



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

## THE ATHLETIC

### 2019-20 NHL Season Preview: Carolina Hurricanes

By Dom Luszczyszyn

To many casual observers, last year's second-half surge by the Carolina Hurricanes was a huge surprise. They came out of nowhere and were legitimately one of the strongest teams in hockey down the stretch, earning a 30-12-2 record from Jan. 1 onward, a 116-point pace. That was fourth to only Tampa Bay, St. Louis and Boston.

To others, it was a long time coming. The Hurricanes are annual analytics darlings, winning the expected-goals battle while routinely losing the one that actually mattered: on the scoresheet. Eventually it would turn around, they said, and finally it actually did. A broken clock is right twice a day, but suddenly it just clicked for the team as its overwhelming territorial dominance became too much to handle — though finally getting decent goaltending definitely helped.

With confidence up, one of the league's youngest teams looks ready to take the next step and become one of the next great powers in hockey. By these projections, the team sits just outside the top five with a decent chance of being one of the league's best teams this season. Prepare yourselves for the Carolina Hurricanes because they're about to take the hockey world by storm. (Sorry, I had to.)

After years of my getting burned by predicting success for Carolina only to see the team fail, there's a small part of me that sees the tiny red sliver to the left and just knows that's where the team will end up. The chances are under 10 percent, though, meaning there's a good chance the Hurricanes can build on last season and make a second consecutive postseason appearance. They have an 84 percent chance of making that happen and a 54 percent chance of surpassing last year's 99-point finish.

The Hurricanes are often hyped up each summer, but it's never been to this degree, where 100 points are the expectation and not just a pipe dream. Considering the team took half a year off and still finished with 99 points, it shouldn't be too much of a stretch. This was the league's strongest expected-goals teams at 56 percent, and the Hurricanes finally came close by having a goals percentage of 52 percent — their first season above break-even since 2007-08. If they can get competent goaltending and better finishing, the Hurricanes look like they can be a five-on-five juggernaut.

With Pittsburgh and Washington likely fading, the Islanders regressing, Columbus losing talent, Philadelphia being unable to be anything but mediocre and the rest of the Metropolitan still looking green, the top of the division is there for the taking for Carolina. At 31 percent, the Metropolitan is still very much up for grabs, but for now, the Hurricanes look like they have the inside track.

It's been a long time coming. For a while, the team lacked star power, depth, goaltending or all three. It has at least two of those now, and while the latter is still a big question mark, last year provided optimism on that front. The strength of the

skaters in front of the goaltenders should more than make up for it.

Unsurprisingly, defense is the team's biggest strong suit. The Hurricanes rank first in the league on the strength of the league's best top four, bar none. In Dougie Hamilton, Jacob Slavin, Brett Pesce and now Jake Gardiner, Carolina has four players my model would consider the caliber of No. 1 defensemen, built off their strength to control play to an exceptional degree, specifically on offense. All four are very gifted with the puck, capable of breaking it out of the zone effectively and stepping up offensively when necessary. That's an organizational philosophy here, and it's built from the blue line out. The team has all the tools needed to make the best play in its own zone, when pressured or not. Carolina had one of the most effective breakouts last season regardless of the forecheck pressure being placed against it, and it's no surprise why given the talent available here.

A team that already had an embarrassment of riches added to that arsenal late in the offseason with the addition of Gardiner, who should only further the ability to escape the zone. He was often maligned in Toronto for his frequent "misjakes," but the pros far outweighed the cons as shown by his consistent ability to be a positive influence on the team's chance and goal share. There are some concerns about his back, but at his bargain-bin price, what's the harm? He was worth over two wins in each of the past two seasons, according to GSVA.

Gardiner is just a year removed from a 52-point season with the Leafs, one where he did well quarterbacking a strong Leafs' PP2. He doesn't have a booming shot by any means, but he's a playmaker who can facilitate the puck quite well with the man advantage. That might be just what the doctor ordered for a team whose biggest issue last year was a stagnant power play that may have finished top five in chances created but still finished only 20th in actual goals scored. He should be an improvement over Justin Faulk, who was the most frequent shooter on the team's top unit, firing 30 attempts at the net. That explains a lot about Carolina's struggles in that department, and one that shouldn't be an issue with Gardiner, who takes half as many attempts.

At five-on-five, Faulk was the team's weakest defender by expected-goals percentage, at 52 percent, and a move to the third pairing could help boost that figure. At this point, though, he looks like a largely expendable luxury for that role, one Trevor van Riemsdyk could arguably fill just as well. It's surplus value thanks to the team's expansive blue line depth, and it's no surprise the team has been shopping Faulk around the league, almost stealing Ondrej Kase away from the Ducks. What a coup that would've been, one that would've pushed this team firmly into the league's top five. If Faulk does stay, he'd be paired with Haydn Fleury, who had extraordinary numbers last season in a limited 20-game stint but earned those figures in pillow-soft minutes.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

On the second pair, Gardiner looks to be paired with Pesce, the team's best actual defender and arguably the best player Gardiner has ever been partnered with, a huge reprieve from the past two seasons of Nikita Zaitsev by his side. The two should feed off each other well with complementing strengths, a duo that is the league's best second pair, and would be one of the best top pairs on a majority of teams around the league. When these two are on, it's a good bet that Carolina will have control of the puck.

After a down season in 2017-18, Pesce was awesome last year for the Hurricanes, earning a 56 percent expected-goals share primarily playing with Faulk. An underrated aspect of adding Gardiner to the mix? Getting Pesce back on his strong side, where he may just look even better. While Slavin may get a lot of nods as one of the most underrated defensemen in the league, that distinction might be better placed on Pesce, who handled a majority of the shutdown minutes last season.

Slavin is, of course, quite good himself and along with Hamilton forms what my model considers to be the league's strongest pair. The duo put up a 57 percent expected-goals share, which is par for the course for both guys as two of the league's play-drivers from the back end, especially on offense. Hamilton and Slavin finished first and third in the league in expected goals for per 60, sandwiching the great Erik Karlsson, which should signify just how many chances the team was generating with its top pair on the ice.

Hamilton appears to be the driver there and has long been one of the league's strongest offensive defensemen. By RAPM, his offensive figures were second to only Karlsson last season, and his overall differential was the league's fourth-strongest mark by way of his offensive gifts. Over the past three seasons, he's second to none in both categories and also grades out as the strongest expected-goals driver by my model as well. He puts numbers on the board, too, posting a 1.27 points-per-60 at evens over the past three seasons, the fifth-best mark in the league by way of a league-leading 0.49 goals-per-60. At five-on-five, he's a beast.

For whatever reason, he doesn't get his due for that impact — not even on his own team, where he earned only 19:40 of ice time last year. My model considers him to be a top-10 defenseman (despite his very poor penalty differential), an impressive feat considering most of the other defenders around him buff up their value on the power play, an area of the game he doesn't see big usage in despite his clear offensive prowess. The boy is good, and one day he'll get the credit he deserves for it.

That's an absolutely loaded blue line that deservedly grades out as the league's best, but it doesn't come without its flaws. Though the lot is exceptional from front to back, it's in the pursuit of offense first and foremost, and that has a tendency to leave the goaltending hung out to dry. The expected save percentage from the team last year was just .914 at five-on-five, the third-worst mark in the league as a result. There needs to be a bit more care placed in the team's own end to minimize the few pitfalls of having such an offensively inclined blue line. That the largest culprit on defense, Calvin de Haan, is gone and the next largest, Faulk, appears to be on the way out bodes well for internal improvement. This is another area where Gardiner's addition is a plus as he was above average in limiting quality looks.

It's risky business always thinking offense, but safe is death and as long as the good outweighs the bad (as it did last season) it's well worth it. The team has the horses, might as well let them gallop.

Having dependable goaltending helps alleviate a lot of the potential stress that comes with living on the wild side, and the Hurricanes hope they've finally found that in Petr Mrazek. It sure looked like it last season as he saved nearly five goals above expected in 40 starts, the 19th-highest mark in the league, but my model remains skeptical due to his previous two seasons of being a well-below-average option. In those two years, he allowed 24 more goals than expected.

Perhaps he's turned things around, though, and reverted to the player he showed to be early in his career, especially down the stretch for Carolina, where he looked like a legitimate starter. In his first two seasons, he was quite good, and though I think it's fair to remain skeptical, goalies are capital-W Weird when it comes to projections. For anyone not at the top or bottom of the hierarchy, the most correct answer is usually "I don't know," and that applies to Mrazek. He could be good, he could be bad. His recent history suggests closer to the latter, though.

More troubling for the team, though, is it no longer has its safety blanket in the surprisingly dependable Curtis McElhinney. James Reimer doesn't inspire much confidence and was one of the league's worst goalies last season, allowing 11.5 goals above expected, the 12th-worst mark in the league. The hope is last season was an aberration, as he's been right bounced around average in his previous six seasons. Again, goalies!

While goalies have routinely been an issue for Carolina, so, too, has been the team's inability to finish, as it has landed in the league's bottom 10 in shooting percentage in seven consecutive seasons.

In the first half of last season, it looked like another banner year. The Hurricanes were dead last in shooting percentage at 5.5 percent, scoring just 1.94 goals-per-60 despite leading the league in expected goals per 60, at 3.11. That's a huge chasm, one that felt likely to regress no matter how poorly your previous inking was about the team's scoring talent. In the second half, that predictably went up to 8.7 percent, the eighth-highest mark in the league. Though the Hurricanes' 7.2 percent shooting percentage for the season was still the league's fourth-worst, furthering their wretched streak, their massive shot volume made up for that and pushed them to average in goals at evens.

The team's lower-end players — such as Jordan Martinook, Lucas Wallmark, Brock McGinn and Warren Foegele — are a major factor for that as they're great at creating chances, but not so much at putting them in. The quartet combined for 36 goals at five-on-five last season but was expected to score 57.3. Yikes. Though some regression is expected, those four remain the team's weakest finishers this year, and though they can drive play, their lack of offensive upside holds back their value. With three of those players slotting on the fourth line, playing the system right and contributing on the shot clock is all you can really ask for. The rest is just hoping it works out. Foegele, 23, is the lone player here slotted in the top nine and has the biggest claim for potential upside after an excellent



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

playoff showing, one where he practically became a Raleigh folk hero.

