind of caught everyone off-guard making the team coming out of college," Hutton agreed. "But there is no easy road to the NHL; you've got to earn your ice and your spot.

"It's easy to look back (at last season) and say, 'OK, you were snake-bit the first part of the year and in the end, you weren't playing.' But no matter what, six assists is six assists. I was not happy with that at all."

The six-foot-three blueliner dropped about five pounds, to 203, and became much leaner over the summer. Hutton said he practised getting his shot through traffic, and believes his ability to move the puck from his zone and skate up ice will allow him to re-launch his NHL career.

"I think he has to get more than six assists, that's for sure," Green said Tuesday. "But we're asking for a lot of our D to produce more and be better hockey players. Maybe Ben Hutton can play against top lines. We'll see. Maybe he took a big jump and he's playing the power play. Who knows? It's not just based on points. (But) I think if Ben Hutton plays his best hockey, he's going to get more than six points."

Hutton won't make the Canucks simply because he reported to training camp in better shape. His conditioning is only Step 1, just a start. It merely gives him an opportunity under Green. But it's a much better one than he had last spring.

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1105421 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oral History: The groundbreaking Tyler Seguin, Super Mario Bros. tweet

David Singh | @ByDavidSingh

September 18, 2018, 10:09 AM

The acclaim rushed in for the Dallas Stars immediately after the team pushed out the tweet at 1:07 ET last Thursday afternoon. Its contents were simple: A 44-second video with no accompanying caption. Ultimately, the instantly recognizable graphics were designed to do all the talking.

It was a level from the 1985 NES classic Super Mario Bros., only with a pixelated Tyler Seguin replacing the famous video game character. Seguin — who has flourished into one of the NHL's best centres during his five seasons with the Stars — sidescrolled his way through the level, fired pucks at NHL team logos, defeated Bowser and, finally, was awarded a new contract extension.

It was an unprecedented way of informing the world that the Stars had locked up the real-life Seguin for eight years with an average annual value of \$9.85 million.

Immediately, social media exploded with praise. Some news outlets pondered if it was the greatest contract reveal in sports history. Hockey writers and fans rushed to tweet their best puns, often revolving around Seguin collecting a ton of gold coins, just like Mario himself.

The video was entirely the work of Jonathan Maniet, a digital content producer and editor with the Stars. The 22-year-old, a recent graduate



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from the University of North Texas, had just become a full-time employee with the team after spending last season as an intern.

The following is an oral history of the groundbreaking Twitter moment, told by Maniet and others.

BRAD ALBERTS, Stars president: This goes back really to last year. Our executive group made a major shift in how we handled our social media. We wanted to create specific content and be different. We needed to go out and get people who could do it and so we did.

JONATHAN MANIET, Stars digital content producer and editor: The original thought came from a summer creative project that we were given. They had our department create videos that reflected our personalities, just to create something different that you don't believe you would ever really see from an NHL team's account on social media. That's where I got the idea from. Turning Tyler Seguin into Super Mario. The first video came from there.

ALBERTS: They created something similar in the summer that got some attention.

MANIET: Fans were commenting on that earlier video, thinking it was a contract extension video. Our social media team came to me and said, 'You know what, why don't we give 'em what they want?' and 'Let's do a second video.' I said, 'OK that sounds good.' We put it together and it was ready [if and when] Tyler was ready [to sign a contract extension].

ALBERTS: We're always having to sell the game down in Texas a little bit different than people do in Canada. Especially when our team isn't winning. And so, we're always coming up with ideas to be different. The summer is long when you don't make the playoffs. So, trying to do things to get people's attention is what we're shooting to do.

MANIET: I had some footage of Super Mario Bros. gameplay on my computer and thought, 'You know what, I should use this.' ... I had two older brothers so when I was a little kid, I always watched them play video games. I wanted to do something that paid tribute to what I grew up doing.

MAXMILLIEN ROSENBERG, former CFL social media and content manager, who has also worked as digital media manager with Toronto Argonauts: There is just a nostalgia appeal that is undeniable. Lots of people have a memory of playing video games when 8-bit was the best you could get so it brings them back to those days. Vintage has a certain appeal to everyone.

MANIET: I took it into [Adobe] Photoshop and, frame by frame, I cut out Mario from the level and then I cut it down to the length that I wanted and took it into After Effects and created my own Seguin character, animated it and then plugged it into the video. It was a bit tedious. It took about a week or two to get it down and perfect to where I wanted.

ROSENBERG: Not everyone can do an 8-bit. They have to be thought out and it's the intricacies and really making it true to whatever cartoon/video game they are spoofing on that make me personally love it.

