



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 29, 2019



## Gold: Hurricanes preseason diary

By Adam Gold radio host 99.9 the Fan

There is one more preseason game left before the Carolina Hurricanes set their roster and embark on the 2019-20 season. Between now and Thursday night, head coach Rod Brind'Amour, team president Don Waddell and majority owner Tom Dundon have a few — though not many — decisions to make. There might even be a trade or two, but nothing that would drastically impact this version of the Hurricanes.

### Sharpie time

Sebastian Aho, Jordan Staal, Tuevo Teravainen, Nino Niederreiter, Erik Haula, Brock McGinn, Jordan Martinook, Andrei Svechnikov, Warren Foegele and Lucas Wallmark can be written into the line up in permanent ink. Those ten are automatic in the top 12. Ryan Dzingel would be in that group if it weren't for the nasty-looking-but-not-as-serious ankle injury he suffered at the start of the second period in Nashville on Wednesday. He's questionable for the opener on Thursday night against the Canadiens, but he shouldn't miss more than a couple of games if he isn't ready for the Habs.

On the back end, Dougie Hamilton, Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce and Joel Edmundson are etched in stone for Game 1. We know Trevor van Riemsdyk will not be ready for the opener — and may miss as much as the first month of the season, though the team is more optimistic about a quicker return. We don't know much about lefty, puck-mover Jake Gardiner. The late summer free agent addition has played just once, and has since been sidelined with an undisclosed injury. It's worth noting that Gardiner was bothered by a back injury last season with the Leafs, so it's understandable that the Canes are taking a cautious approach should that be the ailment.

While not in the line up for the Caniac Carnival Sunday afternoon, the team has not ruled him out of the line up for Thursday night.

Petr Mrazek will absolutely be the starting goaltender against Montreal given his performance Friday night

against the Predators. Petr looked sharp and confident, like the player who carried the Canes through March and April before getting hurt in the series against the Islanders.

That's 18 players who will definitely be on the opening day roster, if not on the ice under that gigantic video board, come Thursday. Now it's time to finish off the group.

Grab a pencil

Julien Gauthier, Carolina's second pick in the 1st round in 2016, has been the talk of training camp. He hasn't necessarily been productive on the scoresheet, he has just one assist in five games played, but he's been noticeable every night and has jumped in front of 2017 first rounder Martin Necas for what might be the final spot in the line up on the chance that everyone is healthy. Speaking of, it's also worth noting that Necas might not be ready for the opener. He left practice after an awkward spill in the middle of the week and hasn't yet returned to work with the main group.

If Necas AND Dzingel — or anyone else — can't make it for opening night, the best bet is veteran forward Brian Gibbons hanging around. He played 64 games between Anaheim and Ottawa last year and has skated in 189 NHL contests, scoring 25 goals in the process. Who knows, he could end up as this year's Greg McKegg for all we know. Clark Bishop is also still around, a player familiar with the system and who is the prototypical 4th line center.

I know Haydn Fleury was the 7th pick in the 2014 draft. He's a super nice kid, with great size and his dog is best friends with van Riemsdyk's dog. But, he's a borderline NHL player. Not everyone develops as we'd hope. And, for my money, Gustav Forsling and Roland McKeown would be better options to fill the TvR void until Carolina's defense becomes whole again. Heck, if it were up to me, I'd have kept Jesper Sellgren around before loaning him back to Lulea in the Swedish Hockey League. But, that's not the way it's going to turn out. Fleury will get his shot.



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In goal, before Petr put on a 40-minute show against Nashville, I thought the two best goalies in practice/exhibition games were Anton Forsberg and Alex Nedeljkovic. I don't know if Ned is ever going to be a bonafide number one goalie, but he can play in this league and he'll get his share of starts this year, more than likely. Forsberg is good and will never clear waivers, so he's either here or on another NHL roster. James Reimer has been fine, but his \$3.4 million cap hit will scare the bejeezus out of NHL teams and he could easily start the season in the minors if the Canes can't work out a trade for Forsberg.

With all of that said, the smart money says Carolina keeps Reimer up and moves Forsberg in the coming days.

What do you mean the Canes are against the salary cap?

Yup. Right pressed against it thanks to Patrick Marleau. The future Hall of Fame forward, whose contract the Canes took from Toronto, along with their first round pick in next year's draft, is hitting Carolina for \$6.25 million of cap space. At the time, I hated the deal because why would the Canes help out a team that might ultimately be in their way when it comes to making the playoffs? Now, the move is a payroll headache. First round picks are nice, but if the Leafs make the playoffs — a fair bet — the best that Carolina receives is a pick in the low 20s, where Toronto was slotted this year after losing in the first round. But, what's worse, is that if the Maple Leafs

somehow miss the playoffs — unlikely, but possible, judging from the vastly improved Eastern Conference — the pick is top-10 protected. So, if Toronto were to somehow win the lottery, they would keep the pick and the Canes would get their first rounder the following summer.

To be fair, the Hurricanes are still paying Alex Semin's buyout and just under \$700,000 of Justin Faulk's 2019-20 salary with the Blues. Plus, throw in the injury to veteran forward Max McCormick, which prevents them from placing him on waivers, meaning they're going to carry that salary for a while as well, so it's not ALL Marleau. Still...

A line up with Dzingel out and Necas in with Fleury (on an NHL deal so he's either here or he's gone) subbing for van Riemsdyk would have the Hurricanes cap number at about \$81.2 million. However, if you want to talk disaster scenario, consider...

No one is interested in Forsberg and the team is responsible for his \$775,000. Over. Can a team start the season with just 19 players on the ice? And, this is assuming there are no other injuries. Bubble wrap for everyone!

Even if Justin Williams wanted to walk through the PNC Arena doors tomorrow, the Canes would have to deactivate his key card!

These things have a way of working themselves out. At least we hope so.



## Hurricanes Have Game Rust to Knock Off

By Mark Shiver

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The Hurricanes played what is likely to be most of their season-beginning roster. Head coach Rod

Brind'Amour told the media after the game that there was definitely "game rust" evident in the play of some of his squad.

"We had a couple of guys play really well and a couple of guys were really rusty. That's what you can see... A lot of game rust. That's what happens. A lot of these guys just haven't played much. You could just see it wasn't quite clicking."

Mrázek and Reimer



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Hurricanes goaltender Petr Mrázek played well. He played 40 minutes and saved all 19 of the shots that he faced. Brind'Amour told the media that "he looked pretty good" and that he and the coaching staff will decide if he's ready for opening night or needs to play in the team's final preseason tilt on Sunday. After the game, Mrázek told the media:

"I was happy to be out there. It's so different than being in practice. Happy to be in a game in front of the guys."

As the season draws near, Mrázek is the proverbial wild card in the mix for the Hurricanes. Can he be consistent, and do so without knowing that he can rely on Curtis McElhinney to pick him up, if needed? Last season Mrázek and McElhinney combined to have a season akin to one very good goaltender, each stepping in and playing well when needed.

McElhinney is gone and James Reimer and Anton Forsberg are backstopping Mrázek, although it is not likely the team will carry three goaltenders into the season. Reimer says he is ready to work hard and have fun, and it appears that the team will go with him as the backup.

However, that is not etched in stone. He saw 11 shots from the Predators Friday night and stopped 9, giving up the tying goal in the third period and the winning goal in overtime. Regardless of who the backup is, Mrázek will have to step up in a big way, shaking off the past inconsistency that has marked his career.

Edmundson a Pleasant Surprise

Joel Edmundson was recently acquired from the St. Louis Blues in the trade that sent Justin Faulk on his

way. He did not seem to have any rust growing on his game, as he notched an assist on the Hurricanes only goal scored by Jordan Staal. He also had a hit and four blocked shots. Brind'Amour told the media, "I thought Joel had a really good game for stepping in, not really having a good understanding of what we're doing. He seemed to pick it up pretty quick. I thought he was a pleasant surprise there."

Edmundson looked good Friday night. But, it's one game in the preseason. Still, it's a very positive sign that he basically got off a plane, suited up, hit the ice and played very well. He is an added piece to the Hurricanes' puzzle that should help them maintain one of the strongest defensive units in the NHL.

Jordan Staal the Leader

Even though Justin Williams technically still has a "C" on his sweater, Jordan Staal has been a key leader on the Hurricanes for years. He's worn an "A" and was a co-captain with Faulk two years ago. He scored Friday night against the Predators and after the game said, "It starts now, it hasn't been sharp enough. I think the work ethic at times has been there but still needs to be higher from everyone."

The Hurricanes are sort of limping towards the start of the season. They have several players out who are dealing with injuries. Brind'Amour said that they are close to the team's regular-season lineup. Their last preseason game is Sunday at home against the Washington Capitals. And then things get real on Thursday, Oct. 3 as the Hurricanes welcome the Montreal Canadiens to PNC Arena for their season-opener.



## NHL Season Preview: Predicting Each Division for 2019–20

By The SI Staff

The end of the season is still seven months away, but it's never too early to start thinking about how the standings might shake out. We've pored over new-look rosters and offseason transactions, and have decided that next season could come down to the wire in wild fashion yet again.

Plenty of familiar faces in new places will keep the races exciting in each division, especially with Sergei

Bobrovsky down in Florida and the improved rosters for the Rangers and Devils that are hoping to revitalize the Hudson River rivalry. Out west, Phil Kessel could give the healthier Coyotes that extra push they need to secure a playoff spot and the Central Division still looks tough enough to get into the Salty Spitoon.

Each season always brings its own surprises, but here is how we see things finishing at the season's end:



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## Eastern Conference

### Atlantic Division

1. Tampa Bay Lightning
2. Boston Bruins
3. Toronto Maple Leafs
4. Montreal Canadiens
5. Florida Panthers
6. Buffalo Sabres
7. Detroit Red Wings
8. Ottawa Senators

The top of this division is as strong as any in the league. The bottom of this division is as bad as any in the league. There are three legit Cup contenders up top, and two strong playoff candidates in Montreal and Florida. Buffalo is a wild card. Last season there were signs that the Sabres could have a bright future. There were also signs that they were awful. Watching Tampa and Boston beat up on Ottawa will be painful.

### Metro Division

1. Washington Capitals
2. Pittsburgh Penguins
3. Carolina Hurricanes
4. Philadelphia Flyers
5. New Jersey Devils
6. New York Islanders
7. New York Rangers
8. Columbus Blue Jackets

The top three seems pretty set, though it is possible we see a regression from Carolina. But those three teams clearly have the most talent. After that, it's a bit of a jumble. It's easy to imagine the Rangers playing above their station, and it's also easy to see them hit growing pains. Same thing with the Islanders or Devils. Only thing that seems certain is that Columbus is going to take a significant step back.

## Western Conference

## Central Division

1. Nashville Predators
2. Colorado Avalanche
3. St. Louis Blues
4. Dallas Stars
5. Winnipeg Jets
6. Minnesota Wild
7. Chicago Blackhawks

There's no escape from the NHL's toughest division. The Predators, Avalanche, Blues, Stars and Jets all seem like locks to make the playoffs and each of those teams, minus Winnipeg, made improvements over the offseason. The Wild, clear of the Paul Fenton nightmare, and the Blackhawks aren't terrible, but they're going to struggle to sustain success with a strong group of contenders in front of them.

## Pacific Division

1. San Jose Sharks
2. Calgary Flames
3. Vegas Golden Knights
4. Arizona Coyotes
5. Edmonton Oilers
6. Vancouver Canucks
7. Anaheim Ducks
8. Los Angeles Kings

The Flames outperformed expectations and claimed the division title last season, but the Sharks should end this year on top. The Brent Burns–Erik Karlsson combination is too good and even averaging goaltending from Martin Jones would be a huge improvement. The middle of the division is a toss-up. Even though the Oilers need to dress 12 forwards, Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins might be enough on their own to sneak into wild-card race. Decimated by injury last year, Arizona's forward group should be better with Phil Kessel. As for the rest? It's best for Ducks and Kings fans to remember their Stanley Cup years.

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## SportScan

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

1154577 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes Have Game Rust to Knock Off

BY MARK SHIVER SEPTEMBER 28TH, 2019

The Carolina Hurricanes played their next-to-last preseason game Friday night against the visiting Nashville Predators. In a game they lost in overtime, 2-1, there were high points and points that still need to improve as the start of the 2019-20 season looms large next week.

The Hurricanes played what is likely to be most of their season-beginning roster. Head coach Rod Brind'Amour told the media after the game that there was definitely "game rust" evident in the play of some of his squad.

"We had a couple of guys play really well and a couple of guys were really rusty. That's what you can see... A lot of game rust. That's what happens. A lot of these guys just haven't played much. You could just see it wasn't quite clicking."

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As the season draws near, Mrázek is the proverbial wild card in the mix for the Hurricanes. Can he be consistent, and do so without knowing that he can rely on Curtis McElhinney to pick him up, if needed? Last season Mrázek and McElhinney combined to have a season akin to one very good goaltender, each stepping in and playing well when needed.

Petr Mrazek, Carolina Hurricanes

Petr Mrázek, Carolina Hurricanes (Amy Irvin / The Hockey Writers)

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is ready to work hard and have fun, and it appears that the team will go with him as the backup.

However, that is not etched in stone. He saw 11 shots from the Predators Friday night and stopped 9, giving up the tying goal in the third period and the winning goal in overtime. Regardless of who the backup is, Mrázek will have to step up in a big way, shaking off the past inconsistency that has marked his career.

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Joel Edmundson will make his preseason #Canes debut tonight.

Brind'Amour: "He knows what it takes to win. I love that. ... That gritty presence that, no secret, we're probably lacking, especially on the back-end. ... We're going to need that out of him." pic.twitter.com/WKVkMcMqO8

— Michael Smith (@MSmithCanes) September 27, 2019

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He makes it look WAY too easy pic.twitter.com/cS4TqXDzhs

— Carolina Hurricanes (@Canes) September 28, 2019

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The Hockey Writers LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154673 Washington Capitals

Dmitry Orlov is waiting for his partner on the Capitals' blue line to be determined

By Samantha Pell

September 27

After Matt Niskanen was traded to Philadelphia in the offseason, Washington Capitals defenseman Dmitry Orlov knew training camp would be a time for experimentation.