Though finishing ability is an issue for the team's low end, it's not exclusive to them. It's a thread that runs deep throughout the forward ranks. This team can crush you with volume, but a few more of those pucks going in wouldn't hurt.

The Hurricanes made two additions in the offseason up front in an attempt to change that, a necessity for a team that has a great system to create chances from good locations but still struggles to turn those into goals. That would be Erik Haula, who slots in the middle on the fastest third line in the league, and Ryan Dzingel, who earns a nod on the top line next to the team's best player.

Haula missed almost all of last season with Vegas, but he has rockets for skates and will fit in well with a team that plays at a very high tempo. Carolina had a top-five pace last season. Haula was just coming off a breakout season, scoring 55 points at a second-line rate before a brutal injury kept him out of all but 15 games in 2018-19. That breakout year was built from his ability to find the net, and over the past three seasons, he has 30 goals at five-on-five compared with 26.8 expected goals. He's also a strong play-driver, especially on defense, and gives the Hurricanes great depth down the middle. He's among the best third-line options in the league and boosts Carolina's standing down the middle to top five in the league.

Dzingel is significantly more porous defensively and would be a risky signing on any team but this one. He's projected to be Carolina's worst defensive forward, but that should easily be masked on a well-structured team with the best defensive depth in the league. He makes up for it in providing a skill set the team is short on. He's another finisher who has performed well above expectations over the past two seasons. In that span, he has 37 goals, over 12 more than expected off a 15.6 percent shooting percentage. The ratio between his goal rate and his expected goal rate is the 15th-best over the past two seasons. Dzingel is a second-line-caliber scorer and a savvy signing if the other warts in his game can be mitigated in the new system.

Both players are projected to be 20-goal scorers this season, something the team had only five of last season, one of them being Justin Williams. His absence will be majorly felt on and off the ice as a player worth about 1.5 wins and the team's vocal leader. Both of those qualities will have to be replaced, but it is worth noting that he was part of the issue when it came to finishing. He scored 23 but should've scored closer to 29.

Another one of those 20-goal scorers was Nino Niederreiter, but only 14 of those came with the Hurricanes (in 36 games, mind you, a 32-goal pace). His addition — a natural fit as a longtime analytics darling himself — was a major catalyst to the team's second-half surge as he went right up to the top line and never looked back. He found immediate chemistry with Sebastian Aho, with the duo earning a 59 percent expected-goals rate and a 62 percent actual-goals rate. With Carolina, he scored at a 68-point pace and should approach that total again if he remains a top-line fixture.

Aho is a big part of that and is this team's engine, its sole elite force up front. He's one of the strongest offensive drivers in the league, especially in creating chances. His 32 expected goals were the league's seventh-best part, and he finally

earned some of the notice he deserves after scoring 83 points in 2018-19. Aho should be a consistent point-per-game player through the majority of his prime, especially as the team surrounds him with strong winger talent. He's not absolved, however, from the team's poor finishing ability. He can create a boatload of chances, but finishing is a different story. At five-on-five, he scored only 14 goals off 18 expected goals. That needs to improve, but his 2017-18 performance gives a reason for optimism there, as does his youth. He'll figure it out.

The addition of Niederreiter last year frees the Hurricanes up to put their other prominent young Finn, Teuvo Teravainen, on a secondary line, balancing the top six and boosting its scoring potential. He's a gifted playmaker who should be right around the 70-point mark he approached in 2017-18 and bested last season. Over the past two seasons, he has the team's strongest on-ice shooting percentage, a product of his vision, and it makes sense for the team to use him in a way that can elevate players who've struggled to convert.

He starts the season with Jordan Staal, who has scored below expectations in every season since arriving in Carolina. That lack of finishing ability has long been the rub with Staal, but he remains one of the league's strongest two-way players after posting a league-leading 61.4 percent expected-goals rate last season — 1.3 percentage points higher than the next best player — with an incredible isolated impact. That 200-foot dominance is why he still grades out as a high-end second-liner. The key this season will be getting more offense out of him. His play with Teravainen in 21 games after coming back from injury gives plenty of reasons for optimism on that front, as he scored 17 points in 21 games while remaining excellent at both ends of the ice.

Staal, 31, is the team's oldest player, the only one over 30 for that matter, and it's for that reason the team is expected to maintain last year's strong performance. Most of the Hurricanes' players are in their prime or just entering it, meaning the best is yet to come.

All that comes full circle in discussions about Andrei Svechnikov, the potential franchise winger the team selected second overall just over a year ago and who isn't even 20 years old yet. A bump up to the top six could mean big things for a player who drove offense better than anyone else in the league last season, but who also struggled to convert that into goals. His 1.1 expected goals-per-60 at five-on-five ranked ninth in the league (Niederreiter's time in Carolina is the only higher teammate, ranking second), which contributed to his 3.6 on-ice expected goals for per 60, the league's highest mark. He and his linemates didn't make good on those chances, though, leading to suppressed scoring totals. It's hard to make things click when your most frequent linemates are Martinook and Wallmark. That should improve with stronger linemates, and while I was personally hoping for a spot next to Aho, time with Teravainen should do for a player who's a pure shooter. A big breakout is coming for the player who scored 20 goals and 37 points last season, one that just might put this team over the top.

The team also has Martin Necas, the first-round pick from the season prior, ready to make the jump slotting in right behind Svechnikov, and it's likely he provides a big boost to the offense, too. The 20-year-old scored 52 points in 64 games in his first pro season in the AHL, and the club expects big things



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

from him. Beating his conservative projection of 0.6 wins shouldn't be too much trouble, especially if the addition of Haula works out well and Foegele starts right where he left off in the playoffs. These three have the makings of one of the league's fastest lines.

There are a lot of reasons for upside when it comes to this Hurricanes team, headlined by an elite 22-year-old center with room to grow into a strong goal-scorer, the league's best top four littered with exceptional puck-movers, a 19-year-old future phenom with breakout potential, plus a 20-year old rookie with high upside, and simply knowing what this team is capable of once pucks start going in more often than five percent of the time. After seeing what they can do in the second half and all the additions made since, it's difficult to see them getting stymied that often again — not with the number of chances this team generates. There are reasons for concern, such as goaltending, health (Carolina is projected to be the league's healthiest team), regression in shot metrics, the absence of Williams, and stagnation from its youth, but they are far outweighed by the positives. After a decade of darkness, it's hard not to see daylight.

Some want to discredit the Hurricanes' success based on their past, but I don't believe that holds much bearing; this team is very different from teams of the past. Last year was no fluke. The Hurricanes got a taste of playoff success, and they look like they're here to stay for a long time.

Market expectations

Carolina Hurricanes: 95.5 points

The market believes the Hurricanes to be a playoff team but remains lukewarm on the team being much more than that. My model is about five points higher, which is one of the bigger gaps of any team this season. Overall, it's been generally close to the market, so we'll see who's right here come April, but I've got a good feeling about this group.

What fans predict

Public sample: 1,337

Fan sample: 84

The public isn't sold just yet on the Hurricanes, despite the team's making it to the conference finals, but to be fair the survey was conducted before the team signed Jake Gardiner to a sweetheart deal, giving the Hurricanes the league's best defense corps. Who knows how much that would play a role, but it did feel like the Hurricanes' hype increased after that moment. The fans themselves see a team close to last year's version, scarred by years of false hope provided by models like this one. Last year brought a reason for optimism, that this time it really would be different. We'll find out soon if this Hurricanes team is legit or if last year was just a mirage.



## Preseason Recap: Canes Fall in Washington

McGinn, Kuokkanen tally goals in third period

by Michael Smith

WASHINGTON - The Carolina Hurricanes were edged by the Washington Capitals by a score of 3-2 on Saturday night in The District.

Down 3-0 heading into the third period, the Canes worked their way back into the exhibition contest with goals from Brock McGinn and Janne Kuokkanen.

Here are five takeaways from the Canes' third preseason game.

### 1. Preseason Growing Pains

We've discussed previously how meaningless results are in the preseason - but, for those keeping tabs, this was the first regulation preseason loss under head coach Rod Brind'Amour (7-1-1).

So, what happens when the process is a bit concerning, even when the team isn't rife with veterans?

"It was a pretty disgusting game, to be honest with you. I don't even care about the score," head coach Rod Brind'Amour

said. "We didn't play the way we've been practicing all week. I didn't know what we were watching. That's the hard part."

For some fringe players, this could have been a make or break performance.

"We needed to get some answers," Brind'Amour said. "For some guys, it was a disappointing game in a lot of ways. We move on. A couple more days of practice, and then we'll have another game, still another look game for people."

### 2. Climbing Back in the Third

The Hurricanes made a game of it in the third period with goals from Brock McGinn and Janne Kuokkanen.

"We just started playing with speed and getting pucks behind their net," McGinn said. "You can't just play 13 minutes in a game and win. You've got to play a full 60. We'll learn and go into practice and try to build on things we need to work on here."

McGinn, Public Enemy No. 1 at Capital One Arena, got the Canes on the board first in the building where he scored the biggest goal of his career about five months prior. Aided by a turnover down low, McGinn banged in a loose puck at the top of the crease.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019**

Later in the third, Jake Bean's point shot bounced off the end glass, and Kuokkanen tracked down the rebound. Before the puck hit the ice, Kuokkanen backhanded it past Ilya Samsonov.

"We were a little more tenacious on the puck in the third," Brind'Amour said.

### 3. Gauthier Makes an Impact - Again

Julien Gauthier, who dressed in his third straight exhibition game, continues to draw praise for his performance.

He led Canes forwards with 17:06 of ice time and recorded two shots on goal, four hits and a block. Though he didn't get credit for an assist, he created the scoring opportunity that led to McGinn's goal, as he got the puck deep along the far boards, fought through a defender and then forced a turnover behind the net.

"He's big, he's strong and he's fast," McGinn said of his linemate. "He took away their time and space, and they had to force a play. ... He's a big, strong kid, and he'll only get better in time."

Gauthier nearly netted a breakaway goal in the second period when he tried to slip a backhand past Samsonov, but the Caps' goalie stood strong with his right pad. The Canes' 21st overall pick from 2016 made his physical presence felt in the first period when he shouldered an unsuspecting Shane Gersich in open ice.

"He was probably the one guy who actually looked like there was something going on," Brind'Amour said. "Good for him. He's played hard in these games, and that's why we keep giving him opportunities."

Earn it? Gauthier is making a strong case.