RAJU MUDHAR, Toronto Star reporter with extensive experience covering the gaming industry: It was a really smart use of social media combined with the seemingly never-ending appetite for retro games. You have to give kudos to the very savvy Stars web/media folks.

ALBERTS: Creative genius ... it was brilliant. We had no idea about the reaction we would get from it and clearly, the social media world loved it. Jonathan gets all the credit.

CHRISTOPHER DOYLE, director, partnerships/head of sports at Twitter Canada: They've hit the sweet spot for a Twitter announcement video here. It's short and snappy, under one minute in length. It tells a story. The video is so creative, it stops you as you browse your feed, and you're guaranteed to watch it more than once.

ROSENBERG: They did it to make a major announcement. Usually the hockey/football operations and communications team may control process there. You get the standard press release, social graphic move

but being able to make a big-time announcement in a unique way is great. When I first saw it, I assumed it was just some off-season fun ... wrong!

DOYLE: The audio is also an underrated part of this video. The sound effects are instantly identifiable.

MUDHAR: Classic Mario audio. A little eerie in their choice, but the music takes you back. Really, the only thing that would have made the thing better was if it was playable.

DOYLE: It's one of the best team announcements I've seen on Twitter.

MANIET: One of my friends sent me a screenshot of ESPN Sportscenter retweeting it. I'm glad everyone is noticing it and the words 'Dallas Stars' is getting out there on all these different accounts. That was the goal of the video.

ALBERTS: Tyler loved it as well. Everybody was laughing and thinking it was great. That day was a good day for Tyler Seguin.

The original Super Mario Bros. game was released in Japan on Sept. 13, 1985. In an act of pure coincidence, the Stars video dropped on the same date, 33 years later.

ALBERTS: I did not know that. That's awesome. That's a bit of irony for sure. Does Jonathan know that?

MANIET: No, I noticed that someone shared it and put that stat out there. And I thought, 'Wow, what tweet serendipity that was.' And good timing on Tyler's part too, I guess, without even knowing. Hopefully Nintendo liked it too."

MUDHAR: Mario is a gaming icon and hasn't gone anywhere ... These classic games are still really easy to play, and Nintendo keeps releasing it on newer platforms and with micro-consoles that work with modern TV. The original is an enduring game, because of the care put into it, and is the basis for the entire platforming gaming genre.

The Tweet blew up and the engagement numbers offered strong evidence: As of 9 a.m. the next morning, it had amassed 907,000 video views, 6,700 retweets and 21,500 likes.

DOYLE: It raises the bar for sports team social accounts, because the genius is that it pairs a breaking news event — in this case, announcing a new contract — with a highly entertaining and fun piece of creative.

MANIET: That wasn't really the intent — to try to one-up other teams. I wanted to do my job and try to make something that Stars fans and the team and organization could be proud of on social media.

DOYLE: We talk at Twitter about the planning that goes in to owning moments in real-time, and this is a great example of that. It's also insanely shareable. You think of a typical contract extension or announcement, in previous years, there's maybe a photo and some text. This is instantly shareable because it's so unique. That's the brilliance.

ROSENBERG: The hardest part can be both getting buy in from the communications, marketing and [team operations]. You need the heads up to make the video, you need the news to not get leaked, and of course, you need a [fire] video guy to make it all happen. The third part can be the hardest thing to find.

ALBERTS: We've set ourselves a high bar. We'll absolutely be trying [to top it], that's for sure. There's no doubt, we'll be talking about it.

MANIET: I've got a few ideas. We'll see how it pans out.

DOYLE: What's surprised me most are the number of fans who've replied along the lines of, 'I hope your graphics team is being rewarded for this.'

MANIET: I'm just doing my job. My job is to create content that people will like. I'm glad that people like this video.

ALBERTS: [Laughs] He's going to be taken care of very soon.



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Sportsnet.ca / Alex Formenton on blazing path to making Senators out of camp

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

September 18, 2018, 4:35 PM

LUCAN, Ont. – Even Guy Boucher can't tap the brakes on someone as fast as Alex Formenton.

The Ottawa Senators head coach lavished extremely high praise on his 19-year-old training camp hopeful by drawing a loose comparison to the best player in the world before Tuesday's pre-season opener.

"Speed. Everybody will talk about his speed," said Boucher. "It's clear, he's a McDavid-type of speed in terms of what he looks like and how light he looks on his feet. His glide is unbelievable."

No pressure, young man.

Formenton was a second-round pick in 2017 who briefly made the Senators roster out of training camp last year before being returned to the OHL's London Knights after two weeks. He now finds the organization diving headfirst into a full-scale rebuild and will be given every opportunity to stick around Ottawa for an entire season.

That's because his toolbox includes far more than the ability to get around the ice quickly. Formenton may not make high-end offensive plays at warp speed like McDavid – and, really, who does? – but he possesses a maturity and awareness that suggest he can handle playing against men.