It would be the first chance for coaches to start moving around pieces, trying out new players and situations up and down the blue line to find Niskanen's replacement after he was dealt for defenseman Radko Gudas in a salary cap-clearing swap between Metropolitan Division foes.

For Orlov, that means shifting into more of a leadership role in his top-four pairing, becoming the player Niskanen was to him when the duo made up the Capitals' most reliable defensive pairing for the past three seasons. The two struggled to move the puck and defend last year as well as they did in previous seasons.

When the blue line is fully healthy, the favorites to skate alongside Orlov are Gudas and Nick Jensen, who was acquired at last season's trade deadline. Orlov was mainly paired with Jensen in the Capitals' 4-3 preseason loss Friday against the St. Louis Blues at Enterprise Center. Gudas, who was expected to skate with Christian Djoos in Friday's lineup, was instead a late scratch, leaving the team for the birth of his child. Defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler took his place.

"It will all play itself out as long as the players take advantage of their opportunities and do the things they can do," Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said regarding the blue line options Friday morning.

Gudas and Jensen have skated with Orlov during the preseason, but there is no clear indication of who will win the role. With Michal Kempny questionable for opening night because he tore his hamstring in April, other defensive pairings remain unsettled as well.

Orlov, who was one of the three players wearing an "A" as an alternate captain during the preseason matchup against the Blues, said he is confident playing with any defensemen and trusts the coaches to decide who best helps his game and the team. Offensively, the Capitals are hoping to see Orlov's numbers return to those from the 2017-18 regular season, in which he recorded 10 goals and 21 assists before the team won the Stanley Cup.

"It doesn't matter which player, offensive or defensive player," Orlov said. "I think whoever will help will help. I think the conversation will shift to the coaches, and they will help with how the best way to play, and everyone is professionals. They know they have their own job to do on the ice."

Gudas and Jensen have vastly different skill sets. Gudas is more of a big-hitting defenseman who plays well in his own zone and has the ability to play in a shutdown role. He could help open up Orlov offensively if they are paired together. Reirden said he has seen how Gudas has challenged other players on the ice throughout the preseason and has become more vocal with teammates. Though Reirden thinks there is a bit more to get out of Gudas, he's pleased with the addition.

Gudas said it has taken him longer than he thought to learn the Capitals' system, but he believes he is ready to take on a top-four role.

"I've been training the whole summer for that," Gudas said at the start of training camp. "It's going to be between me and Nick, I believe, so I'm ready to take any role that is given to me. I'm prepared to take second, third. I just want our team to win and be there to make our team successful."

Gudas's physical style of play can get him in trouble. He finished 10th in the NHL with 255 hits this past season, but he has been suspended four times since 2015. He played 17:53 per game last season for the Flyers and had four goals and 16 assists in 77 games.

"I feel like I'm a dying breed pretty much, you know," Gudas said when talking about his physical play. "I feel like every team still needs a guy whose No. 1 thing is defensive and make sure to be [in] the right spot at the PK, and I think it makes every team better when you have a guy in the lineup who can score and defend, so you want to have guys who can do everything."

With Jensen's skating ability, he is able to bring more offensive prowess to the second pairing. The 29-year-old had an admittedly rocky adjustment period after joining Washington at the trade deadline and worked in the offseason to sharpen his all-around game.

"Me personally, it was a little bit of a roller coaster, obviously being thrown in that whirlwind of just being on a different team and adjusting on and off the ice," Jensen said.

Jensen has shown the ability to be in a top-four role during his time in Detroit but doesn't see it as a specific goal.

"I don't like to approach it like, 'I see myself here,' " Jensen said. "I think I like to take the mentality of what I do on the ice, it's more of a process. What you do on the ice will ultimately place you where you belong in that lineup spot. . . . It's all about doing the right things out there, and when you do those right things you find yourself in the right spot."

Washington Post LOADED: 09.29.2019



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1154674 Washington Capitals

Vanecek among the 6 players cut from Caps' training camp roster, here's why that could change everything

By J.J. Regan

September 28, 2019 12:09 PM

With the end of training camp and the start of the regular season rapidly approaching, the Capitals cut six players from the training camp roster on Saturday. The team announced that Shane Gersich, Lucas Johansen, Beck Malenstyn, Brian Pinho, Vitek Vanecek and Colby Williams had all been reassigned to the Hershey Bears.

The news is a tough blow for 2016 first-round draft pick Lucas Johansen. His future within the organization seems in doubt with the team being so high on prospects Alex Alexeyev and Martin Fehervary. Head coach Todd Reirden raved about Beck Malenstyn's play during training camp and he seems like he could be in line for a call-up if needed at some point this season.

But the real name to note among these six is Vanecek.

Vanecek was competing against goalie Pheonix Copley and Ilya Samsonov for the backup role behind Braden Holtby. Copley was the team's backup last season and won a respectable 16 games. Samsonov, meanwhile, is considered Washington's future starter with the highest ceiling of the three. But Vanecek has one very important advantage over the other two players: he has the lowest cap hit.

Copley's new contract carries a cap hit of \$1.1 million. Samsonov's cap hit is \$925,000. Both are higher than Vanecek's \$716,667. For a team tight against the salary cap, those extra dollars are very significant.

Sending Vanecek to waivers will either have massive long-term implications or short-term implications heading into the season depending on what the team's ultimate plans are at backup.

Because Samsonov and Copley both have higher cap hits than Vanecek, the Caps are going to have to shed salary in order to get under the cap. That means moving someone of significance.

This seems like a reasonable projection, but if you add Samsonov or Copley, the team is over the cap. If the plan is to keep either of those two goalies as the backup long-term, then someone from this lineup has to go.

What also makes this tricky is that this lineup has just one extra forward and defenseman, so if you move someone it also means bringing someone else up to replace them. Waiving a player like Boyd, for example, would not simply clear his \$800,000 cap hit off the books, you would also have to account for his replacement.

There is no team in the NHL that wants to carry zero backup forwards or defensemen so if you are looking at this and saying the team should just go with 12 forwards or six defensemen, that is not a viable solution.

But what if sending Vanecek to Hershey is just a short-term move?

The salary cap issue will not be a problem in the first three games of the season as Evgeny Kuznetsov is suspended and his cap hit will not count against Washington. As Vanecek is waiver exempt, the team could potentially choose to recall him after those three games. If the team wanted to get Samsonov some early experience while they have the cap space, for example, perhaps moving Vanecek is just a short-term move.

What the Caps plan to do at backup goalie this season still remains unclear, but moving Vanecek to Hershey on Saturday signals more significant moves are coming. Either a player of note is going to be taken off the roster or Vanecek could be headed back to Washington after the first week of the season.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154611 Montreal Canadiens

In the Habs' Room: Fate of rookie hopefuls rests with coach, GM

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: September 28, 2019

"It's not in my hands."

That was the stock answer Saturday after three Canadiens rookie hopefuls wrapped up training camp with a 4-3 overtime win over the Ottawa Senators.

The decision on their immediate future will be made by coach Claude Julien and general manager Marc Bergevin over the next few days, and defence hopeful Cale Fleury summed up the general feeling among the youngsters when he said: "I've done my part and now it's up to someone else to make the decision. I thought I played solid. I thought I played good most nights, but the game was a little quicker and I move the puck quickly, and kept it simple."

Fleury made the most of his 15 minutes on the ice. He had three shots on goal, delivered four hits and wasn't on the ice for any of the Ottawa goals. He said he's comfortable with the physical aspects of the game.

"Playing physical helps me get into the game," said Fleury, who had two hits on one of his early shifts. "If (the hit's) there, I'll take it, but I don't want to take myself out of the play."



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The lone hiccup in Fleury's game was in the third period when Brady Tkachuk got a step on him and Fleury took a holding penalty.

While Fleury has played well enough to make the team, his future will depend on how the Canadiens manage their personnel in terms of waivers. Fleury doesn't have to be placed on waivers if the Canadiens decide to send him to Laval. Two of the defencemen he's battling for a job — Mike Reilly and Christian Folin — would have to be placed on waivers and the Canadiens might not want to risk losing them.

"I think those are all discussions we're going to have to have," Julien said. "I can't answer them tonight. That's why we're not making any decisions tonight. We're going to look at everything and have to make those decisions based on all the different criteria."

The Canadiens, who will enjoy time off Sunday and Monday, have until 5 p.m. Tuesday to submit their 23-man roster to the NHL.

Ryan Poehling is also on the bubble and he's hoping his versatility earns him a spot. He had a hat-trick and scored the shootout winner in his NHL debut last April but, if makes this team, it will be as a gritty shutdown guy. He played that role Saturday and, aside from what he described as "a couple of bad penalties, he played the role well.

The waiver situation is less likely to effect the decision on Poehling. The Canadiens have to decide whether they can find enough ice time for him if he stays in Montreal.

The third rookie is Nick Suzuki and he's assured of a top-six role to start the season. He capped the preseason by scoring the overtime winner Saturday. He sees the ice well and has the tools to become a top offensive player. He's moving from centre to the wing and that will require an adjustment, and he's expected to shoot the puck more.

The top line of Tomas Tatar, Phil Danault and Brendan Gallagher played for the first time in the preseason and Gallagher said it was just like old times. They each scored a goal with Gallagher scoring in the final minute of regulation to tie the game.

They also had some time on the power play and, while the Canadiens went 0-for-5 with the extra man, there was a sense the Canadiens knew what they were doing, with Gallagher establishing a presence in the slot.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154612 Montreal Canadiens

Newcomers shine as Habs wrap up preseason against Senators

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: September 28, 2019

Does Cale Fleury started the season in Montreal?

How about Ryan Poehling?

Those were the two questions that hung in the air after the Canadiens wrapped up their exhibition schedule Saturday with a 4-3 overtime win over the Ottawa Senators at the Bell Centre. Rookie Nick Suzuki scored the winning goal on a wraparound after a wild finish to regulation time.

Filip Chlapik put Ottawa ahead late in the third period after Carey Price came far out of his net to play a puck. Chlapik intercepted his clearing pass and scored as Price dove back into the net. Brendan Gallagher sent the game into overtime when he scored with 58.4 seconds remaining in regulation.

As coach Claude Julien promised earlier in the week, he employed a lineup that was "close" to the one we'll see Tuesday when Montreal opens the regular season in Carolina.

The two maybes in Saturday's lineup were Fleury and Poehling and they both showed they were comfortable playing in a high-paced game.

Fleury has been a revelation in training camp. After dropping 10 pounds and working on his skating in the off-season, the 20-year-old has delivered performances that are tailored to today's NHL. He's well-positioned in the defensive zone and there's no hesitation in his game as he looks to move the puck up the ice. He was near-flawless against the Senators, but there's a fear he might get caught in the numbers game.

Fleury has had a better camp than veterans Mike Reilly and Christian Folin, but the Canadiens run the risk of losing one of those players through waivers, while Fleury can be returned to Laval without being subjected to waivers. The Canadiens could postpone a decision by keeping eight defencemen, but the bottom line is Fleury has earned a spot.

The situation with Poehling isn't as clear-cut. He's an NHL player, but the question is whether Julien can find enough ice time in Montreal to further his progression. The current depth chart has him sharing fourth-line duties with Nate Thompson and he might be better off starting the season in Laval, where he would be the No. 1 centre and playing big minutes in all situations.

There were no questions about the top line, which has Tomas Tatar and Gallagher flanking Phil Danault. The hard-working Danault opened the scoring with a shorthanded goal and also added an assist on the second goal, although the heavy lifting was done by Gallagher, who drove to the net and Tatar, who came in through the back door to convert Gallagher's pass through the crease.

And there is no doubt Nick Suzuki will start the season in Montreal. His hockey IQ is first-rate. The only quibble with his play Saturday was his tendency to pass when he had an opportunity to shoot.

Carey Price earned a couple of "Ca-rey, Ca-rey" chants and was solid except for his late-game gaffe. The Senators put



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all their scoring together in a two-minute span in the middle of the second period.

The Senators thought they had a goal midway through the period, but a lengthy video review determined Vitaly Abramov kicked the puck into the net. Ottawa got on the board when Bobby Ryan tapped in a puck that trickled out of Price's glove and Anthony Duclair tied the game when he took the puck off Max Domi in the neutral zone and scored on a shorthanded breakaway.

When it wasn't giving up a shorthanded goal, the Montreal power play went 0-for-5.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154613 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens Game Day: Nick Suzuki provides perfect finish in OT win

STU COWAN, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: September 29, 2019

It was the perfect way for this pre-season to end for the Canadiens.

Nick Suzuki, who grabbed the spotlight at the start of training camp and never let go, scored the winning goal in overtime Saturday night as the Canadiens beat the Ottawa Senators 4-3 at the Bell Centre. Phillip Danault (short-handed), Tomas Tatar and Brendan Gallagher also scored for the Canadiens.

Gallagher's goal came on a deflection of a Jeff Petry shot at 19:01 of the third period to tie the score 3-3 with goalie Carey Price on the bench for an extra attacker. Price stopped 34 of the 37 shots he faced in his first game after recovering from a bruised hand.

It's hard to imagine the 20-year-old Suzuki not earning a spot on the final 23-man roster to start the regular season next Thursday night in Carolina against the Hurricanes (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).

"I think I've done everything in my power," Suzuki said after logging 18:51 of ice time while playing right wing on a line with Max Domi at centre and Artturi Lehkonen on left wing. "I know there's room for improvement, for sure, but I've been proud of myself through this whole camp. I've come to work hard every day and having a lot of fun here. My goal is definitely to stay here."

When Claude Julien was asked after the game if it was indeed the perfect ending to the pre-season, the coach responded: "I don't know if I'd put a lot of emphasis on that, but he's had a good camp and it was nice to see him score that goal.