"He's probably been our best player," Brind'Amour said. "Of the guys we've been looking at, he's probably done the most."

### 4. Assessing the Goaltending

The Hurricanes' preseason shutout streak ended at 126:44, when Brett Leason capitalized on a turnover to give the Capitals a 1-0 lead.

Another turnover led to Brian Pinho extending the Capitals lead to two, so it's tough to pin either of those goals on Anton Forsberg, who faced 10 shots in the first 29:12 of game time.

"In the first two periods, we were turning it over at both blue lines, and that's how they were getting their opportunities," McGinn said.

James Reimer played the balance of the game and made nine saves on 10 shots, his one goal against coming as the Canes were shorthanded.

The Canes assigned goaltenders Callum Booth and Jeremy Helvig to Charlotte this evening, and four goaltenders still remain in camp. Who will join Petr Mrazek in the Canes' locker room come the beginning of October? That's a competition to watch in the next week.

### 5. New Helmet Rule

Among a host of rule changes for the 2019-20 season is a new stipulation regarding helmets. It reads as follows:

"A Player on the ice whose helmet comes off during play must (a) exit the playing surface, or (b) retrieve and replace his helmet properly on his head (with or without his chin strap fastened). A Player who is making a play on the puck or who is in position to make an immediate play on the puck at the time his helmet comes off, shall be given a reasonable opportunity to complete the play before either exiting the ice or retrieving and replacing his helmet. Failure to comply with the above will result in a minor penalty being assessed on the offending player."

Late in the second period, Roland McKeown's helmet popped off in the defensive zone. He continued to play without it; he did not immediately exit the playing surface (he was, after all, in his own zone) and did not make an effort to retrieve his helmet. I thought it would have been called a penalty, but there does seem to be a sizeable gray area with the rule.

"It's not black and white. The refs give you an opportunity to finish the play out, and then you have to get to the bench or his helmet," Brind'Amour said. "He probably went a little longer than he was supposed to, but I think they gave him a little break there. It's not automatic; you've got to let the play finish out."

### Up Next

The Canes head to Nashville on Wednesday for a televised match-up with the Predators.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019



## Preseason Recap: Canes comeback falls short in 3-2 loss to Capitals

The Canes fall in DC, training camp roster updates, plus all the regular stuff you expect in your morning update.

By Jamie Kellner

Preseason Recap: Canes comeback falls short in 3-2 loss to Capitals

Rod Brind'Amour went so far as to describe it as "disgusting." The Hurricanes played the first period like a fire drill, without much structure or puck management, and in so doing found themselves in a 3-0 hole to the Washington Capitals through two periods in DC on Saturday night. Their game began to come around by the third period but by that time it was too late and they fell 3-2 for their first loss of the preseason (and first regulation preseason loss in Brind'Amour's head coaching career).

Brian Pinho scored twice, intercepting a Fredrick Claesson pass to give the Capitals a 2-0 lead, then with a knuckleball that ricocheted off Jake Bean's stick and glove during a second period power play for what would stand as the eventual game-winner. Brett Leason opened the scoring for the Capitals, also off a Claesson turnover.

Noted Caps killer Brock McGinn finally put the Canes on the board in the third (prompting a "we don't like him very much"

from the Caps broadcast crew), and Janne Kuokkanen also added a goal on a rebound of a Jake Bean shot. Anton Forsberg (eight saves on 10 shots) and James Reimer (nine saves on 10 shots) split duties in net.

Julien Gauthier continued to make his case for a spot on the NHL roster. He was credited with four hits and five shot attempts, the most notable on a breakaway which required nothing less than an amazing save on the part of Capitals goaltender Ilya Samsonov (read about it from our friends at RMNB).

By the way, if you have access to NHL Network, they'll be broadcasting a replay of the game as we speak (9:00 am).

Prior to Saturday's game, the Hurricanes announced a few training camp roster changes, bringing the current roster total to 47 players. Goaltenders Callum Booth and Jeremy Helvig have been assigned to the Charlotte Checkers, and forward Stelio Mattheos (see more on him in Storm Advisory) has been added to the training camp roster (you can find an updated roster and schedule here).

The Canes have a scheduled day off from practice on Sunday, and we should expect to hear more roster updates shortly, perhaps later today?



## Hurricanes' Lucas Wallmark Is Ready for More

By Mark Shiver

Lucas Wallmark is looking forward to the upcoming season. The 24-year-old center for the Carolina Hurricanes is coming off his first full season on NHL ice, and is ready for more.

Wallmark played in 81 games last season for the Hurricanes. He put up 10 goals and 18 assists for 28 points. In the 2019 Playoffs, he had one goal and four assists.

His \$700,000 salary this season is well-deserved and he no doubt hopes to improve to the point that his restricted free agent status at the end of the coming season will be met with a significant contract offer to continue growing with the 'Canes.

Wallmark the Prospect

Wallmark was drafted by the Hurricanes in the fourth round, 97th overall, in the 2014 NHL Entry Draft. Prior to the draft, Elite Prospects gave this evaluation of the young Swede: "Wallmark has first-class hockey sense and vision. Very smart player and a highly skilled playmaker. Has good

puck control and will also battle hard for the puck. Good defensive game and face-off skills. One concern is his skating ability, as he lacks some speed and acceleration."

Wallmark has demonstrated good hockey-sense and puck control in his young career. If he's a step slower than most, it's not obvious. He has played very well with Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour's up-tempo style, seemingly not missing a beat.

Ready to Take the Next Step

I spoke with Wallmark recently and he said that after last season he is ready to take the next step. "Hopefully I can build on last season and take it up a bit," Wallmark said. That seems to be the notion that others have about him, too. He had a good season but can he keep his roster spot in light of the seemingly abundant talent in the Hurricanes' training camp?

Sara Civian wrote in The Athletic, "I'm 99.9 percent sure Wallmark will make the team, but he's definitely still in prove-yourself szn (sic) with a training camp this stacked." (From



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

"Team Pride vs. Team Passion: Who will make the Hurricanes' opening night roster?," The Athletic 9/21/19)

## Wallmark On the Missing Captain

I asked Wallmark how he felt about Hurricanes' captain Justin Williams taking a break from hockey. "Justin was a great, great guy and a great player. Of course, you're going to miss him, but we've learned from him and can take that with us. So yeah. He's a great guy."

What is interesting, and has been talked about repeatedly by folks in the media like myself, is that Williams did not say the word, "retire." Who knows, he might lace 'em up in the middle of the season and be back leading the Hurricanes once again. Or not.

## Playoff Fatigue?

It is not unusual for teams to experience fatigue at the beginning of the season after having made a run in the playoffs. While other teams are unwinding, getting injury treatments in May and June, teams that advance into the playoffs can only get a break after mid-June, assuming their run is deep.

I asked Wallmark how he thought the team would respond to possible fatigue having played all the way to the Eastern Conference Final, particularly since it has been years since they made the playoffs.

"I feel fresh. Of course, you are a little tired like after a season, but you get a couple of weeks after and get some rest and get back in shape. So everyone is excited to get it started again and hopefully we're going to have a long season again."

## Wallmark and Pressure

As previously noted, Wallmark would like to step his game up to the next level. I asked him if he felt pressure to score and

how he liked playing center. "I just play. I don't think so much," Wallmark said. "I'm just trying to have fun out there. If you start thinking too much it's not going to help you. I'm just trying to have fun every day and work hard for us to win games.

For a young player just coming off his first full season, Wallmark seems more like a veteran than a guy knowing he's in a training camp with guys who want his spot. It's easy to believe that he approaches the game with a "just want to have fun" mindset. The entire team has bought into that part of Brind'Amour's mantra. Work hard and have fun.

Austin Isham wrote recently at [cardiaccane.com](http://cardiaccane.com), "Constantly winning slightly over 50% of his draws, in both the regular and post season, it is safe to say that under the guidance of head coach Brind'Amour, Lucas has the potential to be one of the better face-off men in the entire league.

Wallmark is looking at his second NHL season. He's having fun yet working hard. Not unlike Victor Rask when he was young and hungry, Wallmark's faceoff prowess is helping him make the case that he belongs. Typically centering the fourth line, Wallmark doesn't seem like a guy hanging by a thread.

But rather he is an important part of the Hurricanes. Having a capable fourth-line center is crucial to a team's success. He even showed poise when stepping up for Jordan Staal when was out with an injury. And he has already scored, albeit in the preseason. He looks to be very ready.

Don't look for a player who is gripping too hard, worried about his roster spot. Wallmark is indeed having fun and he is going to play hard and very likely continue to be an important part of Brind'Amour's team. Anything is possible, though, and the 'Canes are sporting a deep set of prospects and acquisitions from the offseason. Wallmark earned his spot on the ice, though, and it will take someone really strong to make him give it up.



## Canes assign Helvig and Booth to Charlotte, Checkers announce camp roster

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Hurricanes made their first cuts from their training camp Saturday night, assigning goalies Callum Booth and Jeremy Helvig to Charlotte.

Both Booth and Helvig – going into their third and second pro seasons, respectively – suited up for the Checkers last season while spending the majority of their 2018-19 campaigns in the ECHL.

The netminders will now report to Checkers training camp, which begins Tuesday, and join AHL-contracted forwards Dave Gust, Cedric Lacroix and Anthony Louis on the roster.

Additionally, the Checker have invited 10 players to training camp on tryouts: forwards Sam Kurker, Ryan Horvat, Robbie Payne, Bobby MacIntyre, Lucas Lessio and Scott Davidson and defensemen Reid McNeill, Brien Duffley, Jesse Graham and Jack Stander.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

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# SportScan

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

1153730 Nashville Predators

Matt Duchene scores tying goal in long-awaited Predators debut

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean

Published 7:09 p.m. CT Sept. 21, 2019 | Updated 10:21 p.m. CT Sept. 21, 2019

Matt Duchene waited almost 60 minutes to make a first impression in his Predators debut. And it came on his second good chance in the final 12 seconds of regulation Saturday.

He tied the score with 3.6 seconds left to tie the score before Rem Pitlick secured a 5-4 victory over the Lightning 1:39 into overtime.

"It was kind of funny. I looked up at the clock right as (Viktor Arvidsson) got it. I didn't really expect it to come through," Duchene said. "I wanted to see how much time was left. I looked back right as it was 10 feet from me. I kind of got lucky there. ... I've been looking forward to this all summer."