"I think what people might bypass is that he's an extremely hard-working kid," said Boucher. "He's got all the mental tools to be in the NHL. He goes to the net, he pays the price, he's first on puck, taking checks to make plays happen. It's always 'Yes sir, what do you want me to do?' ...

"That's always a coach's dream to see that type of work ethic with that type of speed. It's usually a great combination."

Formenton's skating stride is equal parts nurture and nature. He was a quick, smaller forward in his minor hockey days and started focusing on edge work about five years ago through specialized coaching. He worked with Barb Underhill and Jim Hughes for a couple summers before moving on to Tara McKay as part of his off-season training with Gary Roberts.

That allowed him to keep pace despite a growth spurt that took him from five-foot-six in his OHL draft year to six-foot-two today.

It's also benefited him to spend two seasons in Canada's top junior hockey factory with the Knights – following in the footsteps of several NHL players by learning the finer points of the game from Dale Hunter and his staff.

"I'd say London is like a mini NHL team," said Formenton. "They prepare well for games, we do a lot of video and all that stuff. Just on the ice, they work a lot on your shot and stuff like that. So I think just the little parts of the organization help you round yourself out as a player. You see it obviously it works out with the amount of NHLers that come out of the program."

The Senators opened their pre-season schedule about 30 minutes north of London as part of the Kraft Hockeyville festivities in Lucan. That gave Formenton a chance to catch up with old friends – including his billet

family – but he hopes it's his last visit to the region for the foreseeable future.

He's among a group of Ottawa forward prospects in the running for a job that includes recent fourth-overall pick Brady Tkachuk, Drake Batherson and Logan Brown.

Formenton has a leg up in the race because of his jaw-dropping speed and a strong performance at the team's rookie tournament earlier this month that left a lasting impression.

"He doesn't need to make an impression anymore. He's [done] enough," said Boucher. "Right now it's about 'Can he keep up what he's done?' He's very smart, he's extremely hard-working, he really pays the price on the ice everywhere. That combination is really an appealing one for me.

...

"Everybody knows that we're wide open right now, so this is the perfect year for young guys."

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1105423 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk will 'not take a backseat to anybody'

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

September 18, 2018, 3:34 PM

Technically, Ottawa Senators coach Guy Boucher may still be using pencil when scribbling the name Brady Tkachuk into a top-six slot on his probable opening night roster, but he's pressing so hard, it might be impossible to erase.

"You never want to say somebody's spot is already there, but he has been very solid — and that's the truth," Boucher says. "From now on, he's got to earn the rest. But has he started well? Absolutely."

Ask any coach or veteran who roams Senators headquarters about their freshest first-round draft choice, a key piece to the organization's loudly touted rebuild, and you'll be bombarded with overtures about the giant kid's professionalism, work ethic, positive attitude, and unique skill set.

"Is he even 19 yet?" wonders projected linemate Mark Stone. (As of Sunday, yes.)

Stone, the club's de facto captain in wake of the Erik Karlsson trade, joined leaders Matt Duchene and Mark Borowiecki in immediately reaching out and welcome Tkachuk into the fold after he fell to the team at No. 4 on draft night. Stone has gone out to dinner with the teenager a few times and invited Keith's son over to his place last week before training camp opened.

"You understand that he comes from a great family. He was raised the right way. He's very respectful and understanding of what he's doing right now. He knows he needs to earn his spot, and it makes him more energized," Stone says.

"You're gonna notice Brady Tkachuk because he plays hard, he plays fast, and he plays the right way."

Chalk it up to winning the gene lottery if you will, but Tkachuk's makeup is as much nurture as it is nature.

"He comes from an environment that taught him how to be a pro," Boucher states. "That's the reason why he was drafted that high."



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Like older brother Matthew and his dad, American hockey great Keith, there is a fire raging within the youngest Tkachuk, but it's a controlled burn.

Tkachuk is one of the first Sens to arrive at the rink and last to leave every day, the kid interviews like a man who already has the job, and he blew away spectators with his dominant, two-goal performance versus the Canadiens at the rookie showcase in Laval earlier this month.

That exhibition came on the heels of a summer bunking with Matthew in Aurora, Ont., where the rival siblings trained alongside the likes of Steven Stamkos and Connor McDavid under fitness master Gary Roberts. Roberts helped convert Tkachuk from picky eater to a nutrition freak, mostly.

"I've got a sweet tooth," he confesses. "Once in a while I have a couple hiccups. Chocolate gets me."

At six-foot-three and 193 pounds, Tkachuk has been billed as a nastier version of Calgary's Matthew, and while picking his brain during a recent 15-minute sit-down, we were taken aback by his confidence and sincerity.