"At the end of the day, I think our camp was based on evaluations of different players and I think through it all — now that we're done our last pre-season game — I think we were able to accomplish that as an organization. We were able to have a look at a lot of players. Certainly, it's never easy because it's a sample size, there's ups and downs in a season. But I think these games, with the types of lineups we put together, we were able to evaluate properly."

Asked if he would be able to sleep Saturday night while he waits to find out if he made the team for sure, Suzuki smiled and said: "I'll definitely be able to sleep. It's been a hard camp. I just need a couple of days rest."

Suzuki will get his wish. The Canadiens will have Sunday and Monday off, before returning to practise at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Bell Sports Complex in Brossard. The deadline for the Canadiens to submit their final roster is 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Suzuki's OT goal was a beautiful individual effort.

First, he beat the Senators' Jean-Gabriel Pageau to a loose puck in the corner behind the Ottawa net, using his body to win the battle, then used a forehand wraparound move to beat goalie Anders Nilsson.

Suzuki said he never actually saw the puck go in the net.

"I didn't even know it went in," Suzuki said. "I just saw the ref point to the goal.

"The coaching staff have been preaching hard forechecks and I was coming on fresh and he was a bit tired," Suzuki added about the play. "I just got to the puck first and took it hard to the net."

That's how good things often happen.

Suzuki grew up in London, Ont., and was a big Domi fan during the four years Domi was playing junior for the London Knights. Domi is four years older than Suzuki.

"It's really weird, kind of," Suzuki said about now having Domi as a linemate. "He's always someone I looked up to growing up in London. I got to watch him play basically every Friday in London. It's definitely weird just interacting with him. He's definitely a fun guy.

"It felt really good," Suzuki added about playing with Domi. "Really easy to play with. I've always wanted to be on a line since I got traded here with him. It's a lot of fun playing with him. We're talking a lot and he tried to set me up a few times."

Suzuki and Domi displayed some great chemistry on the ice, but they both have a pass-first mentality and there were times when they both should have shot the puck.

"For me, personally, I think I need to shoot more, for sure," Suzuki said. "I'm looking pass a lot. I think that just comes with experience and knowing these guys are all skilled and they can find me in those areas."

Ryan Poehling, another 20-year-old forward trying to earn a spot on the Canadiens, was in the lineup against the Senators after missing the previous four games while recovering from a concussion. Poehling played centre on the



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fourth line, between Nick Cousins and Joel Armia, logging 11:56 of ice time. Poehling went 4-6 in the faceoff circle, had two tripping penalties and was minus-1.

"I took some stupid penalties, for sure, that I can't be doing," Poehling said. "So I think it's a little bit of the rust getting shaken off, though, from the last five or six days. But I think for the most part we did a good job with our role tonight."

Asked how his legs felt, Poehling said: "I thought they'd be worse, honestly. I didn't play a crazy amount, so it's not too hard on your body and also I was only off for five or six days. So I think it's kind of like riding a bike. Once you get out there and kind of get your feet moving, you kind of get into it a little easier."

It wouldn't be a surprise if Poehling starts the season with the AHL's Laval Rocket to get a few more games under his belt, although he looks ready to play in the NHL.

The Canadiens' power-play problems continued as they went 0-for-5 and also gave up a short-handed goal when Domi lost the puck at offensive the blue line in the second period, allowing Anthony Duclair to go in alone on Price and beat the goalie on a nice breakaway move.

Captain Shea Weber, who missed all of training camp last season while recovering from foot and knee surgeries and didn't play his first game until Nov. 27, looked very healthy as he logged a game-high 25:01 of ice time, had four shots, two hits and was plus-1. One of his hits was a bone-cruncher into the boards on Scott Sabourin in the first period.

Gallagher looked to be in mid-season form with a goal, an assist and a team-leading five shots in 17:26 of ice time, finishing plus-1.

Phillip Danault had a monster game with a goal and an assist while going 18-9 in the faceoff circle (67 per cent) and finishing plus-3.

Defenceman Cale Fleury is the third 20-year-old rookie hoping to earn a spot on the final roster and played well again Saturday night while paired with Brett Kulak. Fleury logged 15:20 of ice time with three shots and a team-leading four hits.

Fleury and Kulak started last season as partners with the Rocket before Kulak got called up by the Canadiens after 19 games with Laval and spent the rest of the season in the NHL, earning a three-year, US\$5.5-million contract this summer.

"I'm pretty excited," Fleury said Saturday morning about playing with Kulak again. "I think we played well at the start of the year before he got called up and hopefully we can continue to do that tonight."

"I think it did a lot just seeing him go up there (to the Canadiens) and the success he had," Fleury added. "I think he had a pretty good year for himself there and earning a new contract this summer it's just something to look up to as a guy playing with him last year."

Fleury gives a lot of credit to Rocket head coach Joël Bouchard for his progress last season in Laval, where he posted 9-14-23 totals in 60 games and was minus-16.

"He was just on top of me every day, he just never gave me a day off," Fleury said. "I think that's important, especially for a young guy transitioning into pro to have somebody like that just making sure you're really on top of it."

When asked about the No. 83 he has been wearing, Fleury smiled and said: "I didn't actually get to choose. I'll take whatever they give me."

Only two players have ever worn No. 83 in the regular season for the Canadiens: Eric Bertrand (2001) and Ales Hemsky (2018).

Fleury brings 'some jam'

Defenceman Ben Chiarot likes what he saw from Fleury during training camp.

"He brings some jam and some physicality to the D," Chiarot said Saturday morning. "I found over the years more and more defencemen coming up kind of have a similar look. They all skate well and move the puck well and every once in a while you find one with a little bit of jam to his game, a little physicality. And I think Cale brings that, which is getting harder to find in young defensemen. He brings it and that's perfect for him. He's a good player."

When asked if he has offered any advice to Fleury during training camp, Chiarot said: "With some things. Just your typical young guy who comes in, if he makes something as small as missing a pass you can see him kind of like get down on himself. I just tell him: 'Listen, everybody does it. Shea Weber does it, Max (Domi), the best players in the world they'll miss a pass here and there. So don't beat yourself up about it. Just move on and get to whatever you're doing next.'

"He's got some young-guy tendencies," Chiarot added. "But with time you get more and more comfortable and I think you'll see that with him."

Chiarot has played with great confidence for a 20-year-old throughout training camp.

"I felt like in rookie showcase and the rookie camp I was really confident and I kind of just carried it on through this camp as well," he said. "For me, being confident is huge, just to be able to make the right plays. If you're not confident in your play, it's going to be tough to make the right decision."

If Fleury isn't on the final roster, it will have more to do with the fact he doesn't need to clear waivers than the way he played during the pre-season. Both Christian Folin and Mike Reilly, who were scratches for Saturday's game, would have to clear waivers and GM Marc Bergevin likes to have depth on defence and might be afraid to lose one of them.

We'll see.

The Canadiens' penalty-killing unit was perfect against the Senators, who went 0-for-5 on the power play.

"I think the most important penalty-killer is your goaltender," Chiarot said Saturday morning. "So making things easy for Carey, keeping the shots to places where he can see them and he feels comfortable with them. Not giving up any back-door passes or saves that you just can't expect your goalie



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to make. So, letting Carey see the puck and keeping the shots to certain areas is important. So, definitely making things easy for him is the most important thing for a penalty-kill."

Chiarot has enjoyed working with Canadiens assistant coach Luke Richardson, who is in charge of the defence.

"Personally, I think we're very similar in our style of play and the way we see the game," Chiarot said. "Luke had an incredible career and a career that a guy like me would like to have something sort of similar. Play a long time, play a hard style, a leader in the room. So he's a great guy for me to be around and learn from."

"Just the little things that he's able to teach, a guy who played that many games," Chiarot added. "He's got so much knowledge of the game. I know the guys love him, love having him around. So he'll be important for me."

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154614 Montreal Canadiens

The Canadiens' reset has hit a philosophical crossroad, and picking the right path is vital

By Arpon Basu

Sep 28, 2019

Claude Julien said something Friday afternoon that probably sounds obvious, but it really isn't. It encapsulates a problem the Canadiens face, the proverbial "good problem to have" that, in the end, remains a problem, no matter how good it is to have that problem.

"It's always been clear here," Julien said Friday, "that if a player is ready and it is to his advantage to be here, then he'll be here."

If it were in fact that simple, then the difficult decisions the Canadiens have to make in the coming days as they set their season-opening roster before the 5 p.m. ET deadline Tuesday aren't difficult at all. If it were purely a meritocracy, then Nick Suzuki and Cale Fleury not only would be on that roster but also would be in uniform on opening night in Raleigh on Thursday. There would be little debate because both players have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are the best option for the Canadiens at their respective positions.

But it's not that simple.

The line between running a true meritocracy and maintaining proper asset management is paper-thin at this time of year. Waiver status is a major factor and has a permanence that the other path — sending rookies to the AHL — does not. A

rookie can always be called back up; a player lost on waivers is lost forever.

The wise move would be to avoid losing assets for nothing whenever possible. Allowing Suzuki, Fleury and Ryan Poehling to make the team would force the Canadiens to expose three players on waivers. If two of them are kept, then two players will be exposed. That's a reality they face right now.

The players who would have to be exposed would most likely come from a group of four who did not play in Saturday night's preseason finale against the Ottawa Senators, a game in which each of the three rookies made a case, to varying degrees, for breaking camp with the Canadiens. Suzuki's case had already been made, frankly, but Fleury again showed an incredible level of comfort for a 20-year-old defenceman, and Poehling had a very effective night centering the fourth line after missing most of camp with a concussion.

Did they do enough to make the potential loss of Charles Hudon, Nate Thompson, Christian Folin and/or Mike Reilly a meaningless consideration? Of course not, because those are NHL players and NHL teams never have an interest in losing players when they don't have to. So that is the burden of proof the three rookies had Saturday night and, more generally, throughout training camp.

Perhaps Poehling's injury makes it easier to justify having him start the season in Laval to avoid having to expose Thompson — a player Julien clearly values — to waivers to make room for him. But in the case of Suzuki and Fleury, this is where the Canadiens are at a fork in the road. The good problem to have becomes messy because both players quite obviously make the Canadiens a better team, and isn't that the ultimate goal?

If the Canadiens are ready to take the next step and make the playoffs, waiver considerations should take a back seat to skill and quality. If Suzuki is a better option than Hudon — and he quite obviously is, despite how well Hudon played in camp — then waivers should not matter. If Fleury is a better option than Folin or Reilly — he is — then that must be the driving force behind that decision as well.

Because running a meritocracy is important. The message it sends is important. It tells the team the best players will play because the best players give the team the best chance to win. That's what makes Brendan Gallagher's assessment of the three rookies following Saturday's game, a commonality they all share, that much more relevant. It shows what kind of value these guys can add to the team because the biggest hurdle most rookies face does not appear to apply to them.

"The biggest difference going from junior or college is obviously the speed of the game," Gallagher said. "So when you can process the game at that speed, you're not going to have a problem. Your game will translate. I think all three of them do a pretty good job of keeping up with the pace, keeping up with the speed, and they're able to process the games so they're playing the same way they always did."

"It's not really a jump for them. It just feels the same."



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How that applies to Suzuki has already been covered, but he showed it again on numerous occasions against the Senators, making slick passes, constantly being in the right spot on the ice, arriving just as Senators players were receiving the puck in order to take it away from them. And, oh yeah, winning the game in overtime on a wraparound goal.

But there was a moment Saturday when Fleury, for one of the few times in training camp, appeared a bit out of his element. He was defending Brady Tkachuk on a rush, got caught a bit flat-footed and was called for holding to prevent a scoring chance. A normal rookie would look at that play and concede he simply got overwhelmed by a high-end NHL talent.

Fleury, if it's not yet clear, is not a normal rookie.

"I think I was too far up on the play. Maybe I could have made my pivot earlier," Fleury responded when asked what he would do differently on that play. "But I think in the situation I had, I thought I played it right. I don't even think it was a hold; I gave him a push in the hips. But the refs, it's a fast game for them, so they can't necessarily see everything."

So, yeah, I wouldn't do anything differently.

Whether that's true is not important here. It shows a level of confidence in his own abilities that suggests Fleury doesn't need any more time in Laval. If the Canadiens were to act on that reality — because it is clearly a reality — they would have to put one of Folin or Reilly on waivers. Losing one of them would hurt the depth of the organization, no doubt. But having Fleury play in Laval makes the Canadiens worse.

That is the most important thing the organization needs to consider.

"Obviously there's a lot of things that come into play. I don't have to explain that to you guys," Julien said Saturday morning. "Is the player worthy of being here? Whether it's the top 13 or 14 forwards or the top seven or eight D, etc, etc. At the same time, we all know that certain guys don't need waivers, others do need waivers, and you make the decision not based on 'this guy deserves to be here' but 'this guy needs waivers.' If this guy doesn't need waivers and we feel he can improve in Laval by playing more, then we have to make those decisions. So there's a lot that comes into those discussions at the end."

By Saturday night, Julien didn't really want to touch the waiver question, and no one can blame him. As a coach, Julien would obviously want the best players to start the season. It is Marc Bergevin's job as general manager to worry about waivers and asset management and depth and whether the Canadiens can afford to lose legitimate NHL players at this stage in the team's development.

The whole point of the Canadiens' reset was to integrate young players into the lineup on a regular basis, year after year, because they have more draft picks and, hopefully, would use those picks as well as they can. What we are now seeing is the beginning of that process.

But the bigger point is not even that. It is a philosophical one, and it is one the Canadiens will need to grapple with over the coming days.

Do they want to ice their best team, no matter the cost?

We will see by Monday where the Canadiens' priorities lie, but from our vantage point, this really should not be a question at all.

"I think I've done my part," Fleury said Saturday. "I did as best I could."

"I knew coming into camp there could be a few spots, and they're not afraid to take younger guys like Vic (Mete), Jesperi (Kotkaniemi)," Suzuki said. "I kind of owed it to myself to try and make the team, and I think I've done a pretty good job of that."