Duchene, who signed an eight-year, \$56 million free-agent deal this summer, centered the second line next to Filip Forsberg and Eeli Tolvanen.

Eight seconds before his tying score, Duchene raced toward the net with the puck, he and his new teammates down 4-3, but was stopped.

He was on the ice with Ryan Johansen, Arvidsson, Filip Forsberg and Roman Josi on the power play when the Predators scored their first goal early in the first.

He was almost part of the second when he shot a pass to Yannick Weber, who put the puck off the crossbar.

He assisted on Arvidsson's tying goal late in the third period, much to the crowd's delight.

Duchene brought fans to their feet again with about 12 seconds left when he raced toward the net and unleashed what could have been the tying shot. But he was stopped.

"(Arvidsson) just desperation kind of threw it backdoor," Duchene said. "It landed flat on my stick. You let it go and hope it goes in. We had some good desperation there."

Duchene, 28, was involved in a three-way trade that brought Kyle Turris to the Predators, but he's not hidden his affection for Nashville.

After playing for the Senators and the Blue Jackets last season, Duchene decided to sign with the Predators. General manager David Poile made it no secret he's long coveted Duchene, and traded P.K. Subban this summer to clear cap space in hopes of landing his guy.

"We made no secret we were trying to get him," Poile said this summer. "He made no secret he had an affinity for the city."

Poile said despite following his career closely, he had never met Duchene, save for a nod at the All-Star Game in Nashville in 2016, until the Predators signed him.

Duchene said at the start of training camp that he was working out a few butterflies of his own by finally joining the team.

"I was a little bit, I don't know if nervous is the right word, going out," he said. "But just kind of like, 'Geez.' The anticipation, you just build it up and build it up, build it up. Finally get out with the boys and be where I wanted to be for so long."

On Saturday night, he was formally introduced to Nashville at Bridgestone Arena.

"It's definitely the biggest preseason crowd I've played in front of, by double," Duchene said. "It felt like a regular-season game with the crowd."

Tennessean LOADED: 09.22.2019

1153731 Nashville Predators

Austin Watson: 'There's a lot to prove off the ice, on the ice'

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019**

Published 5:00 a.m. CT Sept. 20, 2019

Austin Watson visited the Louvre this summer.

He went underground and absorbed the sights and history of the Catacombs of Paris, which hold the remains of 6,000,000 people.

He added to his tattoo collection with a comedy/tragedy mask on his left wrist. He checked out a war museum and Napoleon's tomb.

It was the perfect place for him.

"I like that old history stuff," the Predators forward said after a recent practice. "I got that from my grandpa. I could watch the History Channel 24/7."

The trip to France with his girlfriend, Jennifer Guardino, lasted 10 days. The two also spent about a month at the dawn of summer in California with their 1 1/2-year-old daughter Olivia, visiting Guardino's family.

So close, yet so far

It was a far cry from last summer, when Watson was arrested and pleaded no contest to domestic abuse for allegedly striking Guardino during an argument outside a gas station in Franklin.

Guardino later denied Watson committed an act of domestic violence. Watson declined to discuss specifics of his arrest.

It was a far cry from January, when Watson, who said he's dealt with anxiety, alcoholism and depression since he was 18, missed more time while going to rehab after a relapse.

For the first time in a long time, Watson says he feels, well, normal. At peace. At ease.

Not that he's forgotten the past. That's not Watson's objective. He lives with it every day. He understands it's sewn into his life story.

"There's no escaping the headlines," he said. "The stuff off the ice is what the year will be remembered for. Learning from that, more or less, just if I'm doing what I need to do for me, taking care of myself and my family, the hockey is going to fall into place."

Hockey began to fall into place last season after he served an 18-game suspension for his arrest.

It fell out of place when he went to rehab for six-plus weeks. It fell back into place when he returned.

But after a summer free of public drama, Watson says he feels like he's in a better place.

A place of familiarity. A place of comfort. He feels like he's a part of something rather than apart from something.

"Hockey is a sense of freedom, a sense of structure," he said. "A sense of community when you're here with your buddies. That helps alleviate some of the pressure.

"You might think of it as more pressure. In my case hockey, takes the pressure off.

"Being around the guys, getting back to a little bit of normalcy and this year being in camp and not dealing with the off-ice stuff, it's nice. There's no other way to describe it."

Welcome to reality

With recovery comes sobering acceptance. Some realities that Watson wasn't necessarily willing to deal with before. The fear of failing again.

Hockey is an addiction, just like alcohol. But Watson realizes the former is much healthier than the latter. A lesson it's taken him a long time to realize.

Learning to be more self-aware has become vital. Knowing he's vulnerable also is important.

"It has to be No. 1 for me," Watson said. "We talk about family and work, but if I'm not sober and I'm not living a life of recovery, then those things go away. I don't have those things if I'm not taking care of myself.

"It took me a long, long time to learn that. This isn't my first rodeo with this stuff."

But he hopes. He prays. He wants it to be his last.

But accepting who he is hasn't always been easy.

"Today? Not very. Before? Tough. .... Acceptance at first is hard," he said. "Today acceptance is a huge blessing. I get a chance to work on myself every day.

"People are concerned about what's going on around them, what other people are doing. I feel fortunate I get to look in the mirror and deal with me. When I do that, everyone else seems to be looking a whole lot better."

Moments of reflection

Austin Watson is a man who wears his emotions on his sleeves -- and his knuckles and arms in the form of tattoos.

He'd just scored in a preseason game, meaningless to most veterans.

The celebration was muted. But Watson did take a moment to reflect.

"Look, we get to play hockey for a living," he said. "It's supposed to be fun. I enjoy doing what I do -- even if it is blocking a shot or getting punched in the face. I could be doing other things.

"I've spent a year dealing with other stuff. ... That's the beauty of hockey and sports in general. You spend every day with each other, being vulnerable, being friends at the core and working toward accomplishing something. I'm serious, that's for sure. I might say some bad words on the ice. I might do my job and hit and fight and whatever's going on. But at the end of the day there's nothing else I'd rather be doing."

On the ice

Watson had seven goals and nine assists in his abbreviated 37-game season last year. He felt that it was one of his most productive seasons, all things considered.

But a fresh start this season has him excited for what potentially lies ahead: Not necessarily easy for someone who lives life "one day at a time."

"Between recovery, hockey and family, that's what life is," he said. "It's comfortable right now. Things are moving in the right direction. This year, even just right now, there's a lot of trust to be earned back. There's a lot for me to prove off the ice, on the ice.

"As long as I take care of things, everything will work out the way it's supposed to."

Tennessean LOADED: 09.22.2019



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

1153780 Washington Capitals

3 players who stood out in playoff rematch against the Hurricanes:  
Samsonov gets the full game and the win

By J.J. Regan

September 21, 2019 10:07 PM

WASHINGTON -- In a reversal of last season's playoff, the Capitals dominant forecheck suffocated the Carolina Hurricanes for much of the game on Friday in a 3-2 preseason win. The game was the final preseason game in Washington as the Caps' three remaining contests all will come on the road.

Here are three players who impressed in the home preseason finale.

Ilya Samsonov

Samsonov faced only 15 shots from a clearly outmatched Hurricanes roster, but he looked impressive in the few times he was tested. The save of the night came in the second period when he denied Julien Gauthier on a breakaway.

Gauthier attempted the old Peter Forsberg move and skated to his right while trying to craftily tuck the puck in to the left. Samsonov slid with Gauthier, but stuck out his stick to deny the shot and make the tremendous save.

Samsonov continued to demonstrate his comfort playing the puck with his stick as he also denied a scoring opportunity with a well-timed poke check and was always quick to play the puck when it came behind the goal line.

One area in which he was not comfortable was the glove. There were multiple occasions in which he was able to get a glove on the puck, but was not able to catch it creating dangerous opportunities for Carolina's offense.

The Hurricanes managed only seven shots on goal through the first two periods, but managed some more pressure in the third. The shutout bid was ended in the third when Brock McGinn followed up his own rebound to score Carolina's first goal of the game. The second goal came on a fluky bounce off the backboards that Janne Kuokkanen was able to whack behind Samsonov before he could get a glove to it.

While Todd Reirden likely hoped Samsonov would be more tested than he was, he was up to the task with 13 saves.

Brian Pinho

The Caps recorded three goals on the night and Pinho had two of them. In the first period, Axel Jonsson-Fjallby created a turnover on the forecheck. Feeling the pressure, Fredrik Claesson tried a hopeful clear that was cut off at the blue line by Pinho who skated in and tucked the puck through the 5-hole of goalie Anton Forsberg. He scored again in the third period on the power play when his shot deflected off of Jake Bean and took a favorable bounce up before dropping into the net.

Pinho led the Capitals with five points in three games at the 2019 Prospect Showcase, but at 24 years old, he would be expected to play well. He faced slightly better competition on Saturday and still was able to produce with two goals on the night.

Richard Panik

One of the newest Caps, Panik has looked extremely comfortable in both of his preseason games thus far. He was again strong on the penalty kill where he logged 1:35 of ice time. He also looked strong offensively.

Panik played very heavy below the goal line which suits the Caps' offensive cycle the team likes to utilize. He also showed good vision as, in the third period, he was able to fight off a check and literally kicked the puck out to a wide-open Tavis Boyd in the slot.

With Panik and Carl Hagelin together, the Caps should have a much more formidable penalty kill this season.

Washington Times LOADED: 09.22.2019

1153781 Washington Capitals

How to WATCH: Capitals vs. Hurricanes preseason Game 3

By Julia Karron

September 21, 2019 10:00 AM

The Washington Capitals remain undefeated in preseason play, thanks to Tom Wilson's clutch overtime goal and a Nicklas Backstrom bouncing saucer-pass-turned-shot.

Saturday night, the Caps will get their first crack at the Carolina Hurricanes, who knocked them out in the first round of the playoffs last season. This game is also the first one that comes after the Caps whittled their roster down after the first round of cuts, which included Caps 2019 draft picks Connor McMichael and Aliaksei Protas.

The Caps will face the Hurricanes in the regular season on October 5 at Capital One Arena in their home opener.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.22.2019

1153726 Montreal Canadiens

In the Habs' Room: No cobwebs in Kinkaid's game despite long layoff

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: September 21, 2019

OTTAWA — Keith Kinkaid brushed off the rust from more than seven months of inactivity as he made 27 saves Saturday to lead the Canadiens to a 4-0 win over the Ottawa Senators at the Canadian Tire Centre.