When we suggest that the Senators' trading away of core pieces should bode well for his ice time, Tkachuk grabs the conversation by the collar.

"The first thing I'm going to say is, I don't think everybody is giving this team and this organization enough credit. We have a lot better team than people think. We're going to surprise some people and be a force in this league," he asserts, not at all sounding like a kid still looking to make his pro debut.

"I felt this was the perfect opportunity and moment to come in. I feel like I'm ready, I'll get better throughout the year, and I'm going to make an impact right away."

So, you're OK to leap from college to a top-six role?

"I'll do everything in my power," Tkachuk says. "If that's where they put me, I feel like I'm ready for it."

Whether that means producing points (Tkachuk put up 31 in 40 games as a freshman at Boston University), crawling under opponents' skin ("I have been a talker in the past," he says), or even dropping the gloves, Tkachuk is game. He says he has no worries ditching the cage, required face protection for NCAA players.

"I'll make sure it's not, like, [Ryan] Reaves, but I've fought before and I'm not scared of that. It's part of my family, and it's part of the game. If it happens, I'm ready for it," Tkachuk says.

"I'm not going to take a backseat to anybody. I don't care how old they are. All I care about is the guys in the dressing room. I'm going to be who I am and play how I always have."

Even though Ottawa wanted him right away, Tkachuk delayed until Aug. 13 to sign his entry-level deal as he weighed the pros and cons of returning for another winter of development with his friends at BU. He discussed the "difficult decision" with every member of his family, who said they'd back him unconditionally. He surveyed friends in Boston, back home in St. Louis, and used Vancouver draftee Quinn Hughes — who did opt for another college season — as a sounding board.

"We were definitely part of each other's decisions. It was nice to have him to lean on," Tkachuk says. "He's going to come into this league and be a dominant impact player. I'm super happy for Quinn."

Ultimately, though, Tkachuk believed his dream was too close not to snatch it.

Because of petulant personnel like Tkachuk, Boucher plans to deploy less of a passive, trapping defence in favour of a more aggressive forecheck. Placing Tkachuk, for now, on a line with respected veterans and glue guys Stone and Zack Smith is also by design.

"I want him surrounded by leaders," Boucher says. "They've made the kid breathe a little bit. That's what I was looking for."

Recognizing Tkachuk's brash side, Stone says this: "You need to be confident or things will spiral outward. At the same time, when you're that age, you'll have times when you're not so confident. That's when you need to lean on guys who have experience to help you through that process."

A detail lost in the emotions of the Karlsson trade is that one of the prospects brought over from San Jose is Michigan's Josh Norris, one of Tkachuk's closest friends and a former U.S. national program teammate. Norris excitedly texted Tkachuk before the press release went out.

"He's super pumped," Tkachuk beams.

As reluctant as Sens fans may be to feel the same way this October, if Tkachuk can live up to his own expectations, they too have reason to get pumped.

"To be here in Ottawa for the whole year, I feel like I'm mentally ready and physically ready for the challenge," Tkachuk says.

"For me, it's not just making it but making an impact."

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Sportsnet.ca / Matthew Peca excited for chance to move up Canadiens' depth chart

Eric Engels

September 18, 2018, 12:38 PM

MONTREAL— I'm not going to lie, I did a double take when I saw the Montreal Canadiens had signed Matthew Peca to a two-year, \$2.6 million contract on July 1.

Sure, this was a team that desperately needed to add centres in the off-season. But signing a five-foot-eight, 25-year-old who had 20 games of NHL experience to a one-way, two-year deal seemed like a borderline foolish decision to me.

Three months later I was sitting at the Bell Sports complex in Brossard, Que., watching Peca take his first strides in a Canadiens uniform, when a feeling of déjà vu washed over me.

It was on the eve of the regular season in 2015 that a much deeper Canadiens team put in a waiver claim on 26-year-old Paul Byron; an unexpected move that had most every Canadiens fan rushing to Google just to see who the player was. And the initial reaction to Montreal's decision was a universal dismissal of Byron's ability, which was only reinforced when head coach Michel Therrien made him a healthy scratch to start.

No one envisioned Byron could be more than fourth-line contributor with the Canadiens—until they watched him play. Now he's a middle-six forward who's hoping to breach the 20-goal mark for a third straight season, playing for a new contract as his three-year pact with the team is set to expire in July.

I can't say whether or not Peca will have the same type of impact with the Canadiens as Byron has, but I can tell you that my first reaction to watching him skate with the team was that it wouldn't surprise me if he does. It's a feeling that's only grown stronger since watching him



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scrimmage on Sunday, and one that I think a lot of Canadiens might have when they watch him play his first exhibition game against the Florida Panthers at the Bell Centre on Wednesday.