They are both right. How can the Canadiens tell either one of them otherwise and maintain some semblance of credibility when they said at the start of training camp they have an open mind and would welcome having that problem that is good to have?

They have that problem now. But it's only a problem if you see it as one.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154615 Montreal Canadiens

Bubble Report: Cale Fleury has done everything possible to earn a roster spot

By Marc Dumont

Sep 28, 2019

With the preseason coming to an end, Saturday night's game against the Ottawa Senators was the last chance for Nick Suzuki, Ryan Poehling and Cale Fleury to make an impression before the final roster decisions had to be made. The Canadiens beat the Senators 4-3 in overtime, finishing the preseason with a 5-2-0 record, though that doesn't matter.

What does matter is the play of the roster hopefuls, and they definitely did not disappoint.

Arpon Basu stated unequivocally on Wednesday that Suzuki should be in the Canadiens lineup on opening night.

But things can change very quickly in the NHL. One poor performance can quickly overshadow several prior quality outings.

On the other hand, some arguments just get stronger, which has definitely been the case with Suzuki's roster bid.



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He's still adjusting to the lack of time in the NHL and he isn't capitalizing on every scoring chance, but his incredibly well-rounded play has constantly stood out regardless of the situation. By now, we've taken a close look at just about every aspect of his game, and he's passed every test with flying colours.

The last remaining drawback is speed, though the criticism has been blown way out of proportion.

Suzuki's skating is far from elite and compared to the rest of his skillset it may seem like a significant flaw, but it hasn't held him back whatsoever. He can, and probably will, improve upon his skating, but if he's able to keep up with Paul Byron, the reports of his peg-leggedness have probably been exaggerated.

Oh, I forgot to mention, he also scored the game-winning goal by outskating Jean-Gabriel Pageau, which, I guess you could say is a decent way to end the preseason.

For players like Suzuki, the goal is to stand out. For Fleury, the goal is a little different. Yes, you want him to stand out when the opportunity arises, but you also want him to blend into the crowd of veteran blueliners, and that's exactly what he's done. Despite being the youngest defenceman at camp, he's extremely comfortable on the ice and is rarely caught out of position, constantly matching the flow of the game in all three zones.

He knows when to shoot, when to hit and when to focus on defensive coverage, not to mention he's doing a much better job boxing out opposing forwards and keeping them to the outside of the high-danger areas, an area of concern in his game last season.

If the Canadiens are looking for stability on the back end, which they should be, it's hard to argue that Fleury hasn't been one of the most consistent players at camp.

In addition to his overall solid play, Fleury has shown a strong ability to recognize escape routes, evade the forecheck and put his lateral skating to good use when it comes to puck retrievals and clean zone exits.

It's worth noting the Canadiens have controlled well over 60 percent of the shots, high-danger chances and expected goals while Fleury has been on the ice in the preseason.

From the eye test to the stat check, you couldn't have asked for much more from the rookie, who capitalized on every single opportunity he was given at camp.

Ryan Poehling had a relatively quiet game, though he did end up leading the Canadiens when it came to 5-on-5 shot control at 68 percent.

With the preseason at an end, I'm not sure he did enough at camp to convince Claude Julien to give him a spot in the lineup on Oct. 3. Missing time with a concussion certainly didn't help his cause, though, it definitely should not be held against him.

More than anything, unlike Suzuki who's fighting for a job in the top-six, I don't see a pressing need to put Poehling in the lineup. He's very good on the penalty kill and his breakout passes have been crisp, but he's still having a hard time

when it comes to the lack of space in the offensive zone, and the Canadiens already have a surplus of bottom-six players.

That's not to say he definitely shouldn't make the opening-night roster, but some time in Laval might do him some good, as it did for Fleury last season.

The Brendan Gallagher, Phillip Danault and Tomas Tatar line is back to their old tricks. And by tricks I mean complete and utter domination. Statistically speaking, they're the best 5-on-5 trio in the NHL and it's a shame the Canadiens have a terrible power play, because that line really doesn't get its due from analysts around the league.

Speaking of Danault, he's surprisingly good on the power play. He's also a very good penalty killer, though it may be worth sacrificing his penalty kill minutes for some man-advantage ice time, given how important the power play will be to the Canadiens's chances of qualifying for the playoffs.

Ben Chiarot's biggest obstacle in preseason was keeping his helmet on. He seems to be adjusting to the Canadiens' defensive-zone strategy rather quickly.

Brady Tkachuk's ability to drive opponents up the wall is impressive. Annoyingly impressive.

Contracts, waiver exemptions and developmental concerns will come into play when Julien makes his final choices, but if the goal of training camp is to give jobs to the most worthy candidates, Suzuki and now Fleury have done everything they can to tip the scales in their favour. Turning defence into offence is the name of the game in Montreal, and few players at camp have done a better job showing they're up to the challenge.

As an added bonus to their fantastic play in camp, both players can be reassigned to the Rocket at any point and be skating in Laval in under an hour, which mitigates any risk of ruining their development by rushing them into the NHL.

Coaches always say they want their rookies to make roster decisions difficult. And that's usually true.

But in this case, at least two of the Canadiens roster hopefuls have made the decision rather easy.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154660 Tampa Bay Lightning

Tampa Bay Lightning coach Jon Cooper mostly pleased with preseason finale

By Ryan Kolakowski

TAMPA — The Lightning have less than a week before the games are for real, and coach Jon Cooper expected them to use their final preseason game Saturday as a tuneup for Thursday's regular-season opener.



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The Lightning lost to the Panthers 1-0 in a shootout at Amalie Arena. Still, Cooper was encouraged by his team's performance.

"We led possession time and scoring chances," Cooper said. "(The puck) just didn't go in. The big thing for me was we kept the zero up on the board (for Florida in regulation and overtime)."

Cooper wanted to get out of the game healthy, but two players left with injuries. Forwards Tyler Johnson and Cedric Paquette exited in the second period and did not return. Cooper said Johnson was held out as a precaution but Paquette would require further evaluation.

In the third straight game between the Lightning and the Panthers, the players continued a trend of chippy play. In the second, Lightning forward Pat Maroon scuffled with Panthers forward Noel Acciari, leading to penalties for both.

Penalties in general continued to be an issue for the Lightning, which took six minors in all. The Panthers came up empty on four power plays.

The Lightning opens its regular season against the Panthers at Amalie Arena.

Cooper said before the game his coaching staff had developed a good understanding of the roster puzzle and how his players fit together, but he still wanted to see growth.

"You want to see a little bit of chemistry with the group and a little consistency in how we're playing," Cooper said. "With every exhibition game, it's gotten better."

The preseason has given the Lightning a chance to evaluate roster additions, including Maroon and defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk. In preseason play, Cooper gave Maroon reps on the power play and assigned Shattenkirk to a pairing with Victor Hedman.

"When you have new players, you want to try and see if there's chemistry in some places, and we're seeing it, so that's a good thing," Cooper said.

Cooper said he would have a good idea of how the roster would come together after Saturday, but the makeup also depends on the health of center Brayden Point, who is recovering from offseason hip surgery.

"If (Point's) not available until Thanksgiving, then things will change," Cooper said. "If he's available by Canadian Thanksgiving, then there's a different mind-set. We'll find that out here in the next couple days."

Canadian Thanksgiving is Oct. 14. American Thanksgiving is Nov. 28.

"There's a laundry list of checks and balances we have to go through before we get (Point) in with us," Cooper said. "There's more optimism on an earlier return."

Point, who ended his contract holdout last week, has been wearing a red noncontact jersey in practices. If he is out for an extended period, the Lightning may add another forward to the regular-season roster.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154682 Websites

The Athletic / Graduate class mini-series: Sizing up Elias Pettersson and other sophomore talent

By Alison Lukan

Sep 28, 2019

Youth is one of the hardest variables to account for in predictions. As talented players make the jump to the NHL and the highest level of hockey, we often don't know who will continue their development or may lag in their production as they adjust. That can be a level of risk that fantasy owners are reluctant to take on, but if you can find the right players, they can provide value that your competitors may not have identified.

With that in mind, The Athletic's Shayna Goldman and I put together a "graduate class" miniseries. You've seen our review of rookies who are worth adding to your roster. Now let's look at the sophomore class:

Elias Pettersson, C, Vancouver Canucks

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 45 | ADP: 44.7

If you win the Calder Trophy, you're probably going to get solid fantasy attention in your sophomore season. Pettersson comes in as the top sophomore in Luszczyszyn's rankings this year, and there are reasons to be bullish on the young Swede. Pettersson looks to be the guy in the middle of the top line for the Canucks this season, and if Brock Boeser is on his right, that puts the two highest-impact players by GSVA together for dynamic possibilities.

He will be a power-play weapon as well. As our Thomas Drance notes, Pettersson was already scoring at a top-50 rate on the power play last season, and now he is projected to play the half wall on the top unit that should be quarterbacked by incoming Quinn Hughes.

Fantasy owners seem to be right in line with this player, but it will be important to not overpay. While Pettersson projects as possibly a point-per-night player, his production last season dipped late, and his shot rate (6.56 per 60) was 11th on the Canucks roster last season while his shooting percentage (19.44) was fourth. He also took just 627 faceoffs last season and won only 41 percent of those.

Andrei Svechnikov, LW/RW, Carolina Hurricanes

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 119 | ADP: 147.6

Svechnikov is poised to have a strong breakout season in Carolina. Last year's second-round draft pick is expected to move up to the top six this season, and while his point totals



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last year (20-17-37) say he didn't light up the scoreboard, he had 187 shots last year — one more than Evgeni Malkin — and had the 37th-best shot quality among all forwards. Moving up in the lineup might cure some of those finishing ills.

Feel free to bet higher on this player than some historically based projections may have him placed.

Brady Tkachuk, LW, Ottawa Senators

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 117 | ADP: 151.8

Tkachuk in and of himself is worth your fantasy investment. It's going to be the company he keeps that will be important to monitor in terms of finding this forward's value. Last year, through 71 games, Tkachuk was the highest-rate shooter on the team (11.29 per 60), and the fourth-highest scorer on the Senators (22-23-45), behind only Mark Stone, Matt Duchene, and Chris Tierney. But that production came in a season when Tkachuk's most frequent linemates were Mark Stone and Colin White. With Stone gone, can Tkachuk's production continue on a natural progression or will there be bumps as the rest of the roster catches up? It's also worth noting that Tkachuk adds fantasy value with hits and penalty minutes, but with so much relying on offensive categories, be sure to keep an eye on his scoring progression.

Andreas Johnsson, LW/RW, Toronto Maple Leafs

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 189 | ADP: 170.8

Johnsson is a player who's been pushing for more and more fantasy consideration for a while now. It's all about opportunity. When he has moved up the lineup, he's produced points (20-23-43) and earned the fourth-best five-on-five scoring rate among all Leafs last season (2.49 per 60). Going into this season, Johnsson looks to slot into a second-line role and possibly the top power-play unit. Here's how those units looked in Toronto's most recent preseason game, on Sept. 25:

The key to mining value from Johansson will be his role. He's not a high-volume shooter (7.07 per 60) nor is he driving individual quality at a high rate (.65 individual expected goals per 60). But when he's locked in with talent like that on the Toronto roster, he can produce.

Rasmus Dahlin, D, Buffalo Sabres

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 56 | ADP: 84.2

Dahlin is the highest-ranking sophomore defenseman available this year, and with good reason. Luszczyszyn projects Dahlin to be a top back for Buffalo. He's slotted to play top-pair minutes in five-on-five play, as well as handling duties on the top power-play unit. That should only increase his point production. Even playing on a struggling Sabres team last season, Dahlin had 22 even-strength points (4-18-22), putting him in the top 40 of all NHL defensemen, and was 12th in power-play points (5-15-20). Dahlin was also in the top 25 in shots (177), and it's worth mentioning that he played all 82 games last season, which may hint at durability as a player you can expect to be in your lineup.

(Chart via Dom Luszczyszyn)

Filip Hronek, D, Detroit Red Wings

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 199 | ADP: 184.0

Hronek could be a good late-round add for a manager. He has a bit of the "bad team effect," but last season he came in 27th in points per 60 (1.12) among defensemen with 500-plus minutes and is projected to play top-pair minutes this season. He's middle of the road in shots (4.47 per 60) and hits (10.2 per 60) but has the talent of a top-pair defenseman. Watch, too, if he can own a spot on the top power play.

Jordan Binnington, G, St. Louis Blues

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 81 | ADP: 48

Of course Jordan Binnington is one to look to this season after being a big part of turning the Blues from worst to literal first in the NHL. This season, he will look to build on a .917 save percentage that resulted in 14.38 goals saved above expectations. Rated out, that's ninth-best in the league (.44 GSAA/60) for goalies with 10 games or more under their belt. He's sure to get lion's share of starts and should stick right around last year's total of 24.18 saves per game.

Carter Hart, G, Philadelphia Flyers

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 159 | ADP: 73.1

We have Hart here to ensure proper perspective on what his second year might look like in net. Hart burst onto the Philadelphia scene last year and seemed to buoy a team that had quite a merry-go-round in net before his arrival. But while his five-on-five save percentage looks fine (.917), it actually resulted in 1.85 fewer goals saved than expected based on the shots he was facing in terms of volume and quality. Extrapolate that to all situations, and he was just below seven goals against more than expected.

Hart also played just 31 games last year, and that may not jump to a true starter's workload this season. Hart could be a viable candidate for a backup job, but manage against the hype last season generated.

Others worth watching:

Miro Heiskanen, D, Dallas Stars

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 130 | ADP: 109.3

Heiskanen will bring you volume in five-on-five time. He is going to get top-four minutes game in and game out (18:52 per game last season), and he'll bring you shots from the back end (5.89 shots per 60) and just over a hit per game on average. But with limited special-teams time, it will require a unique fit for Heiskanen on your roster.