"I haven't played an NHL game since February, so I'm just getting back in the mode," said Kinkaid, who is being counted on to serve as Carey Price's backup this season. "I just want to show the team and



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

the staff what I can do, that I can be trusted in certain situations. I felt good out there once I settled down.”

Kinkaid faced a couple of challenges in this game. The first was a lack of activity, while the second was the result of Ottawa forwards being a tad aggressive as they crashed the net.

Kinkaid learned about the odd dynamic that accompanies the Canadiens’ visits to Ottawa when he made a glove save in the first period.

“It kind of felt like there were more Habs fans there,” he said. “It was kind of loud after I made the save and I was confused at first, but it was good to have our fans here supporting us.”

Kinkaid faced eight shots in the first period and six in the second when Ottawa managed only one shot in the first 17 minutes.

“That makes the game tough when you haven’t played since February,” said Kinkaid, whose last game was Feb. 17 with New Jersey. He was traded to Columbus a week later, but sat in the stands while serving as insurance in case Sergei Bobrovsky was injured. “You want to get some shots. In the first half of the first period, there weren’t any shots, but then they got a few on net and that got me in the groove. I like to get a shot early on, obviously not a high quality shot, but a shot to get a feel for the puck. It gives you a little confidence for the rest of the game.”

Kinkaid said the physical play around the net didn’t bother him.

“I kind of have fun with it,” he said. “I embrace contact but, obviously, if it’s too much I won’t like it. But as long as it’s in the boundaries, I think that’s part of the game.”

Nick Suzuki made his debut at right wing and earned plaudits from centre Phil Danault for his intelligent play.

“He’s super smart and he has silky hands,” Danault said. “He fit right in.”

Suzuki picked up an assist and came close to scoring when he took a drop pass from Danault and skated across the front before testing Craig Anderson with a backhand shot.

“I definitely had to bury that for Phil,” Suzuki said. “I knew I had time, but I thought (Anderson) would over-commit to my side. Definitely, I’m going to keep it simple next time.”

The Canadiens, who had the second-worst power play in the NHL last season, had three power plays and scored on all of them. Danault had a goal and an assist on the power play and renewed his pre-camp request for more time on the PP.

Coach Claude Julien appeared open to that suggestion.

“We put him on the power play at the end of the year and we put him on the power play this week with some of our veterans,” Julien said. “He’s a good faceoff guy, he’s good at retrieving pucks, and on the power play, you need a little bit of everything. Right now, he’s there and as long as he keeps doing the job, there’s a good chance he’ll be there.”

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.22.2019

1153727 Montreal Canadiens

Kinkaid backstops Canadiens to 4-0 shutout over Senators

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: September 21, 2019

OTTAWA — Goaltender Keith Kinkaid, who is pencilled in as Carey Price’s backup this season, made his first appearance in the preseason Saturday night and he was solid as he stopped 27 shots in a 4-0 shutout win over the Ottawa Senators at the Canadian Tire Centre.

Kinkaid provided quality, if not quantity. He made a couple of big saves in the first period and then battled to stay awake in the second period. Ottawa had only one shot on goal for the first 17 minutes of the period. The Senators thought they had a goal when Jean-Gabriel Pageau found the back of the net late in the period, but the score was waved off. Kinkaid was understandably distracted on the shot because rookie Drake Batherson charged into the crease and knocked Kinkaid’s mask off.

Forward Nick Suzuki was the other player to watch Saturday. Suzuki was making his third preseason appearance and coach Claude Julien changed things up when he moved Suzuki to the wing on the top line with Phil Danault and Tomas Tatar after playing his first two games at centre.

Suzuki played well in the middle, but that position is crowded with Danault, Max Domi and Jesperi Kotkaniemi holding down spots on the top three lines. Julien could throw him into the mix with veterans Nate Thompson and Jordan Weal, and rookie Ryan Poehling battling for a spot in the middle on the fourth line, but his skills might be wasted in a checking role.

Suzuki had an assist and matched defenceman Jeff Petry with a game-high five shots on goal. He also made the occasional trip to the faceoff circle and won two of his four draws. Suzuki had a good chance midway through the second period when Danault took advantage of a turnover in the Senators’ zone and skated in on goal. He left a drop pass for Suzuki, who cut across the crease and tried a backhand that tested veteran goaltender Craig Anderson.

The Canadiens scored their first three power-play goals of the preseason. Petry pinched in and scored off the rebound in the second period after Danault set up Joel Armia in the slot. The important thing to note on this goal was the Canadiens established an inside presence, a marked change from last season when they struggled while trying to find shots from the perimeter.

They scored two more power-play goals in a 40-second span in the third period. Tomas Tatar made it 3-0 when he scored with Suzuki in front to screen Joey Daccord, who replaced Anderson in the third period. Danault scored the final power-play goal. Petry assisted on both of those goals for a three-point night.

Jake Evans, a second-year pro from Notre Dame, continued to show his hockey smarts. He scored from the slot after Riley Barber took advantage of Anderson’s sloppy pass behind the net and found Evans in front. Evans has shed some weight and worked on his foot speed in the off-season. He’s a long shot to start the season in Montreal, but he should be on the short list of players available for a call-up.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.22.2019



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

1153728 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens send 14 players down to Laval

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: September 21, 2019

The Canadiens trimmed their roster to 40 players Saturday when they assigned 14 players to the Laval Rocket of the American Hockey League.

The cuts included two goaltenders, Michael McNiven and Connor LaCouvee. Both saw action with the Rocket last season, but they'll be facing another battle for jobs when the Rocket training camp gets under way on Monday at Place Bell in Laval.

Carey Price and Keith Kinkaid are expected to start the season in Montreal and that means Charlie Lindgren and newcomer Cayden Primeau will likely handle the goaltending in Laval.

The other players reassigned Saturday were Morgan Adams-Moisan, Ryan Culkin, David Sklenicka, William Pelletier, Nikita Jevpalovs, Joe Cox, Antoine Waked, Michael Pezzetta, Alexandre Alain, Hayden Verbeek, Maxim Lamarche and Lukas Vejdemo.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.22.2019

1153729 Montreal Canadiens

Bubble Report: Nick Suzuki and Jake Evans continue seizing their opportunities

By Marc Dumont

Sep 21, 2019

All eyes were on Nick Suzuki, who, following his fantastic performance against the Florida Panthers on Thursday, played right wing on the first line with Phillip Danault and Tomas Tatar in a 4-0 Canadiens win against the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre, a fourth straight preseason win for Montreal.

Once again, Suzuki did not disappoint, though he was not the only Canadiens rookie hopeful who had a good night. Jake Evans continued to take advantage of every opportunity he's given, and Cale Fleury played every shift with the poise of an NHL veteran.

Let's take a closer look at how the Canadiens prospects fared against the Senators.

Suzuki the opportunist

There's something to be said about the ability to perform in the heat of the spotlight.

Suzuki did it in the OHL playoffs last season, and he's doing it again at Canadiens training camp. Any player who can perform under pressure will always have a leg up in Montreal, which bodes well for Suzuki's future with the organization.

Playing his first game of the preseason on the wing was a different kind of test for the young forward, but he passed it with flying colours. He showed instant chemistry with Danault and Tatar, which led to the trio spending the majority of the game in the offensive zone.

Suzuki had three of the Canadiens' 10 high-danger chances at 5-on-5, including their first two of the game. It was his ability to exploit open ice that was most noticeable; he constantly found himself in quality scoring areas and was noticeably better away from the puck than he was in his first two outings.

He played a very responsible game in his own zone, particularly on the penalty kill, but his 5-on-5 defensive awareness also shined. That was most evident on a couple of clever backchecks that squelched Senators scoring opportunities. He eventually hit the scoresheet by assisting on Tatar's power play goal in the third period, although his screen was much more important than his pass on the scoring play.

Jake the Snake

As usual, Evans wasn't very noticeable ... until he was.

It's the classic Jake Evans way of doing things. Lay low, play a smart game and strike when the opportunity presents itself.

He did that by scoring his second preseason goal, capitalizing on a great forecheck by Riley Barber and a botched clearing attempt by Craig Anderson.

Evans led the Canadiens with four high-danger scoring chances at 5-on-5 and his line with Barber and Matthew Peca controlled 85 percent of the shots and 100 percent of the scoring chances.

Realistically, Nate Thompson, Jordan Weal and Nick Cousins have the inside track for a spot on the fourth line, but Evans has done a great job distancing himself from the rest of the pack, including Charles Hudon, Peca and others.

Not to mention Evans is showing a significant uptick in physical play compared to last season, and the coaching staff surely noticed him blanketing Brady Tkachuk after the Senators pest made contact with Keith Kinkaid.

Just as Suzuki is pushing the envelope for a job in the top six, Evans is doing the same in the bottom six.

Poise personified

The first thing you notice when speaking to Cale Fleury is his confidence. That confidence only grew stronger throughout his rookie AHL season, and now we're seeing it against NHL-level opponents.

At one point, Fleury was seen directing traffic on the ice prior to the faceoff, rare for a rookie in the NHL. His sneaky physical streak aside, Fleury plays a smart game at both blue lines, although he was a little too hasty delivering some of his breakout passes Saturday. He got caught deep at one point but recovered nicely, and overall had a very solid game.

When it comes to Fleury's NHL aspirations, it's starting to feel like a matter of when, not if. He's quickly positioning himself as the most logical choice for the first call-up on the right side from Laval. Unless he earns a spot in the Canadiens lineup, which he is making a very real possibility.

Quick hits:

Otto Leskinen needs time in Laval to study the playbook and get used to the lack of time and space on the smaller North American



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

ice, but he's fared quite well so far in the preseason, especially when it comes to his defensive duties. He also showed a lot more physicality than before against the Senators.

Ben Chiarot has his limitations, that much is clear, but he's been adapting to the Canadiens' style of play fairly well so far.

Jesper Kotkaniemi is slowly yet surely getting into a rhythm. His timing is still a little off, but he's creating a good amount of space for his teammates in the neutral and offensive zones.

Charles Hudon had a good game, though it'll take a lot more than a couple of good games to make the roster. The effort is there, and he did create a chance or two, but he needs to stand out in relation to his competition and that's not happening.

