When the Carolina Hurricanes took to the podium at the 2015 NHL Entry Draft in Sunrise, Florida, they were coming off a tough year. The first season under general manager Ron Francis and head coach Bill Peters did not yield positive results, with Carolina finishing as the fifth-worst squad in the NHL. If there was a silver lining, it was landing the fifth-overall pick in that draft, and being able to draft talented offensive-defenseman Noah Hanifin to help jumpstart the team’s rebuild.

Fast-forward two years, and that rebuild is close to done, with Hanifin looking to play a key role in the finished product. The smooth-skating blueliner out of Boston College made the jump to the NHL in his first year, and it has been a big learning curve over the past two years. Hanifin has learned, along with the standout offensive game that made him a top-five draft pick, the importance of playing a strong overall game.

“For me individually, I think the most important thing that I’ve learned is how important it is to be responsible defensively and in your own zone,” Hanifin said. “The better you are in your own zone, the more you have the puck on your stick, the better you can play offensively. My whole life it’s always been all offense. I think the last year or so, I’ve really focused on my defensive game. I think towards the end of last year and coming into the beginning of this year, I definitely feel that’s something I’ve improved on, and I feel I have the puck a lot more because of that.”

That’s not to say that Hanifin has forgotten the central aspect of his game. His skating and puck-moving abilities have not quite broken through on a consistent basis in the big leagues, but he has shown bigger and bigger flashes of his ability to carry the puck and make an impact in the offensive zone.

Hanifin has improved his numbers from year to year, going from 22 points as a rookie to 29 last season. He will look to bring that offensive ability on a nightly basis to a Canes lineup that will need increased scoring to end its eight-year playoff drought this season.

Hanifin’s game saw a big jump after last season’s trade deadline. For most of the year, his minutes came on the third pairing, with less-than-ideal partners for a developing young defender. However, after veteran Ron Hainsey was shipped to the Pittsburgh Penguins at the deadline, Hanifin stepped up into the top four, pairing with either Brett Pesce or Justin Faulk.

He handled those increased responsibilities well, with two goals, 13 points and a plus-two over the season’s final 23 games. He will look to bring that from game one in a full-time, top-four role this season. One person he impressed with last year’s finish was his bench boss.

“His numbers when you look at them from the trade deadline on were real solid last year,” Peters said. “You look at him from the trade deadline on, I think he was a plus [two] and his ice time was up minimally but his production was up greatly.”

Hanifin was not alone in breaking into the league as a rookie blueliner in 2015-16. Joining him was Pesce and Jaccob Slavin, and the trio has developed together to become a key part of the Canes’ talented young defensive core on the ice.

Off the ice, Hanifin, Pesce and Slavin have developed into great friends as well, which has helped them to lead the Carolina blue line at the ages of 20, 22 and 23, respectively.

“It’s awesome,” Hanifin said. “I think it’s really cool; we’re all really close. I think that’s important to have, good chemistry, good buddies. Me, Brett and Jaccob, we’re good buddies away from the rink, and I think it definitely carries over to on the ice.”

In the NHL, year three is often eyed as the big breakout season for a young player. If Hanifin has his way, he will follow that trend, and play a key role with his strong two-way game and skating ability for a Canes team looking to reach its first postseason since 2009.
“For me, I’m just kind of focused on getting better,” Hanifin said. “Something I want to do this year is try and get better every game. I play 82 games, each game I want to learn something new and get better. The first two years were my years where I could kind of learn and figure out the league a little bit, but I think now is kind of the year where I want to take off a bit here and start to really make an impact on the game.”

While a poor season is never fun for a team and its fans, the prize can often be a key piece to long-term success in a high draft pick. If his current development track is anything to judge by, that’s exactly what the Canes got with Hanifin two years ago in south Florida.

THE DEFINITIVE RANKING OF THE NHL’S TOP 23 DEFENCEMEN OVER THREE SEASONS
Andrew Berkshire October 2, 2017, 12:54 PM

Last year around this time, with the help of some smart people, I posted a series of articles ranking the top-20 NHL players at each position over the previous three seasons. We’re going to do the same thing this year, but change it up fairly significantly as well.

Like last year, the list will be limited to players who have participated in 2000-plus 5-on-5 minutes over the past three seasons in order to get an adequate sample size of play to draw from.