Filip Chytil, RW, New York Rangers

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: NR | ADP: NR

As training camp comes to a close, it looks like Chytil — who was quietly good last season — may end up getting top-six minutes playing on a line with Chris Kreider, and time on the second power-play unit. He'll get you shots (7.96 per 60, second only to Kreider) and drive to the dangerous areas,



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thus increasing his chance to finish (4.61 high-danger attempts per 60).

Mackenzie Blackwood, G, New Jersey Devils

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: NR | ADP: NR

There's no defined starter yet in New Jersey, but there is a dogfight. And Blackwood comes in with a good chance, if not a slight edge in terms of start share. Keep an eye on this one.

Devon Toews, D, New York Islanders

Dom Luszczyszyn's ranking: 200 | ADP: 169.1

Toews is heading into his sophomore season as the likely quarterback of the Islanders' top power-play unit and a solid fixture in the top four.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154683 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs ready for real games to start after successful pre-season

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

September 28, 2019, 11:28 PM

TORONTO – Take your sweet time, Zach Hyman.

Don't rush back before you're 100 per cent, Travis Dermott.

By every measure, it would appear the lineup the Toronto Maple Leafs ice on opening night should be capable of holding down the fort just fine, thank you.

Buried deep in this training camp's hurricane of headlines and deluge of diversions — the Mitch Marner contract comparisons, the Auston Matthews allegations, the captaincy questions — is the actual hockey. And the fact the 12 forwards, six defenceman and starting goaltender who stride onto Scotiabank Arena's slick, white canvas Wednesday night to face Scott Sabourin's Ottawa Senators are pretty darn good at the sport.

Of course, a playoff series victory — or four — is the 2019-20 end game here for a collection of talent as flashy and fun as it is pricy and pressurized.

But if the two pre-season dress rehearsals of Toronto's NHL-calibre roster have taught us anything, it's that the journey from October to April should be a blast.

Hope you like Hall & Oates.

In trouncing the Detroit Red Wings 5-0 at home Saturday night, the core Leafs outscored their only two big-roster pre-season opponents (Montreal being the other one,

Wednesday) by a combined 8-0, outshot them 81-42, and controlled 62 per cent of shot attempts over those 120 minutes, despite sitting back and controlling a lead.

Andreas Johnsson scored Saturday's game-winner 29 seconds after puck drop. By the third period, the locals in the sold-out barn were doing the wave — at an exhibition game.

"Good club this year," said one high-ranking Red Wings executive, prior to the rout. "A lot of firepower."

The revamped penalty kill went six-for-six, with a Trevor Moore shorthanded strike. Assistant coach Paul MacFarland's new-look power play buzzed around and went four-for-eight, with contributions from both units.

Oh, and Frederik Andersen will start Wednesday having not allowed a goal in nine consecutive periods.

"What has he got, like, a .001 goals-against average this pre-season? I'd say that's not bad," Matthews said. "We've got plenty of skill, lots of guys that can put the puck in the net and make plays all around."

"I don't think there's really much more you can ask for heading into the season."

Matthews wrapped his fourth exhibition contest with five goals and eight points. Encumbered only by his own swagger and the sprouts of a new Matthews-inspired moustache, William Nylander registered a point per game, including a wristed snipe so sharp Saturday that referee Kevin Pollock requested a replay because his eyes couldn't see the thing in real time.

Ilya Mikheyev and Alexander Kerfoot look comfortable in their new countries while Kasper Kapanen and Johnsson look like legitimate top-six forwards, ready to seize the special-teams roles now available to them.

Tyson Barrie is as advertised. Fringe guys Martin Marincin and Frederik Gauthier have never started so smooth. And you've already read 19 articles about the readiness of super-teen Rasmus Sandin, whom Babcock confirmed postgame is a Maple Leaf.

"All the main pieces you think have been good for a long time are way better," Babcock said. "It's time to get at 'er."

A club with so few holes? Anything less than home ice in Round 1 should be unacceptable.

Remember: The Maple Leafs dressed seven 20-goal scorers last season, and Nylander was not one of them. The shooters are all back, and they'll be fed pucks by an overhauled blue line.

Take it from veteran Jake Muzzin.

"I think so. Not taking anything away from Hainsey and Zaitsev and Ozhiganov — they're all great players. But we needed a right-handed D, and we got two of them," says Muzzin, tipping his cap to Kyle Dubas's acquisition of Barrie and Cody Ceci.

"That fills a hole we needed to be filled. There's some areas we checked off. Now it's on us to get to work and put wins together."



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Andersen doesn't want to say that this is the sharpest he's felt heading into a Leafs campaign, but that's OK. He doesn't need to.

What's even more telling is the goaltender's praise for how the five players in front of him are blocking shots and limiting high-danger chances.

"They're making it pretty easy for me," Andersen said. "They have the puck a lot, and they've been relentless when they do lose it."

Though ultimately meaningless in the standings and stat sheet, John Tavares argues that these past two weeks of practice have been critical in adapting to new faces, new coaches, new combinations and new systems.

But if ever there was an edition of the Maple Leafs eager to turn the page on the camp narratives and start their mission in earnest, this is it.

"It's the best time of year," Tavares said. "We're gettin' goin' again."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.29.2019

1154684 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Former Oilers giving Flames big boost ahead of regular season

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

September 29, 2019, 12:53 AM

CALGARY – The ink hadn't dried on his new contract with the Flames when Tobias Rieder put an exclamation mark on his signing Saturday night.

Scoreless in 67 outings with the Oilers a year earlier, the 26-year-old German punctuated his successful tryout with the Flames with two goals against his former squad.

His second broke a 2-2 tie late in the third for the game-winner, which added a level of satisfaction for the former 16-goal scorer who was not offered a chance to return to the Oilers last spring.

"It feels really good – too bad they don't count," chuckled Rieder, whose season was punctuated by comments from Oilers CEO Bob Nicholson, who told season ticket holders, "if Toby Rieder would have scored 10 or 12 goals we'd probably be in the playoffs."

"It gets the confidence up and I think that's what I needed before the regular season," Rieder added. "You're just happy – finally something goes in and goes your way."

To complete the juicy storyline, another former Oiler, Milan Lucic, also scored midway through an entertaining pre-season tilt at the Dome won 3-2 by the hosts.

In 146 games as Oilers last year the duo combined for just six goals, a total they got halfway to in just one game against their former team.

"For both of us it was a tough year to find the back of the net last year so it was great to see him get rewarded right before the season starts," said Lucic, who said he had plenty of dialogue with his former teammates on the ice all night.

"It's great to see. Obviously an exciting 24 hours for him, signing a contract here after a PTO, and getting two big goals after one of those years. It's always nice to end off the pre-season with a good taste in your mouth."

The only three additions to the Flames lineup this year are all Oilers, which made it unfortunate Cam Talbot didn't get in for at least a period to complete the story.

Unfortunately, Talbot and his transferred teammates won't get another shot at the Oilers until Dec. 27, which is the first time the Battle of Alberta is slated to resume for real.

This one was just for fun, completing both teams' silly seasons.

For Rieder these games meant everything as he is one of three players on PTOs who made it to the final game. Devante Smith-Pelly was released earlier in the day, leaving Zac Rinaldo as a likely depth signing (and perhaps Andrew MacDonald as well) to start the season.

Rieder's speed and penalty killing savvy made him one of the biggest stories of Flames camp this fall, leading to the signing of a two-way deal worth the league minimum \$700,000 in the NHL, \$300,000 in the minors and \$400,000 guaranteed.

The Flames have yet to make the deal official.

The players and coaches left after the game for two days of team-building in the mountains Sunday and Monday.

Lucic, who had just six goals last year, scored while on a second power play unit he'll be a fixture on to start the season. While parked net-side he calmly corralled a Rasmus Andersson rebound and beat Mikko Koskinen.

Home of the Flames

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CHIP SHOTS

- Three days after inking his three-year, \$21 million contract, Matthew Tkachuk was welcomed to the Dome by the crowd after being announced as part of the starting lineup. He played alongside his age-old linemates Mikael Backlund and Michael Frolik and was on the first PP unit. In the final minute of the first period he proved to be in mid-season form by bowling over Koskinen after being thrown into the crease



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by Darnell Nurse. All told he played almost 17 minutes in his pre-season debut.

- David Rittich completed a solid pre-season with an impressive 28-save effort. Big Save Dave came up large with significant stops on Leon Draisaitl and twice on Zack Kassian to end his tuneup season, allowing just three goals in 60 shots over three games — a far cry from the rust he showed a year earlier in pre-season. The only blemishes on the night were redirects by Gaeten Haas and Kassian midway through the third period to tie the game 2-2.

- Connor McDavid said earlier in the day he was hoping to play in the game, but was shut down by the Oilers coaches who kept him in Edmonton. The last time McDavid played a regular season game was the season-finale at the Dome where he left early with a significant knee injury after crashing into the net.

- Backlund left the game in the second period and was getting treatment after the game for an injury Peters said he hadn't been updated on before his post-game scrum.

- The two former Flames players who relocated up north this season were not part of the game as Mike Smith sat as the backup and James Neal didn't make the trip. Yet another former Flame, Alex Chiasson, drew the ire of Mark Giordano and T.J. Brodie late, prompting a heated exchange and shoves after Chiasson dumped Frolik at centre ice.

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1154685 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Cap Comparables: Connor, Rantanen opt for long-term deals

Josh Beneteau | @jbenny15

September 28, 2019, 11:06 PM

And then there were none.

With four days to go before the regular season begins, the last of the restricted free agents have come to terms with their teams. Aside from Jesse Puljujarvi, who is playing in Finland while awaiting a trade from the Edmonton Oilers, every other RFA now has a deal.

On Saturday, Mikko Rantanen agreed to a six-year, \$55.5 million with the Colorado Avalanche. Kyle Connor then agreed to a seven-year, \$50 million deal with the Winnipeg Jets a couple of hours later.

What makes these contracts interesting is the term, with both players opting to sign for longer than many of their other RFA counterparts.

Let's take a look at how both contracts compare to other deals around the NHL. Thank you to the always-helpful CapFriendly.com for the contract details.

Kyle Connor

Best comparable: Clayton Keller, eight years, \$7.15 million AAV

If Connor's contract looks familiar, it's because Arizona Coyotes star Clayton Keller signed an almost identical one earlier this month. Keller still has a year to go on his rookie contract, and got one more year on the extension, but his AAV of \$7.15 million practically matches Connor's \$7.14 million.

The comparison extends beyond the money for these two. Keller has 114 points through his first 167 career games while Connor has 128 points in 178 career games.

While Connor has shown himself to be a better goal-scorer so far — with back-to-back 30-goal seasons — both players have shown enough similarities in their games to earn comparable contracts.

Other comparables: Johnny Gaudreau (six-years, 6.75 million AAV), David Pastrnak (six-years, \$6.666 million AAV), Filip Forsberg (six-years, \$6 million AAV)

Mikko Rantanen

Best comparable: Mitch Marner, six years, \$10.893 million AAV

Like Connor, Rantanen's best comparable is a contract signed in September. Mitch Marner's six-year deal carries an average annual value of \$10.893 million, slightly more than Rantanen's \$9.25 million.

On the scoresheet, the two have similar offensive numbers. Through 239 career games, Rantanen has 80 goals and 209 points. Marner, through 241 games, has 67 goals and 224 points.

Besides points, the two have a lot more in common. Both are 22. Both are the highest-scoring wingers on their teams. And both signed for six years.

So what made Rantanen get over \$1.5 million less, on average per season, than Marner? Likely it was comparables on their teams.

Rantanen's deal makes him the highest-paid Avalanche player, by a lot — almost \$3 million more than Nathan MacKinnon — while Marner still trails both Auston Matthews and John Tavares in payroll on the Maple Leafs.

A high tide raises all boats. But the lower tide in Colorado may have saved the Avalanche some money on Rantanen's contract.

Other comparables: Nikita Kucherov (eight-years, \$9.5 million AAV), Claude Giroux (eight-years, \$8.275 million AAV), Vladimir Tarasenko (eight-years, \$7.5 million AAV)

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1154686 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Nick Suzuki a safe bet to stick with Canadiens after strong pre-season

Eric Engels

September 29, 2019, 12:26 AM

MONTREAL — Everyone tuned up? Good. Great. Grand. Fantastic.

Another pre-season has come and gone — thank heavens, it's over — and the real fun can now begin. Or at least it can start five days from now when the Montreal Canadiens play their season opener in Carolina.

Before we get there, we have a few observations to share on what we've seen in exhibition, on the young, emerging talent that helped the Canadiens build a 5-2-0 record over the last 16 days, on some veterans rounding into form, on the decisions that still need to be made before rosters are finalized Oct. 1, and on a few other odds and ends.

Here are our takeaways from training camp.

It became patently clear that the 13th overall pick in the 2017 NHL draft was making this Canadiens team well before he pickpocketed Jean-Gabriel Pageau and scored the overtime goal in Saturday's 4-3 win over the Ottawa Senators.

We knew Suzuki had the smarts, that he had the versatility of playing wing and centre, and that he could be just as effective on the penalty kill as he would be on the power play. But the one question the London, Ont., native had to answer in camp was whether or not he was physically prepared to start his season in Montreal.

With a speedier skating stride and some more muscle added to his 20-year-old frame, Suzuki made it abundantly clear in his first few days at camp that he was up to that challenge. Now that he's excelled incrementally, and against better players as the pre-season wore on, it seems like a no-brainer that he's here to stay.

Canadiens coach Claude Julien wouldn't confirm Suzuki's place following Saturday's game.

"He keeps playing well," Julien said. "He's showing he wants to start the season here, but we don't have any announcements to make tonight. Over the coming days we'll surely have some. We still have to reduce our roster to 23 players, so decisions will be made over the next few days."

If the Canadiens still have one to make on Suzuki, it should be about who he lines up with against the Hurricanes on Thursday.

On Saturday, Suzuki lined up with Max Domi and Artturi Lehkonen and appeared to be right at home.