Both Mike Reilly and Christian Folin looked good, though the former had a better game than the latter. Reilly's active stick at the blue line shut down a few Senators rushes, and he joined the rush in the offensive zone without taking a low-angle shot from deep below the left faceoff circle. Progress!

The Canadiens scored more power play goals Saturday than they did the entire 2018-19 season. Ok, maybe not, but they weren't that far off, either. The biggest change we've seen so far in the preseason is a tendency to go high-to-low, which confuses the goaltender and forces him to constantly readjust. If the camera operator is having a hard time keeping up with the play, you're probably doing something right.

Welcome to Montreal, Keith Kinkaid!

It's hard not to get swept up in the Suzuki hype. Or the Evans hype. Or even the Fleury hype. Their play is dictating all the attention they're getting.

Another strong game should be enough to shift the Suzuki conversation into high gear. At this point, it's impossible to discuss the Canadiens' opening-night lineup without giving him legitimate consideration for a trip to Raleigh. He's outplayed the competition in camp, including several veterans, by a significant margin.

And it's not just because he's a creative force in the offensive zone, though that certainly doesn't hurt.

In more general terms, it's because Suzuki is playing as if he has 100 games of NHL experience under his belt and there are no noticeable flaws in his game at either end of the rink. Not to mention his play on special teams, which has been excellent.

His confidence keeps rising, as evidenced by a fantastic backhand pass to Tatar following a clean entry into the offensive zone.

It wasn't a safe play, but it's the kind of play you attempt when you're playing with the utmost comfort and confidence in your game.

It's the kind of confidence that can land you a roster spot in the NHL.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.22.2019

1153790 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Explaining the Maple Leafs' plan for Spezza and Gauthier

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

September 21, 2019, 11:26 PM

BUFFALO – Two centres, one line.

Until further notice, Jason Spezza and Frederik Gauthier will be playing the same position on the Toronto Maple Leafs' fourth unit.

It'll be up to them to figure out whose turn it is to man the wing or run middle ice.

Here's the plan: Spezza, the righty, will take draws on his strong side. Gauthier, the lefty, will do the same on his.

First man in the zone plays down low, and the other is responsible for the flank.

Both will see time on the penalty kill to help win critical D-zone draws — a glaring weakness of last year's edition of the Maple Leafs that was exposed by the Boston Bruins at playoff time. And the one with 915 NHL points could see shifts on the second power-play unit.

While this deployment has certainly become a training-camp talking point — largely due to coach Mike Babcock's steady praise of the younger one and subtle challenging of the vet — Spezza, whose NHL career is old enough to drive, says the situation isn't especially unique.

Analytics and the increased frequency of maximizing strong-side draws have just shed a brighter light on the tactic.

"I've kinda played that way my whole career," Spezza explained Saturday, before the Leafs lost 5-3 to the Sabres in pre-season action. "In Ottawa, I played with [Milan] Michalek for a long time. We just didn't talk about it. He played down low a lot for certain times. In Dallas last year in [the] playoffs, I played with Justin Dowling — we did it the exact same way. I think it's a pretty common thing that goes on. Through my best years with Alfie [winger Daniel Alfredsson], he played low a lot.

"It's really a matter of getting up to speed with the guy you're doing it with, because there's little switches throughout the game you want to work on. Freddie seems to have great hockey sense. The quicker we get on the same page, the faster we'll look as a line."

Make no mistake: While there is still a battle being waged for the fifth, sixth and seventh defenceman spots, Trevor Moore-Frederik Gauthier/Jason Spezza is expected to be the Leafs' opening-night fourth line.

Babcock made a point of praising the trio again Saturday night, and Moore scored a pretty little shorthanded goal after defenceman Jake Muzzin buried Sabres winger Victor Olofsson into the visitors' bench.

The coach's questioning of Spezza's interest in being a role player has vanished as quickly as it appeared. On Saturday, Gauthier took 13 draws. Spezza took 15.

"We have him and Goat both playing centre on that one line. I'm going to give them lots of D-zone starts," Babcock said. "He's different than other guys here, in my opinion, because I'm going to have a conversation with him every day to see how he's doing. I think he's earned that just because of the kind of person, the kind of player he is. We'll just keep talking."

Spezza reminds that he's played plenty of wing over the years and always assumed that role when he made a national team. Looking at the Leafs' 1-3 exhibition record, Spezza is quick to point out that there's a learning curve for any player adapting to new coaches and how they want their breakouts and forechecks to unfold.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

"We have to get up to speed here quickly, so we don't slow ourselves down by thinking too much. That's the challenge of a short training camp," said Spezza, who's both complementary and complimentary to his fellow 4C.

"[Gauthier] is a big, strong guy. He hangs onto pucks well down low. I think he has pretty good hockey sense and knows his way around the rink pretty well."

Unlike Spezza, the 6-foot-5 Gauthier's experience at wing is essentially zilch, unless you count the occasional shift in youth hockey, but he figures it's "something you pick up as you go."

Back in the early days of Babcock's Toronto tenure, the coach publicly pleaded for more centremen. He envied Tampa for having the luxury of putting, say, a Steven Stamkos on the wing. It's easier to nudge a centre to the wall than burden a winger with the responsibility of middle ice. So, as problems go, this is a good one.

The ultimate goal would be to roll out a double face-off threat on each line. Auston Matthews (lefty) and William Nylander (righty) have already enjoyed success splitting those duties in the top-six.

"In Ottawa we did it because I was good, [Antoine] Vermette was good, Mike Fisher was good," Spezza said. "Now wingers are being taught to take draws so they're always on their backhand side. That's maybe a newer trend."

So, on Saturday morning, Spezza took fellow righty Mitch Marner aside for a face-off tutorial. Last season, Marner took a grand total of 11 draws; he's 71-72 over his three-year career.

But if he's going to play alongside a lefty centreman like John Tavares for, oh, say, the next six winters, it would serve Marner well to add strong-side face-offs to his arsenal.

What better challenge than taking reps with the most successful face-off man in 2018-19, when Spezza topped the class at 58.2 per cent.

"He was impressed with my one win, but that's the only one I got on him," Marner said. "I want to be more useful in D-zone and O-zone taking draws. I'm trying to learn, and that's a guy you can definitely learn from. His percentage over the years talks for itself."

"I've talked to [Spezza] a lot. He kinda reminds me a little bit of Patty [Marleau] as that veteran presence, that guy who's been around for a while and knows how hard it is to win. That's something he's preaching to all of us: Come in every day and make sure you're ready to work."

Even if you have the same job description as one of the other guys on your own line.

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Sportsnet.ca / Suzuki, Fleury proving readiness for regular season time with Canadiens

Eric Engels

September 21, 2019, 11:28 PM

Sure, it's pre-season, but you can say a 27-save shutout for Keith Kinkaid in his Montreal Canadiens debut was just what the doctor ordered.

It had to be a welcome site for Canadiens coach Claude Julien, who said earlier on Saturday that he just wants "to see (Kinkaid) perform."

"We want to see Kinkaid play the way we think he can," the coach added.

Mission accomplished for the 30-year-old from Farmington, N.Y.

Kinkaid, who signed with the Canadiens this off-season for one year at \$1.75 million, wrapped the night with four saves as the Canadiens were killing their fifth penalty. His first-period stop on Ottawa Senators forward Alex Formenton was one for the ages. He made several more good ones on Brady Tkachuk, Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Cody Golubeff and Anthony Duclair.

This is the guy the Canadiens need this season. Not the one who stumbled through 41 games with the New Jersey Devils last season—going 15-18-6 and putting up a sub-standard .891 save percentage and a not-so-flattering 3.36 goals-against average. If Kinkaid can perform this way, it will enable the Canadiens to stick to their plan of limiting starter Carey Price to around 60 games.

It'll only help Kinkaid if the Canadiens play the way they did in front of him on Saturday in Ottawa. They went 3-for-4 on the power play, had 34 shots on net and 31 hits in their 4-0 win at Canadian Tire Centre.

## THE BIG TAKEAWAY

Nick Suzuki, the 13th overall pick in the 2017 Draft, had another excellent night.

Yes, the assist he notched and the screen job he managed on Tomas Tatar's third-period power-play marker was a perfect example of his elite hockey sense. And yes, he made a bunch of nifty passes in the game and appeared extremely comfortable in his first tryout at wing alongside Tatar and Phillip Danault.

Here's what you really have to like if you're Julien: Suzuki's awareness and his positioning.

On one shift, the 20-year-old sees Tatar and Danault in deep on the forecheck and stops himself from following up and instead fades back to the high slot to ensure that if the puck is turned over, he's covering. On another, he's given a tough pass along the boards while the Canadiens are killing a penalty and he isn't able to make a play with it.

What does he do? He doesn't go racing for a poke check at the point only to have the Ottawa defenceman fake and move around him for a clear look. No, he calmly takes three steps to his left, fills the lane and blocks a shot. The Canadiens were already up 4-0 at that point of the game. That's the kind of stuff that wins points with the coaching staff. The kind of stuff you can't teach.

Suzuki is making it really hard for Julien and co. to send him down to the AHL.

Sticking on the theme of youth, 20-year-old defenceman Cale Fleury is making the decision of who to start on the right side of the third Canadiens pairing a real easy one for Julien.

With Noah Juulsen sidelined from the race due to lingering headaches, with Christian Folin and Mike Reilly not really pushing the pace, and with Josh Brook looking like he'll need a bit more seasoning in the AHL, Fleury is quickly leaping ahead.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

"He certainly doesn't seem intimidated," Julien said about the 6-foot-1, 201-pound defenceman earlier this week. "He's thrown some big hits, he's made some good plays, he's skating well, moving the puck quick. He's had two solid games."

Make it three.

Fleury played 17:16 on Saturday—finishing the night at plus-1 and registering three hits. His play was fluid at both ends, and he brought out a bit of the nasty when he took a first-period penalty driving Colin White to the ice.

Don't think Julien minded seeing that.