Like last year, this is a complicated task that requires outside input, and whenever I take on a project this large I like to rely a little on people smarter than myself. The framework of the rankings is built on the input I got last year from Dom Luszczyszyn, Steve Burtch, and Jonathan Willis, while this year I received additional input from Luszczyszyn again and Dominic Galamini, as well as the ideas of smart people like Manny Perry and Tyler Dellow.

Statistics for this project were collected from Sportlogiq, Natural Stat Trick, Puck IQ, Hockey Reference, NHL.com, and Luszczyszyn’s Game Score database. Each statistic was individually weighted in categories, scored as a percentile from the highest score at the position in order to award a score to each player.

This year for all forward positions I adjusted the categories slightly, taking five points from transition play and adding it to offence, while adding a new category for difficulty of minutes played that is applied as a multiplier to all categories. As such, the highest theoretical score would now be 125 points instead of 100 if a player were to be the best in the NHL at every single statistic while playing the toughest minutes in every category in the difficulty matrix, but no one scores that high so practically we’ll keep the numbers out of 100 even after the adjustment. The categories for defencemen have not changed, even though the weightings of statistics within them have, so it’s 25 points for offence, 40 points for transition play, and 35 points for defence.

The breakdown of points available for defencemen is weighted heavily towards transition, as that’s the area they have the most impact, with 25 points for offence, 40 points for transition, and 35 points for defensive play.

Also new this year is weighting season scores by how recent they are, using the same breakdown as Galamini does with his HERO charts: 22.2 per cent for 2014-15, 33.3 per cent for 2015-16, and 44.5 per cent for 2016-17.

Here are the statistics used in each category:

For offence: 5-on-5 and power-play goals, primary assists, secondary assists, scoring chances, high-danger scoring chances, scoring chances generated for teammates, shot attempts, passes to the slot completed, penalties drawn, and on-ice goals for relative to teammates per 60 minutes, and offensive zone pass completion rate.

For transition play: 5-on-5 outlet passes, stretch passes, controlled carries out of the defensive zone, neutral-zone passes, controlled entries into the offensive zone per 60 minutes, Corsi, and Corsi relative to teammates, and pass completion rates relative to teammates in the defensive and neutral zones.

For defence: 5-on-5 and short-handed loose-puck recoveries by zone, pass blocks, stick checks, body checks, penalties taken, and successful dump outs per 60 minutes, on-ice goals against relative to teammates, on-ice shot attempts
against relative to teammates per 60 minutes, dump-out success rate relative to teammates, and turnover rates relative to teammates by zone.

For difficulty of minutes played: Puck IQ’s competition faced percentages, Game Score’s quality of competition, Game Score’s quality of teammates, PDO, offensive zone starts percentage, 5-on-5 time on ice, and overall time on ice.

With all that information out of the way, let’s get to the rankings. This year we’re adding a few extra, doing the top 23 at each position. For the defence position, 163 players qualified.

23. Jeff Petry
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25
Total: 64.92/100

Playing behind Weber and Subban in Montreal has been great for Petry, as he soaks up slightly easier competition and dominates at both ends. While Petry’s defensive style does lead to him getting walked once in awhile, but you have to look at the forest for the trees, and his defensive impact is phenomenal.

Petry is an aggressive player without the puck, attacking puck carriers early to attempt to gain possession. That aggression can lead to him being beat, but his on-ice results are stellar, especially on the penalty kill where his mobility helps counteract the numbers disadvantage. Once he’s gained the puck, he’s a strong transition player that prefers to make short passes out of the zone, but struggles a little with success rates. Luckily his excellent skating allows him to move the puck out of danger with control when he has to.

22. Ryan Suter
Difficulty Matrix: 1.19/1.25
Offence: 13.54/25 | Transition: 29.18/40 | Defence: 25.15/35
Total: 64.98/100

There’s an effortlessness about Suter’s game that reminds me a little bit of Chris Pronger, specifically how he glides around the ice without ever looking like he’s expending much energy. Maybe he isn’t, since he’s able to play so much and maintain such a high level of play while taking on the second-toughest minutes of any defenceman the last three years.

Suter is a solid puck handler and playmaker, but his biggest strength is his transition game, not just because of his skating. Suter is a precise passer in the defensive and neutral zones. Defensively his skating allows him to be in great position at nearly all times, and as you might expect, his turnover rate in the defensive zone is very low.