I don't believe people around the NHL will be too surprised to see Peca succeed, either.

Peca's agent, Jay Grossman, told Sportsnet 15 teams expressed interest in his player when the free-agent negotiation window opened in late June. According to him, one team offered more money on a shorter-term deal.

But the security Montreal offered—and the opportunity to move up their depth chart—was too good to turn down for a player that had been buried on a Tampa Bay Lightning team overflowing with natural centremen.

Peca, who led the unheralded Quinnipiac Bobcats to two ECAC titles and brought them to within one win of an NCAA championship, had been stuck in the mud with the Lightning. He showed well in his 20 games spread out over two seasons, scoring three goals and seven points with limited ice-time and opportunity, but jumping over the likes of Steven Stamkos, Brayden Point and Tyler Johnson wasn't going to be in the cards for him.

"I think I had it in me to make that team and for whatever reason they went in other directions," said Peca on Sunday. "I thought it was time for me in my career to move on and maybe go somewhere where there'd be more opportunity, and now I hope I can make the best of it here."

He's gotten off to a great start in that quest, scoring a goal in the intra-squad scrimmage by beating goaltender Charlie Lindgren to a loose puck and cruising his way to the net to tap it in.

He was consistently dangerous throughout the game, particularly so on one sequence when he showed off his dizzying speed and silky hands by deking his way through three defenders for another great scoring chance.

There's grit to Peca's game, too. He's not afraid of the dirty areas of the ice, from which he's scored the bulk of his 34 goals and 134 points in the AHL.

And though it may not be what he's known for, he can shoot the puck.

In a dream world, Peca turns into the next Jonathan Marchesseault, the diminutive centre who went on to become an elite point producer with the Florida Panthers and Vegas Golden Knights in successive seasons after being pushed out of the same logjam in Tampa Bay.

But if he turns out to have a similar impact to the one Byron has had with the Canadiens, that'll be ideal, and I won't be the only one having to offer up an apology for my initial reaction to his signing.

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TSN.CA / Matthews takes big summer strides chasing McDavid

Mark Masters

Early in Toronto Maple Leafs training camp it's become abundantly clear that Auston Matthews is back to being Auston Matthews. The centre didn't produce as he had hoped in a playoff series loss to the Boston Bruins last spring and looks eager to put that setback way, way back in the rearview mirror.

"The biggest difference to me is skating," said Leafs head coach Mike Babcock. "He's skating at another level."

"Auston looks like he's found another step," added winger Connor Brown.

"He looks powerful in his stride," observed goalie Frederik Andersen. "He's fast and a great player already so it's nice to see how much he's focused on his own game to get that better."

With a big chunk of the media core in Lucan, Ont., for Toronto's pre-season opener against the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday night, Matthews met with a smaller-than-usual scrum after practice at the MasterCard Centre where the non-playing group worked out. The 21-year-old used the intimate setting to outline how he went about improving his skating in the summer with the help of the team's skating development consultant Barb Underhill, who competed for Canada in figure skating at the 1980 and 1984 Olympics.

Here's an edited transcript of the exchange:

Q: People were saying in Niagara Falls (where the first three practices and scrimmages of training camp took place) that you look like you've reached another level. How do you feel about yourself right now?

AM: "I feel good. I think I put a lot of work into this off-season to go into this season as prepared as possible. I feel good on the ice skating-wise, working on that a bit on that this summer, explosiveness, and yeah, I just feel like I'm in pretty good shape."

Q: Do you feel like you're just back to where you were before the injuries last season or do you feel that skating-wise that's an area where you've gotten even more explosive?

AM: "I think I made progress in the summer. I was here for a week in July working with Barb just kind of on mechanics and stuff. Over the course of the summer, that was a big focus for myself, just being more explosive, kind of getting a step up on the opponent, getting that quicker step and I think it paid off. I mean, I feel good out here. I've got to keep pushing and go into the season with a full head of steam."

Matthews reveals how Underhill made him a more explosive skater

Auston Matthews has been flying early in training camp. The Leafs centre explained on Tuesday that he spent much of his summer focused on becoming a more explosive skater something he accomplished with the help of former figure skater and Toronto consultant Barb Underhill.

Q: How did you go about trying to get more explosive?

AM: "Just kind of working with my trainer and I then I think a lot of it had to do with mechanics. Barb really helped me out with that, broke it down on video for me so I could get a clear perspective on what she's seeing and what I can work on and just kind of went from there."

Q: In layman's terms, is there any adjustment you made that you can talk about?

AM: "Honestly, I'd have to sit here and talk to you for five to 10 minutes but, it's just mechanical stuff. It's little things, but they make a big difference. You get a couple little things you can work on and fine-tune and all of the sudden that gives you another step or two on the ice."