Tough decisions looming on Poehling, Fleury

The two other 20-year-olds left at camp have left the impression they're ready to join the Canadiens right now.

Whether they do will come down to asset management and whether the Canadiens are willing to expose certain players on one-way contracts to waivers.

Despite missing a week with a concussion and being limited to just two pre-season games, Ryan Poehling showed that he's physically prepared to play at this level.

"He had a good game tonight," said Julien on Saturday. "He continues to show his worth and for a guy who didn't play for a week, he rebounded well."

Poehling's worth is in his size, his hockey sense, his versatility in being able to play at both ends of the ice, at centre and wing and at even strength and on the penalty kill.

If the Canadiens are willing to expose Charles Hudon to waivers, it will be easier for them to keep Poehling around. And given that Hudon hasn't been able to find his way into regular playing time with the Canadiens over the last year—and that the team now has several NHL-capable players at its disposal, players who have already passed through waivers—you have to think they will be willing.

As for Cale Fleury, who played 15:20 and finished with five shot attempts and four hits against the Senators, he left quite an impression.

"He was great," said Canadiens captain Shea Weber after Saturday's game.

Fleury was unquestionably better than Mike Reilly and Christian Folin in the competition for who gets to play alongside Brett Kulak on the team's third defence pairing.

But here's the rub: Folin, who has 228 games of NHL experience and has a digestible contract (one year at \$800,000), is susceptible to being picked up by another team if the Canadiens decide to waive him. And though Reilly might prove less appealing given his two-year, \$3-million contract, waiving him is also a risk.

The Canadiens' depth on defence isn't quite what it is up front, and that opens up the possibility that Fleury will start his season in Laval, with the AHL's Rocket, despite the fact that he's earned a job in Montreal.

If that's what ends up happening, don't expect Fleury to be in the minors for long.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

The vets have found their games

Whatever concerns there might have been about how Phillip Danault and Tomas Tatar appeared in their limited pre-season action, they were alleviated on Saturday.

"They were better tonight, absolutely," said Julien. "It just goes to show you that when we say, 'guys, this is pre-season,' when we get all wound up about certain guys, but it



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is pre-season. The same thing's happening in every organization, so right now you can see that they're finding their game and they're becoming the players that we knew from last year."

Danault had a goal and an assist on one for Tatar on Saturday and both players looked like the ones who formed a dominant line with Brendan Gallagher last season.

And perhaps of greater significance, aside from a glaring and rare puck-handling error, Canadiens starting goaltender Carey Price was all-world on Saturday after missing some time over the last week with a bruised catching hand.

Price made 34 saves against Ottawa and saved his best for last, stopping Anthony Duclair on a breakaway and turning aside two quality scoring chances in overtime.

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.

### Odds and Ends

- We saw a lot of good from newcomer Ben Chiarot over the course of training camp, and one thing he won some points with was his handling of Ottawa's Bobby Ryan following Ryan's extra stab at a puck Price had frozen in Saturday's game. Chiarot didn't hesitate; he grabbed Ryan, dropped his gloves and engaged him in a fight. He also finished the night with three hits. His physicality is a dimension the Canadiens desperately needed on their blue line.

And give the former Winnipeg Jet some time to adjust to playing in the East, where speed and the transition game is much more apparent than it is in the West.

- Unless the Canadiens can work out a trade, expect goaltender Charlie Lindgren to be exposed to waivers before the team's 23-man roster is submitted to the league.

- The power play is a work in progress, but people will say it's the same old power play that finished 30th in the NHL last season after it came up blank on five opportunities in Saturday's game.

We don't see it that way, not that we're suggesting it will magically surge to the top of the league all of a sudden.

Julien said on Friday he's looking for "focus and cohesion" on the power play. We saw those elements at hand in Saturday's game.

The Canadiens worked the puck well down low with the Senators taking away Weber's one-timer. Weber snuck down as a back-door option, and they were a bounce or two away from scoring multiple goals as a result. There's some stuff to build on there.

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Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Can Egor Korshkov slide onto the Maple Leafs roster?

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

September 28, 2019, 12:22 PM

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. Written from a basement in Toronto.

1. If Egor Korshkov keeps playing against NHL-calibre competition the way he did in the Toronto Maple Leafs B-squad's victory over the Montreal Canadiens' A-team Monday in Montreal, Ilya Mikheyev might not be the only KHLer making a jump onto Toronto's NHL roster next week.

After five seasons with Lokomotiv, the six-foot-four Korshkov got his first taste of North American hockey last spring, when he played nine playoff games for the Marlies.

Korshkov, 24, scored twice in the 3-0 exhibition victory, earning a look Saturday night at Scotiabank Arena alongside fourth-liners Jason Spezza and Frederik Gauthier as part of the Leafs' "NHL roster" for the club's final pre-season game.

It's his best chance to make the cut.

"I've been seeing a real good player right from the get-go, just because of his hands and his hockey sense for a man that big," said coach Mike Babcock. "I mean, he makes plays every time he has it. We've seen that right through.

"We often say he's not that quick, but then I saw him skate by three NHL D-men (Monday) night. Maybe he's just that big he doesn't look that quick."

The Maple Leafs believe Korshkov (and Mikheyev, for that matter) will only up their performance and reaction time once they acclimatize themselves with the size of the rink and, perhaps more importantly, the language.

"It didn't seem to hurt Korsh," Babcock quipped.

"It's not easy for 'em. I can't imagine if I'm in Russia and I'm trying to keep up to things going 100 miles an hour. Over time, they're gonna get it. It goes to show you how good a player."

Has the veteran coach picked up any Russian in his travels and dealings with so many imports to his roster?

2. Never underestimate the dressing room seating map.

It's seemingly a small thing, but clubs and players — much like wedding planners — put more thought into who sits where than you might imagine.

When you secure a special young talent in Jack Hughes, it's important to have another skilled veteran in his ear. That why Team USA purposely sat Hughes beside Patrick Kane at the world championships.



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3. On Friday morning, Winnipeg Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff woke up knowing there were just four unsigned restricted free agents still on the board and he owned the rights to half of them.

When looking at Winnipeg's predicament — now exacerbated by Dustin Byfuglien's indecision — I was compelled to go back and read my notes from a business-of-hockey conference panel Cheveldayoff appeared on last winter.

For one, how much is the Jets' reluctance to juice their player contracts with signing bonuses hindering these talks?

High-end players will often take a little less on average annual value if they're able to get big chunks of real cash upfront and earn some loot through investments.

That approach certainly helped cash-rich Toronto in the John Tavares sweepstakes.

The other thing Cheveldayoff may be wary about is investing too high a percentage of his payroll into wingers, conventionally presumed to be the least important position.

Blake Wheeler is on the books long-term at \$8.25 million, Patrik Laine comes in very short term at \$6.75 million, Nikolaj Ehlers is at \$6.125 million and Mathieu Perreault costs \$4.125 million.

If/when Kyle Connor, whom the Jets had been more open to giving term, comes in at market value, he'll really tilt the team's payroll to the wings.

Calgary Flames winger Matthew Tkachuk (three years times \$7 million) rewrote the rules for a short-term scorer. Connor has found the back of the net at a greater rate than Tkachuk over their short careers.

"The outlier sometimes skews the league and skews the cap system to a point where it does make it difficult to kinda keep those players. Is it the exception or is it the rule?" said Cheveldayoff, speaking in general terms.

"I'm representing the pie. I got to fit it into this pie. They're trying to get the biggest slice."

4. Brad Treliving was relieved to squeeze Tkachuk back into the fold without having to make a zero-leverage trade off the roster. He'd much rather do the demote and recall dance with fringe players to save cap space than have his hand forced.

That said, it won't be ideal when cornerstone young scorers Tkachuk (RFA, requiring a presumed \$9 million qualifying offer) and Johnny Gaudreau (UFA) both come knocking for raises on July 1, 2022.

Sean Monahan (\$6.375 million AAV) will look like a virtual steal that day, and the U.S. broadcast revenue better be as lucrative as everyone is banking on.

5. The titleholder for "My Favourite Player I'd Never Heard Of Before But Now Think He'll Tear It Up" is Buffalo Sabres winger Victor Olofsson.

A seventh-round gamble in 2014, the slick-shooting Swede lit up the AHL last season, his first in North America, and put

up four points in a six-game call-up with Buffalo at the end of 2018-19.

He's had the hot hand in pre-season, creating highlights and reaping so much praise from coach Ralph Krueger, he could get a look on Jack Eichel's left side — even though the organization just signed Jeff Skinner for \$72 million.

"Victor is just permanently dangerous," Krueger told reporters. "He's a shooter."

"In practice, we've been watching it. We've seen it in the other games already. He's a threat all the time."

Fantasy deep sleeper, kids.

6. My, how quick things can change.

As the internal race for the final D-man spots on the Maple Leafs roster wages on, the tallest man in the race, Ben Harpur, watched his stock tumble and now finds himself on waivers.

Teenager Rasmus Sandin and refreshed journeyman Martin Marincin are your clubhouse leaders, with Justin Holl and Kevin Gravel seemingly passing Harpur, who had curried Babcock's favour early in camp — in part by fighting Ottawa Senators agitator Scott Sabourin.

"He's a big, physical guy who can look after his teammates, so he's way different than most of us on this team. That separates him," Babcock said. "He just has to keep grinding away and do his thing."

Yet Harpur's pre-season will end without a taste on the A-team and is set to join the Toronto Marlies. Read into that what you will.

Harpur said his willingness to drop the gloves makes him "unique" in an organization — and, increasingly, a league — that favours speed and skill. He fought six times with the Senators last season, equaling his total from four years of junior.

Throwing fists wasn't part of Harpur's repertoire until he reached the AHL. The Sens encouraged him to fight, essentially saying it would give him his best shot of making the big league.

We asked the big man to think back to his very first fight in Guelph. He was nervous and not very good.

"Fighting's kinda weird in the sense where if you think about it, you become more nervous. Him and I had gone at it a bit during the game, and I thought about it too much," Harpur said. "But over the years, I've learned to dive in and get right into it. I think you do better that way. You never want to be in a position where you're thinking about it, whether it's the night before a game or throughout the game. It gets in your head and kinda freezes you when you get into the actual fight."

"The game's different now. There's no staged fights anymore. It's more a reactionary thing. You don't have to think about it too much beforehand."

Harpur's dance card filled up as soon as he was getting paid in Binghamton.



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"I found that being a rookie and being a bigger guy, there's a lot of guys who go out of their way to challenge you. It was just a byproduct of playing with an edge," he explained.

"Ottawa was big on me introducing something to my game that they really emphasized was something I needed to do to make the jump to the NHL and earn that call-up.

"There's not a ton of guys who really do it anymore. That's not to say I'm going out looking for it or anything. It's just a reactionary thing, like what happened the other night. If something happens in the game where I feel it's needed, then I can do it for sure."

Harpur has been partnered with righty Jordan Schmalz, another AHL/NHL tweener destined for a year on the bubble.

"With Harp, he's a guy who's 6-6. He's a pretty big tower back there, so I think if we can complement each other well, whether that's with our skating or our sticks to defend the blue line, then go in our end and be hard, everything else will come easy," said Schmalz.

It's important to remember that guys like this aren't just auditioning for the Leafs but for the other 30 clubs as well.

7. Of all the 2018-19 St. Louis Blues whose names are now etched into the Stanley Cup for eternity, 10-year veteran Michael Del Zotto is the only one who never appeared in a single playoff game for the club.

Del Zotto only played seven regular-season games for St. Louis and has since rejoined the Anaheim Ducks, but the club can request that a name or two be added.

Del Zotto describes his hours with the Cup as the "best day of my life." His brother, David, flew from New York to Toronto for the party, and Michael was moved seeing his parents' happiness after all their sacrifices of working full-time plus putting two sons through high-level hockey.

"It was an emotional day," said Del Zotto. "Seeing my brother lift the Cup over his head ... he's a bigger hockey fan than I am. He loves hockey. That was probably the coolest moment of my life: seeing my brother with the Cup over his head and a big grin on his face."

8. Happy cap compliance season!

By Tuesday afternoon, all 31 teams must tuck themselves under the \$81.5-million ceiling. As of Saturday, nine(!) teams are over that limit, according to CapFriendly.com. Another three have a cushion of less than \$1 million. Seven more have less than \$2 million to spend.

So, keep your eyes on the transaction wire.

Also, with roughly 61 per cent of the league entering the season with under \$2 million in wiggle room, the number of buyers for pure rentals come trade deadline time should shrink.

On the flip side, this is good news for the few clubs that may be willing to spend instead of save in-season.

The Canadiens, New Jersey Devils and Columbus Blue Jackets pop to mind as teams that could add a significant piece without carving from the core.

9. A familiar name is in the early running for KHL's scoring lead. A 35-year-old Alexander Semin ranks third in points in the Russian league, putting up 12 through his first 10 games.

Only former Golden Knight Vadim Shipachyov and Minnesota Wild prospect Kaprizov Kirill (13 points apiece) have more.

Kirill, one of the most intriguing point-producers outside the NHL, is an interesting project. New Wild GM Bill Guerin, who holds Kirill's rights on this side of the Atlantic, has explored the possibility of bringing him stateside.

Minnesota needs offence. The 22-year-old winger is reportedly open to the idea. His contract with CSKA expires in April.

10. Hey, Leafs: Don't announce John Tavares as captain via press release and stiff press conference prior to opening night.

Just have him come out to take the season-opening face-off casually wearing the "C" on his crest.

Zoom in with your Jumbotron cam, and let the fans react.

11. The Dallas Stars raised the creative bar with their Super Mario Bros.-inspired announcement of the Tyler Seguin contract extension last September, and it's awesome to see teams like the Senators, Tampa Bay Lightning and Flames following suit when they have some big news to splash.

Sports are supposed to be fun.

"I love it," said Steve Mayer, the NHL's chief content officer.

"When Brayden Point gets signed, how do you let people know — not only Tampa Bay Lightning fans and hockey fans but sports fans? I've gotta give the teams a lot of credit. Many teams have invested in personnel that bring that creativity and have a significant amount of experience and aren't these entry-level, never-done-this-before people. And it shows."