## QUICK HITS

- Again, it's pre-season, but going 3-for-4 on the power play—and the one they didn't score on was abbreviated—has to be a confidence booster for a Canadiens team that ran its power play at 13.2 per-cent efficiency last season.
- How the Canadiens scored those power-play goals was a good sample of what they're trying to do there this season. They want to funnel more plays down low and then feed the points. They also want two bodies in front of the net at all times, so they aren't just putting up one-and-done opportunities.
- Another key on the power play: Winning faceoffs. The Canadiens did a horrible job in those situations last year. In Saturday's game, Phil Danault won one back clean and charged the net to tip the puck by Joey Daccord for a goal.
- Speaking of Danault, he said his top priority this season was to prove to the coaching staff he's worthy of more time on the power play. He also said he did a lot of work over the summer on his play along the goal-line. If Saturday's a sign of what he can bring, the Canadiens will have to strongly consider boosting his already taxing role.
- In the competition to be the 13th or 14th forward on the team, 23-year-old Jake Evans has outperformed Dale Weise, Charles Hudon and Matthew Peca and been just as good as Nate Thompson and Nick Cousins. Not that any of those guys have been particularly bad here — Hudon showed well on Saturday, Cousins has had a lot of jump in his limited pre-season action, and Peca was particularly good on Wednesday night in Bathurst, N.B. — but Evans, who scored his second goal of the pre-season on Saturday, has proven throughout training camp he can be a reliable option at this level. If he doesn't make the opening night roster, he'll be a top player in Laval with the AHL's Rocket, and it wouldn't be a stretch to suggest he'll see some action with Montreal at some point this season.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The Canadiens have three games remaining on their pre-season schedule, starting with one against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday at the Bell Centre. Let's see if they can improve their record to 5-0-0.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Giordano adds to popularity with permanent move to Calgary

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

September 21, 2019, 1:22 PM

CALGARY – Captain. Norris Trophy winner. Humanitarian. Calgarian.

Mark Giordano's considerable investment in the city is complete, as Calgary is now officially home for him and his family.

"We sold our place in Toronto," declares the NHL's top blue liner of a decision to leave his parents and childhood friends for a full-fledged foray out west. "We'll spend our summers here now. It's a pretty cool city and a pretty great city to live in. I think I've developed so many friends and relationships in this city, and with your kids growing up and going to school here I can see it being tough to leave."

Ever?

Well, that's an impossibly long time, especially in the hockey world where things can change on a dime.

Oh sure, there will be plenty of summer jaunts out east to visit family. But after years of summering in his native Toronto, Giordano and his wife, Lauren, decided to stay in their southwest Calgary home long after their kids' school year ends.

"To me, he's become synonymous with our city," said GM Brad Treliving of his team's heartbeat and engine. "And now, to be here full time, I think he looks at this as home. He's really adopted this as their second home.

"For what he means to the franchise he's meant as much for the city."

To put the move in perspective, only two other teammates call Calgary home year-round: Michael Stone and Dillon Dube.

Hockey players around the league typically scatter following exit meetings, either to their hometowns or cottages. This move serves to not only further entrench him in the city, but further endears him to fans who pepper the Dome with No. 5 jerseys nightly.

"For everything he does on the ice he's really continued that legacy of the Flames," added Treliving. "There's many alumni, hall of famers and Stanley Cup champions that have made Calgary their home and have had just as big an impact off the ice as on the ice, and that's really what he has done here.

"He's an elite player off the ice and has been an elite person off it. I do think that's really cool he's staying here — it shows again the standing now that he has within our community."

The legend of the undrafted defenceman known simply as Gio grew exponentially last year when his career-best 74-point season, and league-leading +39, helped land him the Norris Trophy.

Not bad for a lad who had enrolled at York University in 2004 to study business after a junior career in Owen Sound that netted him nothing more than a summer-camp invite from the Flames he later parlayed into an AHL contract.

On Labour Day he was saluted by 33,000 of his neighbours, who stood and applauded at the CFL's Calgary Stampeders game when Giordano appeared on the field with the prized trophy in hand.

"That was pretty special," Giordano said of the latest love-in for a man who seamlessly took over the captaincy and leadership of the Flames after Jarome Iginla left in 2013. "That was cool of the Stampeders to do that. What a day."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

Ten days later, the soon-to-be 36-year-old topped the carts in the team's annual fitness testing, re-emphasizing his declaration during his NHL Awards speech that he still feels "young and fresh."

With three years left on a deal that pays him a team-high \$6.75 million (like Johnny Gaudreau), the fitness freak is not only on track to play 1,000 NHL games (he's played 833), but may very well be in for another contract after this one.

Is the move to Calgary part of a plan to stay on with the organization in some capacity after he retires?

"I think a little bit of it is that idea – it's not set in stone – you know how hockey is," said Giordano, whose 13-year stint with the Flames was interrupted by his bold decision to try bolstering his stock with a year in Russia. "We love the city, so Calgary is right up there with anything as far as when I'm done playing. But I'm hoping that's a long way away."

Until then, he'll continue to do the sort of charity and community work that earned him ESPN's Muhammad Ali Sports Humanitarian Award in Vegas in 2017. Five years ago, he added to his Habitat for Humanity work with the Team Giordano Project, which is a groundbreaking partnership to supply gym equipment, computers and mentorship initiatives for three high-need schools in Calgary. He and Lauren make regular visits with the kids to provide students with focus and encouragement in academics and physical fitness, as well as promote healthy lifestyles, leadership and community involvement.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

He never turns down a media interview or makes excuses when things go sideways, as they did last spring when his West Conference champions were disposed of in five games by the Colorado Avalanche.

"You look at it 1,000 times in terms of what went wrong," he said. "To me, we were playing not to lose in the playoffs, as opposed to the season when we were playing to win and were aggressive. And then the mentality switched as we became a favourite. You can't have that fear of losing. You can't sit back.

"I don't think we played our game well throughout the series, but we did have two leads late in games and lost in overtime. Looking back, those probably cost us the series."

Fans and prognosticators are unsure how to handicap Giordano's group this year as there has been very little change to the core, save for the Milan Lucic and Cam Talbot additions and the looming absence of RFA Matthew Tkachuk.

He balks at the notion his Flames may have lost ground on some competitors over the summer.

"We finished first in the West with this group," said Giordano of a 107-point team he has every reason and right to be proud of. "We have a good group and we're built to play to our identity and we play it well.

"Adding Looch and Cam, I think, will solidify us. I don't think people give Looch enough credit for what he brings to the room. I think he's one of the toughest – if not the toughest – in the league, and he's a great leader."

Something Calgary's most popular resident knows all about.

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TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs Kings

Jeff Paterson

## TAKEAWAYS

1) With no shortage of goals in a 7-5 hockey loss, Travis Green and his coaching staff have plenty to mull over when they review of the video of the aptly named Salt Lake Shootout. Quite simply the Canucks didn't get anywhere close to NHL goaltending from the minor league duo of Zane McIntyre and Richard Bachman. But it's impossible to pin the outcome entirely on the goaltenders. The Canucks took too many penalties and struggled with their penalty killing giving up three power play goals to the Kings. And that was with a healthy dose of big league penalty killers in uniform on Saturday night. The Canucks dressed a solid line-up with their probable top four opening night defenders in uniform (Edler, Myers, Tanev and Hughes) and many of the forwards who will crack the opening night line-up, too (Pettersson, Boeser, Sutter, Leivo and Pearson). Still, the Canucks were sloppy in their own zone for much of the night and need to find a way to stay out of the penalty trouble.

2) Travis Green did not mince words in his post-game address to the media. When asked about Adam Gaudette's eventful first period which included a power play goal to get the Canucks on the board but saw the young forward on the ice for all five goals scored in the opening frame, Green said "What I like about Adam is that he's trying to make the team. Other guys should take notice. There's a lot of competition for spots and time is running out, so guys need to make sure they play well next week." That seems like a quote aimed directly at Nikolay Goldobin, but could also apply to Jake Virtanen. Goldobin has been nearly invisible in his preseason appearances while Virtanen opened strong in Calgary last Monday, but has had a couple of quiet outings since. He did manage a second assist on Gaudette's second goal of the game with 53 seconds remaining. But second assists in mop-up time won't get a player noticed. Gaudette has scored in back to back games and now leads the Canucks with three goals in the preseason. He also finished up a stretch of four games in the first six nights of exhibition action -- no other Canuck has played more than three games.

3) Add Tyler Motte's name to the list of guys who has impressed the coach with his approach to the preseason. On Saturday, Motte played in all situations and had his motor running all night long. He picked up a helper on Gaudette's opening goal, hit the post on a second period deflection, had an apparent goal waved off when officials lost sight of the puck on a scramble in the LA crease and also rattled a solid scoring chance off the mask of Kings netminder Jack Campbell. In other words, Motte was around the puck all night and making things happen. Much as he did last a year ago when he came to camp and forced his way onto the team, he is again making himself noticed with his effort and energy. He is not the most-gifted player, but he gives everything he's got most nights. And that's more than can be said about some of the players he's battling with to make the hockey club.

4) Brock Boeser made his much awaited preseason debut after missing training camp. After an expected slow start in the opening



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

20 minutes, he seemed to find his legs and the game in the second. He created a scoring chance off the rush moving to the attack with Josh Leivo. Later in the second, Leivo returned the favour and got the puck to Boeser in tight and his attempt to roof the puck failed as he lifted it straight up, over the net and out of play. In mid-season, there's every reason to believe Boeser would make that play and tuck the puck up under the bar. In the third period, Boeser made a nifty play to avoid pressure in his own zone and sprung Leivo away down the right side. Leivo snapped one past Campbell to pull the Canucks within a goal at 5-4 just 18 seconds after Tanner Pearson had scored early to start a Canuck rally. All in all, Boeser had a decent night for his return to game action. He looked confident with the puck and certainly didn't appear to be struggling to keep up with the pace of the frantic game.

5) Quinn Hughes manned the point on the Canucks first power play unit on Saturday night. While that group did not convert, it showed terrific puck movement on its first look of the night. With Hughes at the top, flanked by Boeser and Elias Pettersson, those three gave fans a taste of things to come. They zipped the puck around keeping the Kings penalty killers at bay. It was easy to see how powerful three options up high could be for the Canucks this season as they created shooting and passing lanes with their quick and decisive puck movement. Hughes also danced into the Kings zone and fed Adam Gaudette for a tap in to round out the scoring in the final minute of play. Defensively, the rookie and Chris Tanev looked to be reading off each other well and Hughes was able use his feet to fend off forechecks and didn't struggle to maintain body position when battling with larger LA forwards.