Q: What impresses you about Barb as a teacher?

AM: "She's really smart. She demos drills out here and pretty much does it better than anyone else. She knows what she's talking about. It's a pleasure working with her. She helped me out quite a bit this summer. And even before the season gets going it'd be nice to work with her again and get everything fine-tuned for the start of the regular season."

Q: Had you worked with her before?

AM: "I worked with her a little bit at development camp a couple years back, here and there in the summers, but this summer was the first week I kind of spent three, four, five days with her and every day on the ice so it was good."

Q: Does she show you video of how other guys skate and you try and duplicate that?



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AM: "She'll record you skating and then she'll, maybe I'm not doing something right or she wants you to do something different, and she'll show somebody that does it way better than you."

Q: Is there an example of who that would be?

AM: "You know what. I don't remember who it was."

SC Express: Auston Matthews plays

Happy Birthday Auston Matthews! The Leafs' superstar centre turned 21 on Monday and in celebration of Matthews' birthday, SportsCentre takes a look at the best plays of his young career in the SC Express.

Q: Is there someone you watch in the league and you say, 'I'd like to skate more like that,' maybe?

AM: "I think you'd like to skate like (Connor) McDavid, but I don't think that's just going to happen overnight. I mean, there's quite a bit of guys that can obviously skate well and have extremely good mechanics with their upper body, lower body and all that stuff (coming) together really smoothly so I think that was her main focus with me this summer."

Q: Is it like first-step acceleration, is it agility?

AM: "Yeah, first step and that kind of stuff and just mechanics. (Laughs) I don't know how many more times I have to say it. Skating up and down making sure everything is symmetrical and you're getting the maximum push and everything."

Q: Does it become like muscle memory? You repeat it so it becomes automatic?

AM: "A little bit. You get your reps in with her and over time you kind of want it to get in your head, especially in the summer, it's a good time to practice that stuff. Going into practices and skates even without her you focus on two, three things you want to accomplish in the practice whether it's your skating or certain things, you just put it in your head and go from there."

Q: Is this the first time you talked to a figure skater about how to skate? It seems like they know the technique a little bit differently than hockey players do.

AM: "Yeah, I think so. I mean, you watch her demo the drills and she's always right above her feet, right under them, just her mechanics, body posture is unbelievable. I liked working with her a lot. She shared a lot of videos with me even weeks after I skated with her and just making sure that stuff stays with you so you can engrave it into your head and use it all the time."

Q: How is it different for you playing with Patrick Marleau on your left wing instead of Zach Hyman?

AM: "It's different. They're completely different players, but, I mean, they both work extremely hard. Patty, obviously, has that speed and has always had that knack for scoring. I mean, he's scored 500 goals in the NHL so there's no question he can put the puck in the net. So, for myself, it's nice playing with a guy like that. He's different. He can really create space for myself and (Tyler) Ennis right now or Willie (Nylander) or whoever he's playing with because he's got that speed and guys really have to be aware of him."

Marleau excited to play even-strength alongside Matthews

During his first two NHL seasons, Auston Matthews almost always played at even-strength with Zach Hyman on his left wing. But this year Mike Babcock is making a change. Patrick Marleau has been skating with Matthews at training camp, and the pair have looked very good. Mark Masters has more.

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TSN.CA / Tavares expects jitters ahead of first game with Leafs

Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto reporter Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Leafs held a morning skate in Lucan, Ont., at 10:30 a.m., followed by the Ottawa Senators at 11:30 a.m. Puck drop on the teams' first exhibition game of the season is 7:30 p.m.

John Tavares has spent weeks wondering what it will be like to finally play his first game for the Toronto Maple Leafs. All Tavares has ever known in his pro career is the New York Islanders, the team that drafted him first overall in 2009 and for whom he played the last nine seasons.

Joining the Leafs was the start of a new chapter for Tavares. But when he puts on a Toronto sweater Tuesday night for the opening game of the Leafs' preseason schedule, Tavares expects at least one thing to be quite familiar.

"Any time I play, there are always jitters. That's a feeling you have as a hockey player from the time you're a kid until now," Tavares said. "The first game of the year is always that same kind of butterfly excitement and getting ready to be in that mindset again, that mentality you get into. When you haven't played in a while, it's very fresh."

The Islanders missed the postseason last spring, meaning Tavares hasn't played in a real game for more than five months. Just the prospect of being on the ice again, centering a line between Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman, is thrilling for Tavares. Exhibition or not, he intends to treat the contest as seriously as any other.

"It's nice to get back into that competitiveness and a lot of those little things that you need to get prepared," Tavares said. "No matter what, when you play you want to win. So no matter when it is you go out there, play hard and carry over a lot of things you're working on and preaching to keep building ourselves up to the regular season."