Hockey's reputation as rigid and straight-faced, particularly at the league and team levels, is slowly but surely cracking a smile. And that should have a trickle-down effect on the players.

"It's cool to push the envelope a little bit. Let's be super creative. How do we catch people's eye? How do we cut through the clutter?" said Mayer, giving kudos to teams' efforts toward keeping hockey fresh in people's minds on social media through the off-season.

"And that's not easy to do. A lot of teams got significantly creative in order to do that, and I think that's super cool."

The NHL is not just competing with, say, the NBA for your attention, but with Netflix and Spotify and every other entertainment outlet in your pocket.

Mayer was especially impressed with the outrageous/goofy/bombastic ceremony the Devils threw to celebrate the arrival of P.K. Subban.

"They thought out of the box and got attention for it," Mayer applauded. "We at the league, we need the teams to be



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contributing, and the level they're contributing is significant right now. They're doing a great job, and we encourage it to continue."

12. This is wonderful on, like, three levels:

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Sportsnet.ca / Pettersson looks ready to take on world as Canucks pre-season ends

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

September 28, 2019, 8:20 AM

After their summer harvest of key, new players, the Vancouver Canucks were going to be better. But after the pre-season, the question remains: Will they be good enough?

The NHL playoffs are still 82 games away, and the eight exhibition games in 11 days that the Canucks finished this week merely reinforced uncertainty about how good Vancouver actually will be in the franchise's 50th year. The team went 4-4, scoring and allowing plenty of goals.

As general manager Jim Benning and coach Travis Green pick their team this weekend, the Canucks have four days to prepare for their season-opener next Wednesday in Edmonton. And we've got a few takeaways from training camp.

### PETEY 2.0

All those Pavel Bure references regarding Elias Pettersson made more sense in June when the 20-year-old Swede became the first Canuck to win the Calder Trophy since 1992. It sure doesn't look like there's a sophomore slump coming.

After leading the team in scoring at the end of last season, Pettersson led them on the opening day of training camp – he skated several teammates into the ice during Day 1's timed intervals – and looked every bit the superstar-in-the-making during the pre-season.

Despite feeling "tired" in his first two appearances after Green's difficult camp, Pettersson had three goals and three assists in four pre-season games.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Although the Canucks are guarding his weight like a nuclear launch code, the centre is clearly thicker and stronger than he was as a 176-pound (so the game program said) rookie. He even looks taller than last season's six-foot-two.

Pettersson said he also feels quicker and "more balanced" compared to his rookie year, too.

His attitude is evolving with his body. He has been accommodating and patient with reporters, spent time with fans and generally conducted himself like a leader who is embracing all the challenges coming his way.

"I know the expectations are higher for me, but I'm the one who puts the highest expectations for myself," Pettersson told Sportsnet. "I don't think (about) what other people want to see from me. I try to play my best hockey every day."

He may fail, but Pettersson looks ready to take on the world.

If you held a contest before training camp to name the player most likely to upstage Pettersson, no one would have won. Because no one would have picked Adam Gaudette.

A solid prospect who led U.S. college hockey in scoring while winning the Hobey Baker trophy in 2018, Gaudette often looked over his head in the NHL last season when Canucks injuries forced a premature promotion from the minors. The Boston area centre had five goals and 12 points in 56 games and was overmatched in the defensive zone.

All he did during the pre-season was lead the Canucks with four goals in six games, gaining confidence as he went, and outplay everyone else competing for a job at the bottom of the lineup. That still probably won't be enough for Gaudette to be on the NHL team because the Canucks have roster and salary-cap limits to navigate and the 22-year-old is among the few forwards who can be sent to the AHL without waivers.

Gaudette will also develop better at the embryonic stage of his pro career playing first-line minutes for the Utica Comets rather than fourth-line minutes in Vancouver. What Gaudette did was instill hope that the Canucks may actually have another wave of players to follow Pettersson, Brock Boeser and Quinn Hughes into the NHL.

"He had a great camp," Green said after the Canucks closed their pre-season at .500 by losing back-to-back home games against the Ottawa Senators and Arizona Coyotes, who won't exactly be playing for the Stanley Cup in June. "He's made it hard on us (to make a roster decision). Quite honestly, I wish other players made it harder on us as well."

What really works against Gaudette staying with the Canucks is his position. Right now, he is strictly a centre. And there's little chance Green is moving Brandon Sutter or Jay Beagle from the middle of the bottom two lines to make room for him.

Part of the reason Gaudette stood out is that most others competing for a depth spot at forward were largely invisible.

Jake Virtanen scored twice in his first pre-season game, but had a negligible impact in his final five auditions. Nikolay Goldobin played his way off the team with one assist in five games, and nobody except Green seemed to notice veterans Loui Eriksson and Tim Schaller, whose \$7.9-million in combined salary last season bought 14 goals for the Canucks.



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With skilled winger Sven Baertschi also running hot and cold after missing most of last season with a concussion, the Canucks don't look like they're going to meet the coach's stated goal of having three lines that can score.

### TOP END TALENT

Even if the bottom six disappoints, the Canucks should get a lot more offence from their top six as newcomers J.T. Miller and Micheal Ferland, who was restricted to just two games due to a virus, both looked good in the pre-season.

Miller is a winger clone of his two-way centre, Bo Horvat, and Ferland should get 20 goals if he continues to play with Pettersson.

And what looked better than either of the top two lines was the power play, which went 4-for-7 in a 5-3 win Monday against Ottawa. That new first unit – Pettersson and Boeser on the wings, Alex Edler (or Quinn Hughes) on the point, with Miller in front of the net and Josh Leivo in the bumper role – was probably the most encouraging part of the Canucks' pre-season.

- The most discouraging moment was when Boeser left that first Ottawa game with a concussion after being shoved into the boards from behind by Senator Chris Tierney. Sorry to be Captain Obvious here, but the Canucks need Boeser back. Hockey-ops is hopeful the winger, who missed the opening weekend of camp before signing a three-year, \$17.6-million contract, will be ready for the opener. If he's not, the Canucks play only four games in the first two weeks of the season, so a short-term absence may not be too harmful.

- While Green experimented with forward combinations, the defence pairs were consistent: Alex Edler with Tyler Myers, Hughes with Chris Tanev, and Jordie Benn with Troy Stecher. These pairings have appeal. But there is still a big drop off to spares Oscar Fantenberg, currently injured, and Alex Biega. So, once again, the Canucks will be undermined by serious injuries on the back end if they occur.

- We're just going to go ahead and say it: if often-injured Edler and Tanev can play 70 games apiece this season, the Canucks can make the playoffs.

- Tyler Myers, the big (literally and figuratively) free-agent acquisition, looked like the Myers the Winnipeg Jets had. His mobility and puck-movement were good, and his shot on the point is a weapon the Canucks have not had the last eight years. But he also looked vulnerable at times in the defensive zone, especially against shifty forwards. Myers will help the Canucks more than he hurts them, but there is a danger in Green asking too much of him.

- He may not get top-six minutes like he did last season after his trade from Toronto, but Leivo is a handy player who's going to help. He had four points in five games and led Vancouver with 16 shots during the pre-season.

- Sutter is a huge wild card for this team. He scored 17 goals and 34 points in his only healthy campaign as a Canuck, but has missed 139 games during his other three years in Vancouver. If he gets 15 goals and is strong enough to

handle the defensive heavy-lifting Green requires of him, the Canucks will have their third line.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.29.2019

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TSN.CA / Defending champion Raptors looking for respect entering new year

By Josh Lewenberg

TORONTO – We interrupt our regular scheduled programming of media day – the unofficial start of the NBA New Year – to bring you a very important PSA from the Toronto Raptors.

Their message: We're still the champs.

Not the Golden State Warriors, whose coach has already crowned them the team to beat. Not the Los Angeles Clippers, who won the off-season's biggest prize. Not the Los Angeles Lakers, who added a second superstar to a roster that already included one of the greatest players of all-time.

The Raptors enter the 2019-20 campaign as defending champions, whether it feels like it or not.

It's a weird and almost unprecedented thing, when the champion isn't being feared or even respected as champions generally are, but it's the reality the Raptors face on the eve of training camp.

Without Kawhi Leonard – the player most responsible for delivering their first-ever title – and Danny Green, most see them as defending champs by name only. That's fair, of course, their chances of repeating are slim, but you can see why that might not sit well with the returning players, who bled – in some cases literally – for that trophy.

"I hear a lot of people saying, with all the changes this team made, it's going to be different, and we're not going to even make the playoffs," Serge Ibaka said at the podium on Saturday morning. "Sometimes I just smile because it's not true. We lost Kawhi, we lost Danny, but we still have the same group of champions. Those two weren't the only champions, and now we have the mentality of a champion. We know what it takes to be a champion."

"I'm an NBA champion," said Fred VanVleet, still sporting a scar under his right eye where he needed stitches to close the gash he sustained during a Finals game last spring. "Nobody can ever take that away."

These Raptors are only the third team in NBA history to open a season as defending champions without the reigning Finals MVP on their roster. They're the first to open a season



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as defending champs with that Finals MVP on somebody else's roster.

Vegas is projecting them to win 46.5 games after winning 58 a year ago. That, according to their win projections, would be tied for the 12th-best record in the league and the fifth-best mark in the East.

They're not getting a lot of love outside of Canada these days, but it might not be as awkward as you would think. The team's longest tenured players, and even some of the newcomers, are used to being underestimated, overlooked, and maybe even disrespected. It's a familiar feeling and one that has defined many of their careers.

"It's no different," said VanVleet, a key contributor to that championship run – even getting a vote for Finals MVP – after going undrafted in 2016. "This is my fourth year, and three out of four years we've been disrespected and counted out and talked bad about. So you learn to deal with it. It doesn't take any emotion or energy out of my day. I'm not losing sleep over it."

"I mean it feels the same to me," said Norman Powell, a former second-round pick. "It's been the story since I've been here. Every year we've been counted out – 'We'll be a middle of the pack team, not going to make the playoffs, or we're going to be a first-round exit', this, that and the other, whatever story they come up with. So it's nothing new. This team's been there. The team is full of underdogs who want to go out there and prove people wrong."

For years, that's been the team's calling card: the chip on their shoulder. Kyle Lowry was the disgruntled journeyman point guard, turned perennial all-star and franchise icon. Pascal Siakam, the kid from Cameroon who didn't even pick up a basketball until he was 18 and is now a budding star in the NBA, the league's reigning Most Improved Player. Individually and collectively, it's in their DNA.

"All the bandwagons and all the people that came after Kawhi and kind of went away, it's kind of like back to us. Just continue to grind and be who we are, the Toronto Raptors, always known to be that team that everyone kind of doesn't look at. It definitely puts a chip on our shoulders, and we want to continue to grind, continue to be who we are and work hard. That's what we've always done."

Even last season, when the Raptors graduated to contender status with the trade for Leonard – a top-5 NBA player – it was still something they talked about and prided themselves on. They were the first team to ever win a championship without a lottery pick on their roster.

Since, they've added players to fit that mould. Stanley Johnson was the eighth-overall pick in 2015, a player that was supposed to step right into the Pistons' starting lineup and become a big part of their future. That's not the way things turned out and now, despite his pedigree entering the league, he comes to Toronto with something to prove. Rondae Hollis-Jefferson, Johnson's college teammates, has a similar story.

Terence Davis, who is destined to become a fan favourite, likens his NBA start to that of VanVleet's – going undrafted

and having to, as the Raptors' point guard would say, bet on himself.

Even the returnees aren't lacking for motivation going into the new season. Siakam could be playing for a new deal, if he doesn't get extended before the season, and will be inheriting an expanded role with Leonard gone. OG Anunoby will aim to bounce-back after a difficult sophomore season, on and off the court. VanVleet is trying to shed the sixth man label and prove he can be a starter. Even the vets – Lowry, Ibaka and Marc Gasol – are going into contract years.

These Raptors are no longer contenders but, like the DeMar DeRozan-led iterations that came before them, they seem poised to exceed expectations.

"I think it's a very hungry team," Gasol said. "We all understand what Kawhi meant to the team and how well he played in the playoffs. But we also understand how good we can be as a team. So we are going to invest everything needed to be that team."

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TSN.CA / Bichette shut down early, but 2020 season is already on his mind

By Scott Mitchell

TORONTO — Bo Bichette's rookie season has come to an early end, but what a debut campaign it was for the 21-year-old shortstop.

Ahead of the penultimate game of the Toronto Blue Jays' 2019 campaign, Bichette admitted he won't be able to get through concussion protocol in time to make it back on the field, a situation that was becoming more obvious by the day.

It's for the best.

After being clipped on the helmet by a pitch Sept. 19 in Baltimore and showing concussion symptoms shortly thereafter, rushing him back into the lineup for a meaningless game or two wouldn't have made any sort of sense.

But Bichette expects to be cleared shortly and head into the off-season restriction-free.

"Basically, they were just waiting until I had no symptoms and then I could start doing stuff on the field and some sort of concussion test that I did in spring training to see if I was back on baseline," said Bichette, who took grounders on the field at Rogers Centre on Thursday and reported feeling fine. "I've still got some more hoops to jump through before they can say that I'm good."



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Since making his debut July 29 in Kansas City, the same place his father, Dante, made his 31 years earlier, Bichette has been nothing short of sensational.

In 46 games, he leaves behind an impressive .311/.358/.571 slash line with 11 home runs, 18 doubles and four stolen bases.

If anything is surprising, it's the power Bichette showed, slugging .571 with a .260 isolated power mark, well above anything he had posted in the minors, in addition to solid and consistent glove work at shortstop.

"I'm really happy with it," Bichette said of his rookie campaign. "Like you said, I expect to be good, but I'll be able to look back and see the rookie year that I had, and I think I'd be lying if I said I didn't exceed some sort of expectations. I'm excited with it, but I definitely want to get better though."