21. Oliver Ekman-Larsson
Difficulty Matrix: 1.19/1.25
Offence: 15.70/25 | Transition: 25.94/40 | Defence: 23.44/35
Total: 65.08/100

Accounting for everything, no defenceman in the NHL has a tougher job than Oliver Ekman-Larsson. He doesn’t get much help in Arizona, and faces top competition every night. That may change this season as the Coyotes added some quality to their defensive group, but for the last three years Ekman-Larsson was sort of on an island.

He’s a stellar all-around, balanced defenceman who is good at pretty much everything, with specific standout strengths like a deceptive shot from the point and strong positioning. If he has a weakness, it’s completing passes in the defensive
zone, but that could be an issue with so much pressure being applied to him.

20. Colton Parayko  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25  
Offence: 15.74/25 | Transition: 27.02/40 | Defence: 22.59/35  
Total: 65.35/100

The reason the Blues likely felt comfortable trading Kevin Shattenkirk, Colton Parayko has been incredible from the moment he entered the NHL, bringing a nice balance of play with and without the puck that gives St. Louis the ability to ice two first pairings on defence.  

Parayko is a strong even-strength playmaker and play driver who creates a lot of offence for his team. He had a bit of a rough season transitionally last year, which may just come with the territory of a sophomore year playing tougher minutes. If he can adjust to a tougher job this season, his results should be even stronger.

19. Jacob Slavin  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Total: 65.50/100

Slavin doesn’t generate a lot of points, but he still creates a fair amount of offence for his teammates, which is more indicative of a good offensive defenceman than just points, in my opinion. Although offence isn’t where Slavin truly shines, he’s a machine without the puck.

One of the NHL’s most effective defencemen at stripping the puck from opponents with stick checks and pass blocks, Slavin is also a strong puck retriever in the defensive zone, and one of the safest players in the league when moving the puck out of the defensive zone as well. There aren’t a ton of players who drive play through defensive dominance, but he’s one.

18. Jared Spurgeon  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25  
Total: 65.68/100

Undersized and underrated – maybe those things are related? – Spurgeon is known more as a strong offensive player, but he measures even better defensively and in transition. A large percentage of his offensive impact does come from his ability to move the puck up the ice and create opportunities for his teammates to play in the offensive zone.

Spurgeon isn’t the strongest in puck battles, so he contributes most on defence by being a support player to receive passes and exit the zone cleanly, and he boasts an extremely low turnover rate in every zone, leading to fewer high-danger chances against.

17. Kris Letang  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Offence: 15.76/25 | Transition: 27.06/40 | Defence: 23.49/35  
Total: 66.31/100
Another player who’s known more for offence than anything else, Letang may have been one-dimensional at one time, but he’s a very rounded player as he enters his 30s. Injuries may have robbed us of almost half of Letang’s career since 2011, but the time that he has been healthy, he’s made the most of.

Letang is an incredible puck battler in his own zone, and since he’s the Penguins’ best puck-moving defenceman, he’s often the key to their transition game overall. Though the Penguins won the Stanley Cup without him, it’s not a coincidence that they were outshot consistently as they did it.

15. **Justin Faulk**  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Total: 66.42/100

Despite a booming shot and scoring lots of goals, it’s the rest of Faulk’s game that’s really been moving the needle in recent years. He’s still prone to the odd horrible turnover, but he’s clearly worked hard to round out his game and become better defensively.

He’s been more aggressive in breaking up passing plays, which has led to some impressive success on the penalty kill, making him the current leader in the Hurricanes’ incredible defensive unit.

14. **Seth Jones**  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Offence: 11.22/25 | Transition: 30.45/40 | Defence: 25.41/35  
Total: 67.09/100

When Seth Jones mentioned in an interview this off-season that his goal is to win a Norris one day, I raised my eyebrow a bit because I didn’t think he was in that tier of players. He’s not quite there, but he’s much closer than I thought he was. Jones isn’t a big offensive guy, but he’s amazing without the puck, one of the league’s stronger puck battlers.

16. **John Klingberg**  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25  
Offence: 19.36/25 | Transition: 27.30/40 | Defence: 19.71/35  
Total: 66.36/100

Klingberg took a slight step back in his third season in Dallas, but remained very strong overall, and especially offensively. In the neutral and offensive zones, Klingberg is dynamic, and efficient, breaking opponents down with precise passing and dangerous pinches that create a lot of goals.