Adding to the atmosphere of the occasion for Tavares is the location of Tuesday's game. The small-town of Lucan, Ont., is hosting the Leafs and Senators, just 30 minutes away from where Tavares played part of his Ontario Hockey League career with the London Knights.

Head coach Mike Babcock is choosing to focus on the unique experience before the game gets underway, rather than the big-name star now at the top of the team's depth chart.

"John is part of our team, [but] we know that's just part of it," said Babcock. "It's different just because you're in this town. Whether you're in Saskatoon or here or some other little town, it's just one of those things you're trying to [enjoy]."

John Tavares is set to play his first pre-season game as a Maple Leaf, and as Kristen Shilton explains, the veteran centre isn't feeling any extra pressure.

Before a sea of screaming schoolchildren clamouring to see every second of the NHL practice in front of them, no player had a bigger smile at Lucan Community Memorial Centre than Nazem Kadri.

The centremen grew up in nearby London, and even played some of his minor hockey games in Lucan before graduating to the OHL's Knights. He and the rest of the Leafs were greeted like rock stars before morning skate, with fans lined up several rows deep in the parking lot hoping for autographs.

"We loved [coming here]," Kadri said. "We were waiting for the suspense of it and they were here early in the morning lining up. We certainly



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appreciate that dedication and the passion that the community of Lucan is showing.”

Claiming not to remember exactly how well he played on the rink in the past (“usually I don’t do half bad, though”) Kadri said his friends and family were scattered around the building and looking forward to a more travel-friendly chance to see him play than trekking to Toronto for a game.

“That’s part of the reason I like coming home so much,” he said. “It’s a family-friendly atmosphere and everyone is able to watch from a close perspective.”

As for the on-ice action coming up for Toronto on Tuesday, Kadri was looking forward to test-driving his line from training camp with Josh Leivo and Connor Brown.

“I think we have a little bit of everything,” he said. “Guys have improved; obviously their skating shape has improved. In training camp we talked about how this is the preparation process. I think we have a little bit of everything to complement each other – size, skill, scoring touch, being responsible. So it should be a line that’s able to generate some chemistry.”

A decade before they were teammates with the Leafs, Kadri and Tavares played together for the Knights.

Tavares was traded to London from the Oshawa Generals during the 2008-09 season, the same year Kadri came to the Knights from the Kitchener Rangers. Once there, both players watched and learned from the team’s co-owners, Mark and Dale Hunter. Mark was the assistant coach and general manager of the team while Tavares and Kadri were there, while Dale was the head coach.

“It was great, very much a [professional] environment,” Tavares said. “Learning from the Hunters in a city that loves their hockey like London, it was a lot of fun. I was fortunate to play in two of the best major junior cities in the country.”

In the years after Tavares and Kadri graduated to the NHL, Dale became head coach of the Washington Capitals for 60 games in the 2011-12 season, while Mark joined the Leafs as director of player personnel in 2014 and was later named assistant general manager. He split with Toronto in May after being passed over for their vacant GM job.

These days both Hunters are back with the Knights - Dale as head coach, Mark as general manager - where they’re once again helping to mould future NHLers.

“I think when you go there, a lot of people look at it as a team that’s highly powered offensively, but [Dale is] very hard on his top players in a way to make you better,” Tavares said. “It prepares you for pro hockey and understanding what the challenges will be at the next level. It creates a lot of growth, especially at a crucial time.”

“[Dale] prepares you first and foremost,” Kadri added. “He treats you like a man even though you’re still a kid. He lets you mature at your own level and lets you do your thing. That preparation to make the jump from the OHL to the NHL makes it a smoother transition.”

The Maple Leafs and Senators talk about the importance of playing a preseason game in Lucan, Ontario and former London Knights Nazem Kadri, Alex Formenton and John Tavares also discuss the impact that the Hunter family had on their careers.

From the rumours surrounding an Erik Karlsson trade, to the eventual deal with San Jose that signalled the start of a full rebuild, the Ottawa Senators had quite a tumultuous summer. And no, they don’t want to talk about it.

“We’re now, we’re moving forward,” said head coach Guy Boucher. “That’s our message. We want to transition off ice and we want to transition on ice too. So that’s our focus right now.”

The Senators made the Eastern Conference final on the strength of their veteran players in the 2016-17 season, but now it’s the young guys who will have their opportunity to shine. Alex Formenton, Logan Brown and Colin White all stand to be a part of what the Senators create for the future, and all three will skate in Tuesday’s game.

“We’re going to try different things and have them in different situations,” Boucher said. “But the number one thing is don’t play for the vets that you’re playing with. Play the game, and if you do what you normally do, that’s what we’re looking at right now.”