His expectations for Year No. 2 are even higher, both personally and team-wise.

Being close to 40 games out in the American League East race hasn't sat well with Bichette and the group that came up through the minor leagues that won championships in both High-A and Double-A.

What the front office does in terms of roster building and finding a way to improve the pitching staff may tell the story in the end, but Bichette & Co. have already talked about arriving in Dunedin next February as better players than they are today.

"I was talking to Vladdy about it the other day, that we've never lost before," Bichette said. "This is a first for us. We don't expect to come in next year and have that thought. We expect to come in here and win games, and we think we can." He said, "We've shown we can compete with the best teams and obviously to do that everyone is going to have to take a step forward and get better over the off-season. We anticipate coming in next year with pretty high hopes for our season."

He's not expecting anything to be handed to them.

Bichette plans on fine-tuning on the "consistency" of his swing, taking a ton of ground balls like he did last winter, and, yes, working on his conditioning, which has been a subject usually reserved for Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

If you need a glimpse of the mindset Bichette is taking into the winter, he provided it when I asked him if he had any fun off-season plans that didn't involve baseball.

"I could go take a vacation but I think it's a year-round job," Bichette deadpanned. "I'll take a couple weeks off, but the off-season, I think, is the most important part of our development. I've gotta attack it."

TSN.CA LOADED: 09.29.2019

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TSN.CA / Tavares comfortable in Toronto amid Leafs captaincy buzz

By Mark Masters

Last summer, John Tavares got married, moved into a new place, and signed a big contract with his hometown team, the Toronto Maple Leafs. There were new teammates, new coaches, a new system, and new linemates to get used to.

"I felt like the whole year was a transition," he recalled, "just every point of the year was new and different for me and now I have a better sense of that ... just being very comfortable in your surroundings and your environment."

Despite all the change, Tavares didn't miss a beat last season, scoring a career-high 47 goals while matching up nightly against top lines.

"I never looked at it as ... about expectation and pressure," the centre said. "I just looked at it as a great opportunity. It's the reason I came here, I really felt there was so much potential for this group."

"He doesn't put too much pressure on himself," observed linemate Mitch Marner. "He doesn't put too much pressure on the team. He comes in every day and just expects everyone to come in and do the best they can."

"He wants to win more than he wants to score," said head coach Mike Babcock. "His commitment to play defence since he arrived here has been unbelievable and yet he still scored the most he's ever scored."

That consistent effort last season – Tavares didn't go more than two games without a point – thrust the 29-year-old to the top of the list of candidates for Toronto's captaincy.

"He's a pro," said Babcock. "So, his approach in the off-season, his approach in how he eats, the approach in how he drinks, the approach how he treats his family, the approach that he just is, so leadership to me isn't what you say, it's what you do. When you pick a captain for a franchise you want everyone in the franchise to think they picked the captain and when you pick the right captain everyone thinks that."

Tavares' process-oriented approach is similar to what general manager Kyle Dubas has been preaching since assuming the job in Toronto.

"Worrying about the specific results is kind of where you get in trouble," Tavares said, "and that's what I've learned from the past."

"His daily habits are so good," said Jason Spezza, who trains with Tavares in the summer. "His preparation is so good. He sticks to a process to get himself ready and when you do that it allows yourself to play well at big times, it doesn't matter where you're playing or what your situation is, so his consistency probably allowed him to handle that (pressure) as well as anyone."



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Babcock on Tavares: 'He wants to win more than he wants to score'

Maple Leafs head coach Mike Babcock talks about why, through his actions on and off the ice, John Tavares is such a great leader and Mitch Marner explains how the team looks up to Tavares.

Tavares seems unflappable whether he's doing countless interviews off the ice, dealing with opposing players on the ice or even having plastic snakes thrown at him during his return to Long Island last season.

"I trust who I am," Tavares said. "I always have a strong belief in that and I knew this would be a great opportunity to challenge myself."

"He's led in New York, he knows what it takes to take it past the first round," said Marner. "As a group, we look up to him, when he speaks everyone listens."

The captaincy, Tavares said, wouldn't be much of an adjustment even in the centre of the hockey universe.

"Just try and get a sense of things and how to handle the group and communicate certain things to the coaching staff and management," Tavares said of the role of a captain, which he filled for five seasons with the Islanders. "Talking to the media, setting the bus time, it's not really overly a lot, it's stuff you already have a pulse on, spearheading it a lot more than you usually would, I guess. So, it's not all the sudden you got 10 more things on your plate. I think it's just kind of being aware of everything that's going on around the group."

Tavares on excelling despite hometown pressure: 'I trust who I am'

Despite the added pressure of signing with his hometown team, John Tavares' first season in Toronto saw him score a career high 47 goals. The Maple Leafs centre spoke about how he didn't see his first season with the team as having added pressure, but as a great opportunity.

Asked what his favourite part of playing at home was last season, Tavares can't pick just one.

"It was all just awesome," he said. "I just try to be myself and live my life the way I choose to live it and enjoy this whole experience."

Tavares, who became a first-time father on the eve of training camp this year, seems at ease in Toronto as he starts the second season of his seven-year deal.

"He's loosened up quite a bit," said Marner cracking a slight smile. "I think it helps when he sits beside me in both locker rooms and on the road constantly so I think he's gotten a lot looser than he did when he came in."

And it's worth noting that Tavares won't just be sitting beside Marner in the dressing room tonight when the Leafs play the Red Wings. He will also have Auston Matthews on his other side. Last season, Matthews was flanked by Patrick Marleau.

With five days to go until the start of the NHL regular season, the Maple Leafs' vacant captaincy is still a hot topic. Did

Auston Matthews' off-ice issues change anything in regards to the team's ultimate decision? Mark Masters reports.

The battle for the final forward spots on Toronto's roster is coming down to the wire as tonight Egor Korshkov and Nick Shore get a chance to audition on the fourth line alongside Frederik Gauthier. Babcock says he's still uncertain how Toronto's bottom-six group will look on opening night. Nic Petan, Dmytro Timashov, Matt Read (PTO) and Kenny Agostino are also in the mix.

"We're trying to figure out where all the pieces go," Babcock said. "We played Timashov and Petan last night a ton of minutes. We don't have the answers, we're trying to find them."

Spezza, who suited up with the NHL regulars on Wednesday, won't play tonight. Earlier in camp, Babcock wondered aloud whether the veteran centre would be a good fit in a reduced role, but warned reporters about reading too much into him being scratched tonight.

"You can write whatever you want," he bristled. "It will give you good entertainment for a day, but I wouldn't go there. I mean, you can, but (shrugs). I talked to him and I've talked to him the whole time, we're putting in Shore today, we're seeing what he can do." "I've talked lots with Mike," Spezza said with a smile. "I know exactly what's going on so we're good. I got a good practice in today and will get some rest and be ready to go."

How's the 36-year-old feeling as he starts his first season with his third NHL team?

"It's just getting familiar with the systems and making sure it's automatic," Spezza said of the adjustment. "Feeling pretty good. The last couple games things started to click a little bit more, me and Freddie had good chemistry and created some chances and practices have been going good and we're getting special teams down to groups now and it definitely helps getting into that kind of stuff and more teamwork."

The Maple Leafs' pre-season finale offers the final chance to impress for those vying for the last forward spots. Jason Spezza will not be in the lineup, but head coach Mike Babcock made it clear this isn't something to read into. Mark Masters has more.

Toronto's top power-play unit is stacked with Morgan Rielly at the point, Matthews on the right flank, Marner on the left flank, Tavares in the middle and Andreas Johnsson in front, but don't expect the team to rely solely on one group.

"We want to have two dangerous units," said Babcock. "(Tyson) Barrie is an elite power-play guy, he doesn't want to watch the other clips, he wants to watch his clips. There's nothing worse than going to a power-play meeting and you don't see your power play. Get them both going. And the way we do it here is if you score you're going next and if you're playing better than the other one you're going next. It doesn't matter what your name is, who's going right here, right now? We think we have enough personnel that we should be able to get them both going. That's what we're hopeful of."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The second unit in practice this week featured Barrie at the point, Spezza on the left flank, William Nylander on the right, Alexander Kerfoot in the middle and Kasperii Kapanen in front.

TSN.CA LOADED: 09.29.2019

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USA TODAY / Cale Makar adds more 'wow' to Colorado Avalanche offense, leads NHL rookie class

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

Published 7:00 a.m. ET Sept. 28, 2019

Adding dynamic puck-moving defenseman Cale Makar to the high-octane Colorado Avalanche last season was like tweaking the engine of an Indy race car.

When something already moves that fast, it's difficult to notice any difference.

But Makar noticed the difference in how fast he had to move, especially when he was moving up ice with forward Nathan MacKinnon.

"It was unbelievable," Makar said. "His jump and agility is insane. His ability to stop on a dime and change directions is wild. I haven't even mentioned his shot."

Makar might come across as star-struck, but he is not. At 20, he carries himself like a veteran on and off the ice. He self-aware, curious and is a quick study. You don't have to explain the mission twice.

He played 10 NHL games, all in the playoffs, and he could win a Norris Trophy someday.

Makar, a strong skater, generated six points in those 10 games and looked like he will be the trigger man on the Avalanche's offensive attack. He's too smart to bite on the Norris projection, but he is willing to offer an appraisal of his game heading into his first NHL regular season.

"One of my strengths is being able to read offensive situations and knowing when to jump (into the play)," Makar said. "I think I'm right where I want to be in terms of my D zone play. But obviously there are a lot of areas that I can improve on."

Makar has a strategy when it comes to playing with MacKinnon.

"I just try to keep up with the guy," he said, chuckling, "and see where it goes from there."

The former UMass-Amherst standout leads a strong group of 2019-20 NHL rookies.

Here's the rest of our top 15:

2. Center Jack Hughes, New Jersey Devils: The No. 1 pick is an American-born difference maker who has the skill set to be a No. 1 center and the Devils' eventual flag carrier. He needs to get stronger, but he might be able to generate decent offensive numbers this season.

3. Left wing Kaapo Kakko, New York Rangers: There's as much excitement about Kakko as there is about Hughes. Kakko is bigger and more physically mature, and no one would be shocked if he scored 25 goals as a rookie. The premium player drives hard to the net and has strong offensive instincts.

4. Defenseman Quinn Hughes, Vancouver Canucks: He has a chance in the long run to have as big impact on the Canucks as much as his younger brother Jack will have on the Devils. The defenseman can quarterback the power play and ignite offensive rushes with his skating and passing. He has a chance to become one of the league's top American offensive defensemen.

5. Center Ryan Poehling, Montreal Canadiens: He played one NHL game last season and left the building with a hat trick. Expectations for the former St. Cloud State player are high. He will need some time to adjust to the rigors of the NHL, but he will contribute instantly. He could total 15-plus goals in a middle six forward role.

6. Center Alexandre Texier, Columbus Blue Jackets: There's genuine excitement about Texier's potential. The French-born forward is a high-energy, skilled performer who has expedited his climb since being drafted 45th overall in 2017. Playing in Finland last season, Texier, then 19, had 14 goals and 41 points in 55 games with KalPa. He came to North America and netted five goals in seven American Hockey League games. After he scored once in two NHL regular-season games, coach John Tortorella saw enough to use him in the postseason. He scored twice in the clinching game of the first-round sweep of Tampa Bay.

7. Left wing Victor Olofsson, Buffalo Sabres: The 24-year-old knows how to score. In 2017-18, he had 27 goals in 51 games for Frolunda in the Swedish Elite League and he was a 30-goal scorer last season in the AHL. When he was called up to the Sabres last season and placed on a line with Jack Eichel, he had four points in six games. If given the opportunity, he could be among the NHL's top rookie scorers.

8. Left wing Joel Farabee, Philadelphia Flyers: At 19, he seems to be forcing the Flyers to keep him on the roster. He thinks the game from a scoring perspective. In a recent 2-1 loss to the Rangers, he attempted 10 shots, put five on goal and hit the post twice. He scored 17 goals in 37 games last season as a Boston University freshman.

9. Center Cody Glass, Vegas Golden Knights: With William Karlsson, Paul Stastny and Cody Eakin at center, the Golden Knights don't seem to have room for Glass. But Glass is such a smart, effective player that it's difficult to believe that Vegas won't find a place for him, even if it means moving him temporarily to the wing. He had 69 points in 38 games in the Western Hockey League last season and another five points in six AHL games.



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10. Right wing Vitali Kravtsov, Rangers: He's 6-3 and knows how to use his size effectively. Kravtsov, 19, is a former Kontinental Hockey League rookie of the year and was the league's best teenager last season. In 2017, he became the youngest player (17 years, 61 days old) to score a KHL playoff goal.

11. Center Sam Steel, Anaheim Ducks: With Ryan Kesler out for an extended period, the Ducks need Steel to be ready to step in. He had a 50-goal season in the Western Hockey League and he netted 20 in 53 games playing for the AHL San Diego Gulls last season.

12. Center Martin Necas, Carolina Hurricanes: Necas, 20, showed his potential last season in the AHL when he netted 16 goals and 52 points in 64 games. He should be able to play 14 or 15 minutes a game and provide secondary scoring. He's a gifted player.

13. Right wing Carl Grundstrom, Los Angeles Kings: With five goals in 15 games last season, Grundstrom showed he

can produce at the NHL level. Given the Kings' rebuilding effort, he deserves a chance to play in the top six.

14. Defenseman Erik Brannstrom, Ottawa Senators: The desirable young, smallish puck-mover came to the Senators from the Golden Knights in the Mark Stone trade. The 20-year-old had 28 points in 41 AHL games last season. He seems to be on a path to be with the Senators at the start of the season. He's a skilled player, but he needs to prove he's ready.

15. Right wing Drake Batherson, Senators: The Senators want Batherson, 21, to make the team because they need his offensive ability. He produced 22 goals and 62 points in 57 games last season in the AHL. He also totaled three goals and nine points in 20 games in the NHL.

USA TODAY LOADED: 09.29.2019