In the defensive zone though, Klingberg is prone to dangerous turnovers and he misses passes that can put his teammates on their heels. He makes up for it with his aggressive style, but it can likely be frustrating for his coach to watch someone so talented mess up so often.
He’s also extremely strong in transition, using his reach and skating to move the puck up the ice well, though his bigger strength is hitting players in stride with passes coming out of the defensive zone. He’s a very accurate passer who rarely turns the puck over in the defensive zone.

13. Torey Krug
Difficulty Matrix: 1.12/1.25
Offence: 16.03/25 | Transition: 31.06/40 | Defence: 20.03/35
Total: 67.12/100

He plays very sheltered minutes for a top-four defenceman, but Torey Krug takes full advantage of it. Krug is a power-play dynamo who plays stronger defence than people give him credit for, probably because he only comes up to Zdeno Chara’s knees.

While he’s great offensively, Krug’s biggest asset is his ability to bring the puck up the ice, something the Bruins defence has struggled to do without him in recent years. His play at and between the blue lines is exemplary, as very few defencemen dump the puck out less often, or complete as many clean zone exits.

12. Roman Josi
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25
Offence: 18.96/25 | Transition: 29.97/40 | Defence: 18.27/35
Total: 67.20/100

Josi is a unique specimen, as he’s genuinely amazing offensively and in transition, and those attributes make up for the fact that without the puck he’s quite bad. Only one defenceman rated among the top 60 over the last three years scored lower defensively (Nick Leddy) than Josi, yet because he’s so excellent with the puck, he remains an elite defenceman.

Josi is arguably the best pure puck rushing defenceman in the game, and one of the few who takes the risk of getting shots from in close to the net, trusting in his speed to get back into plays that fail. Josi’s weakness without the puck is pretty easy to ignore when he’s putting goals in either himself or by setting up teammates, and running the Predators transition game.

11. Alex Pietrangelo
Difficulty Matrix: 1.18/1.25
Total: 67.64/100

Pietrangelo narrowly missed out on the top 20 last year, and some additional contextual stats pushed him up to where many believe he should be, right in top-10 range. Pietrangelo plays the fifth-toughest minutes of any defenceman in the league, and he responds with a balanced game centred on his ability to move the puck up the ice.

His favourite move is to skate the puck out of the defensive zone and hit a forward in stride with a pass in the neutral zone, and he’s very good at it, boasting low turnover rates in every zone. If Pietrangelo has one weakness, it’s the penalty kill. He’s very bad at it, but plays there a ton. It’s a confusing choice.

10. Dustin Byfuglien
Difficulty Matrix: 1.18/1.25
Total: 67.88/100
Playing the fourth-toughest minutes in the NHL among defencemen, Byfuglien is another beneficiary of the added contextual stats and new weightings. Byfuglien has a bit of trouble when it comes to transition because of his slow acceleration leading him to get caught a little when he tries to carry the puck, not to mention he has a high neutral-zone turnover rate, but in the offensive and defensive zones he’s still very strong.

Defensively, Byfuglien can sometimes get lost chasing the puck carrier, perhaps a leftover hitch in his game from when coaches kept trying to make him a forward, but he’s very good managing the puck in dangerous areas, and while he loses the puck a fair amount in the neutral zone, he defends the neutral zone very well, recovering more loose pucks there than almost any other defenceman.

9. Cam Fowler  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.14/1.25  
Total: 67.99/100

This one might be a little controversial since Fowler has a lot of doubters, but one thing to keep in mind when you look at his on-ice stats is that he’s played with a lot of bad partners who have been anchors for him. Individually, Fowler does everything you want a complete player to do.

He’s very high event, recording tons of puck touches, while boasting some of the lowest turnover rates relative to his teammates in the entire NHL in all three zones, really high pass-success rates, makes great decisions at both blue lines, and rushes the puck well. He could be far more aggressive defending the neutral zone, but every player has weaknesses.

8. T.J. Brodie  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Total: 68.13/100

Brodie had a rough season last year after being split from his longtime partner in Giordano. Individually though, his play didn’t really drop off outside of the offensive zone. He still registered stellar defensive numbers, especially on the penalty kill, recovering a ton of loose pucks in the defensive zone, and managing some of the lowest turnover rates in the NHL in dangerous areas.

Brodie is also a stellar transition player, boasting some of the best zone-exit and entry-numbers in the NHL among defencemen. His Corsi took a hit last year, but his inputs that create those shot attempt differentials didn’t, so expect him to rebound in 2017-18 with either Hamonic or Giordano.