Boucher spent extra time on the ice with the Sens’ younger contingent during Ottawa’s morning skate, which lasted nearly an hour. But regardless of age, the prevailing feeling among Senators getting ready to kick-off the preseason is one of renewal.

“I think we’ve [worked it out] pretty well in the locker room,” said Matt Duchene. “It’s been really solid for the coaches and the players. We’re not letting that [outside noise] affect us. We’re looking forward to the season.”

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TSN.CA / Toronto’s salary cap balancing act, through the eyes of McDavid, Toews and Tavares

Frank Seravalli

Legend has it that Connor McDavid got cold feet.

It was two summers ago and McDavid’s camp and the Edmonton Oilers were putting the finishing touches on the richest deal in the NHL’s salary cap era.

The two sides worked out an eight-year, \$104 million pact with a \$13 million salary cap hit - or \$2.5 million more per season than anyone in the 13-year history of the cap had ever earned.

Then word started to leak about McDavid’s deal.

Even though he could have justified asking for upwards of \$15 million per year, given his individual dominance and the fact he was still just 20, the belief is McDavid went back to the Oilers and asked to take less.

They worked down to a tidy \$100 million with a \$12.5 million cap hit, still the most princely sum in the game.

For McDavid, the \$4 million less could easily have been made up in endorsements, but those close to him say he wanted to give the Oilers every opportunity to build around him. Who knows how valuable that extra \$500,000 per year on the cap might be down the road?

McDavid would neither confirm nor deny that tale when asked about it earlier this month at the NHL’s Player Media Tour in Chicago.

But he did speak to the wrestling that goes on in players’ minds when hammering out a new contract. How do you balance between personal needs and team needs?

“It’s tough in the cap era,” McDavid said. “You only have a window to make your money for the rest of your life, really, and yet, you want to make sure that other guys can still get paid.”

“I think it’s a very weird, complex thing where I’m taking money out of your pocket, your pocket, and your pocket - and you’re trying to take money out of my pocket. It’s a very, very weird complex.”



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It's a complex that the core of the Toronto Maple Leafs is now mulling, with William Nylander and then Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner needing new deals. It's a complex – one that often includes a hometown discount – that is largely foreign in the NFL, NBA or MLB.

"That's the whole goal. You want to win," McDavid said. "And you want to make sure there's enough money to go around."

No team in the NHL's cap era has won a Stanley Cup with a double-digit earner. Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane were the first with twin \$10.5 million deals for 2015-16.

There will be seven this season, including Anze Kopitar, McDavid, Carey Price, Jack Eichel and John Tavares.

The Kings (and presumably the Maple Leafs) will be the second and third teams to have two players with \$10 million or more cap hits when deals for Drew Doughty and, ultimately, Matthews kick in next season.

Tavares said he left more money on the table this summer because he understood Toronto's big picture. The talent around him was part of what made the Maple Leafs so attractive.

"For me, it's never been about making the most money," Tavares said. "I want to win so I didn't want to do something where the team felt I was going to handcuff them on being able to retain the players they had. Because I didn't come here to subtract. I came here to add to what was already going on here."

For his part, Matthews said he won't be thinking about that balancing act.

"I think that's why we have agents," Matthews said. "You've got a lot of good players that are obviously up for contracts and for extensions and you kind of let your agent and the management handle that stuff so you can go out and focus on playing hockey."

Those who have done it, though, say the big number may feel good to sign on Day 1 but may ultimately come with a tinge of regret if the success doesn't follow - in part of because of what you've been paid.

At a combined \$21 million, Toews and Kane chewed up 30 per cent of the Chicago Blackhawks' cap in 2015-16. Having delivered three Stanley Cups, no one would argue with those numbers for Chicago's two offensive pillars.

The problem is that percentage number has barely shrunk in four seasons as Toews and Kane remained in a salary stratosphere of their own for basically three years. GM Stan Bowman has been forced to make difficult decisions around those cap numbers.

"[When] I signed my last contract, I was looking at the cap. It was going up," Toews explained. "It had gone up for seven or eight straight years and all of the sudden it flat-lined and started dropping. So it's one of those things. You've got to find a balance between what's right for you, what you feel like you've earned with what you feel like you've brought to the team, but also not pushing the boundaries too far where your team can continue to compete."

"Unfortunately, the rules are the rules. We all value winning the Stanley Cup and having a good team, but you've got to look after yourself and your family to a certain degree as well."

So, if he could do it all again, would Toews take less knowing the constraints Chicago has been under since?

"It is what it is," Toews said. "I can't change that decision. So probably not."

Make that food for thought for Nylander, Matthews and Marner.