6) Elias Pettersson showed some frustration on Saturday night that we simply didn't see from him last season. On a second period offensive zone foray, Pettersson worked his way out of the corner and circled to the front of the net. He made a nice move to deke a Kings defender and appeared to be in a shooting position when he felt he was impeded by a stick. As the Kings turned the puck up ice, Pettersson turned to the trailing referee, raised his stick high above his head and brought it straight down as if to indicate he had been chopped. The referee didn't seem to want to hear what the budding superstar had to say. As Pettersson dropped his protest, the puck came quickly back up ice and onto his stick on a partial breakaway. However, perhaps distracted by his frustration with the official, he stumbled and struggled to control the puck. It's going to be interesting to gauge Pettersson's frustration level as he becomes the focus of opponents. It comes with the territory of being a star in the league. But it's also going to be worth monitoring if he gets his share of calls from the officials or if they turn a blind eye as teams do what they can to neutralize him.

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TSN.CA / Spezza looking to win Babcock over in limited role with Leafs

Mark Masters

How can Jason Spezza convince Mike Babcock he's willing to embrace a limited role with the Toronto Maple Leafs this season?

"Oh, I just have to play the game," the 36-year-old said. "I've played one exhibition game so far so it's important I go out and have a good game today. Our line wants to try and build a little bit of chemistry and it's important for us to have a good game today."

Babcock raised eyebrows early in training camp by suggesting the veteran centre needed to prove he could be a good fit in Toronto. The coach is doing his part to make sure the pair is on the same page.

"He's different than other guys here, in my opinion, because I'm going to have a conversation every day, see how he's doing," Babcock said. "I think he's earned that just by the kind of person, the kind of player he is and we'll just keep talking."

Spezza and Frederik Gauthier rotated between centre and the wing at Saturday's morning skate.

"We got him and Goat both playing centre on that one line and they'll figure it out," Babcock explained. "I'm going to give them lots of D-zone starts and he'll play on the power play and the penalty kill and we'll just keep going."

The dual centre-winger spot isn't new to Spezza. After 16 NHL seasons, not much is.

"I've kind of played that way my whole career," he said. "In Ottawa I played with (Milan) Michalek for a long time, we just didn't talk about it, but he played down low at certain times. In Dallas, last year in playoffs, I played with Justin Dowling, we played the exact same way. I think it's a pretty common thing, actually, that goes on. Some of my best years with Alfie (Daniel Alfredsson), he played low a lot. It's something that's maybe coming to light a little more with the analytics and the face-offs on the proper sides and all that, but it's really something I've done for a long time."

Spezza liked the way he and Gauthier worked together in Friday's practice putting together some longer cycle shifts.

"It's just a matter of getting up to speed with the guy you're doing it with, because there's little switches throughout the game that you want to work on," Spezza said. "So, Freddie seems to have great hockey sense and the quicker we can get on the same page the faster we will look as a line and the more we'll play in their end."

As for the special teams side of things, Spezza didn't kill penalties consistently during five seasons in Dallas, but is ready to embrace that task in Toronto.

"It's something I did a lot of before so it's just kind of getting the roots down and figuring out the details of what the coaching staff wants and then just playing and getting your timing back," he said. "We're one exhibition game in and the timing and everything isn't where you want it to be so it's important to get yourself up to speed."

Spezza's high hockey IQ should allow him to learn the intricacies of Babcock's system quickly. During the summer BioSteel Camp, Tyler Seguin described Spezza as a "hockey nerd."

"I like the game," the Toronto native said. "I enjoy it. It's fun for me to come out here. I love the challenge of trying to be an older player playing in the league. I just enjoy getting out here with the guys."

"It means everything to him," said John Tavares. "He obviously chose here, which should say a lot to our group, because of his belief in our talent and the opportunity we have in front of us with a strong team that can contend. I know this is a great opportunity for him and he wants to maximize it."

Tavares trains with Spezza in the summer.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 22, 2019

"No question he's had a great career and he wants to cap it off the right way," Tavares said. "I know he still loves the game as much as he did when I started training with him a number of years ago and wants to play as long as he can. He lives and breathes it and it's fun to be around that."

Spezza on winning over Babcock: 'It's important I go out and have a good game'

Even a veteran player like Jason Spezza knows the importance of showing up and leaving it all out on the ice, even during exhibition games. Building up line chemistry with his teammates and getting his reps in is crucial before the season get underway and Mike Babcock is taking notice of his hustle.

Spezza's contribution this season is expected to extend beyond the ice as he takes on the mantle of oldest player on the team from Patrick Marleau.

"He's a great guy," said 22-year-old Mitch Marner. "I've talked to him a lot. Kind of reminds me a little bit of Patty as that veteran presence, that guy who's been around for a while and knows how hard it is to win and I think that's something he's preaching to all of us, 'Come in every day and make sure you're ready to work.'"

Marner grew up a Leafs fan and cheered against Spezza and the Senators in the heated Battle of Ontario rivalry.

"I just remember how good he was in those games and how much of a threat he was constantly on the ice," said Marner. "I remember just how fun it was watching him and he controlled the play and how he just put fear into other people's eyes and it's kind of crazy still seeing him doing it today."

Spezza, one of the better face-off men in the league throughout his career, gave Marner a crash course at the dot after the morning skate wrapped up, winning six of seven puck drops.

"He destroyed me," said Marner, who took only 11 face-offs last season. "I got one of them. He was impressed with my one win. I want to get more used to taking draws. I want to be more useful in D-zone, O-zone at taking draws so I'm just trying to learn and that's a guy you can definitely learn from. His percentage over the years speaks for itself so he's a guy that I'll try and get some pointers off of."

Spezza won 58% of face-offs last season, tied for first among those who took at least 100 draws. That ability to win face-offs could be a big asset to the Leafs late in games and on the penalty kill, especially with Zach Hyman out for the first month of the season.

"He's always had so much leverage and strength and being a right-hand shot, which is a little more rare, just makes it so much harder to battle and compete against a guy like that," said Tavares. "So, it's just getting to know the way he uses his leverage, how he puts his stick down, his timing, how he plays the angles and how he approaches his opponents too, because a lot of it is a chess game."

With Jason Spezza heading into his 17th season in the league his roll is expected to extend past what he brings on the ice and hopefully can fulfill a mentorlike roll for the younger guys, much like how Patrick Marleau took some of the rookies under his wing the last couple years. Mark Masters has more.

Saturday night will be the second chance for Kasperi Kapanen to build some in-game chemistry with Tavares and Marner. The fleet-footed Finn has switched sides from right wing to left wing to fill the void left by Hyman in Toronto's top six.

"Right now it's just getting used to it, to be honest," Kapanen said. "I just got to get used to playing on that left side and entering the zone

and making plays. You got to be careful when you're getting the puck on your backhand from the D-man in your defensive zone, but it's still hockey and I'm trying to get used to it and every day feels a bit better."

Kapanen, who played his off wing infrequently with the AHL's Marlies before securing a full-time job with the Leafs, did score a goal in Tuesday's exhibition opener in St. John's.

"These pre-season games are really important for me, especially now that I'm on the left side, kind of getting a feel for it, so it's very important," Kapanen said.

The initial reviews from his new linemates are positive.

"He plays a very predictable game," observed Tavares, "not to say that he's not a creative player, but with that speed and his ability to put so much pressure on the opponent it gives me a really, really good understanding of the way he plays."

"He brings a lot of speed," said Marner. "He scares a lot of defencemen with that ... we got to play with Kappy and (Andreas Johnsson) a little bit last year when Hyman was out so we got a little bit of chemistry with those guys."

How is speedy Kapanen fitting in with Tavares and Marner?

John Tavares and Mitchell Marner shared their thoughts on what Kasperi Kapanen brings to their line and Kapanen talked about adjusting to playing on the left wing.

As the Leafs hit the midway point of the pre-season schedule, the battle for jobs is coming into focus.

"When you think about it, camp starts to get long," Babcock said, "and usually what happens is the guys who feel like they should be here keep getting better and the guys that think they shouldn't be here, they start to fall off. It's fatigue time now, there's no question about it, both mentally and physically, and so it will start to separate itself, I think it has already."

Rasmus Sandin has earned big-time praise the last couple of days from Babcock and seems to have an inside track for a job on defence. Up front, KHL import Ilya Mikheyev has impressed and appears destined for a top-nine role.

"He plays a lot like (Pavel) Datsyuk," said Auston Matthews following Friday's game. "He's got that reach and he's kind of got a similar paddle on him, uses a long stick and he's really lanky. He's really shifty, strong on the puck, really good on his edges so I was really impressed, especially that third period."

Babcock pointed out there's a reason why it takes time for Mikheyev to find his way in games.

"He's still trying to figure out the size of the rink and each game he's played (he) hasn't been quite as good in the first, but he's gotten better and better," Babcock said. "He can really skate, he's very intelligent, heavy on the puck, he can shoot it, make plays."

Mikheyev, 24, registered 45 points in 62 games with Omsk Avangard last season.

Matthews on KHL import Mikheyev: "He plays a lot like Datsyuk"

The Leafs have high hopes for KHL import Ilya Mikheyev, who is projected to start in Toronto's top nine this season. "He plays a lot like (Pavel) Datsyuk," Auston Matthews observed following Friday's preseason game. "He's got that reach and he's kind of got a similar paddle on him, uses a long stick and he's really lanky. He's really shifty, strong on the puck, really good on his edges so I was really impressed, especially that third period."



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YAHOO SPORTS / Maple Leafs waive goaltender Kasimir Kaskisuo

Steven Psihogios Yahoo Sports Canada

September 21, 2019

The Toronto Maple Leafs waived goaltender Kasimir Kaskisuo, and assigned goaltender Brandon Halverson to the AHL's Toronto Marlies on Saturday.

Bringing in Michal Neuvirth on a professional tryout contract has given the Maple Leafs a lot of flexibility at the goaltending position within the organization. Michael Hutchinson will also be contending for the team's backup position, behind Frederik Andersen, who is firmly entrenched as the starter.

Kaskisuo had been in the Maple Leafs organization since the 2015-16 season. He never logged an NHL appearance but played in 40 regular-season games for the Marlies.

During the team's latest trip to the Calder Cup playoffs, he posted an impressive .927 save percentage and 2.14 goals-against average across 12 games.

Sportsnet's Luke Fox also reported that the Vegas Golden Knights placed Garret Sparks on waivers. The netminder was dealt to Vegas from Toronto in a trade which occurred earlier this off-season.

In other words, today wasn't the best day for former Marlies.

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