7. Brent Burns  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.12/1.25  
Total: 68.93/100
The reigning Norris Trophy winner sticks in the same spot as last season, which isn’t to say that the voters got it wrong last year since this is a three-year sample, but … Burns does play pretty soft minutes for a top-end defenceman, with Marc-Edouard Vlasic soaking up the toughest jobs to let Burns run wild offensively. It’s a strategy that works amazingly well for the Sharks, but may make Burns look slightly better than his seventh-spot ranking.

Burns is the most dominant offensive defenceman in the game today, he scores goals like a high-end forward, and shoots like a Gatling gun, and he’s actually really strong without the puck too, using his speed and strength to win puck battles all over the ice. Where he shows some weakness is in transition, where he turns the puck over quite a bit, and has among the lowest pass-success rates in the defensive and neutral zones in the NHL. In a lot of ways, Burns’ style is chaos at both ends, and most of the time he and his team thrive on that chaos.

6. Duncan Keith
Difficulty Matrix: 1.17/1.25
Total: 72.18/100

Added statistics that emphasize passing and turnover numbers are a huge plus for Duncan Keith’s ranking, as he jumps up seven spots. Keith is the safest defenceman in the NHL in the defensive zone, boasting the lowest turnover rate relative to his teammates, while being heavily involved in zone exits. Keith can rush the puck, but his passing is so pinpoint accurate that he prefers not to, which probably saves him some energy over the course of a season.

Defensively Keith is one of the better players in terms of gap control in the league, and while his goal totals seem to be dropping, he remains one of the best playmaking defencemen in the NHL.

5. Mark Giordano
Difficulty Matrix: 1.17/1.25
Offence: 15.21/25 | Transition: 30.89/40 | Defence: 27.13/35
Total: 73.23/100

The way Giordano plays is like a prototypical old-school defenceman that Don Cherry loves; he hits hard, sticks up for his teammates, moves the puck well, and he can score at big moments. Giordano is the heart of the Flames defence, leading rushes as one of the NHL’s most successful passers, and a puck-battle machine.

Giordano, like many players on this list, doesn’t turn the puck over often especially in the defensive zone, which leads to very few scoring chances against when he’s on the ice. There’s a reason why everyone that plays with Giordano takes a step forward analytically.

4. Victor Hedman
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25
Total: 73.48/100

The first defenceman on the list above the 75th percentile in all three areas, Victor Hedman is a near perfect specimen for the modern NHL. A giant who moves like a waterbug, who can dangle at one end and crush players into the boards at the other, Hedman has developed into the best even-strength playmaker in the NHL from the back end.
Defensively he's a puck-retrieval machine in all three zones, and no defenceman removes possession from opponents as often as he does. He does have some issues with turnovers, where he's closer to league average than the elite, but he recovers so well that I doubt the Lightning worry about it much.

3. Drew Doughty  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Offence: 12.51/25 | Transition: 36.16/40 | Defence: 26.35/35  
Total: 75.02/100

No one in the NHL can move the puck up the ice as well as Drew Doughty can. Not only is he a brilliant skater, who can stickhandle around anyone, he happens to be the safest passer in the league, giving him more options to be successful than anyone else.

Defensively Doughty is once again all about precision, boasting some of the lowest turnover rates in the NHL regardless of position, and relying on his positioning to close off lanes instead of being aggressive on puck carriers. Once in the offensive zone, Doughty doesn't have a huge impact at even strength, but on the power play he's extremely dangerous.

2. P.K. Subban  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25  
Offence: 17.66/25 | Transition: 32.54/40 | Defence: 27.69/35  
Total: 77.89/100

Each of the last two seasons you can make cogent arguments for why the players who won the Norris Trophy won it, but for Karlsson to have been shut out both years looks extremely suspect in retrospect. Hidden by the general weirdness that is the Ottawa Senators, and defence partner that fell down the proverbial elevator shaft a couple years ago, Karlsson has had the biggest positive defensive impact of any defenceman the last three seasons. I know, you might think he's not great defensively, you're wrong though.

Karlsson has exceedingly low turnover rates relative to his teammates, something obfuscated by the fact that Ottawa's system leads to lots of turnovers, and no defenceman has won more puck battles over the last three seasons. He's not quite at Hedman's level when it comes to removing the puck from opponents, but he's a close second. You already know how great he is with the puck through the neutral zone and in

Despite a couple of injury riddled years in a row, P.K. Subban remains among the cream of the crop, with a balanced game that's built around a high level of involvement, and precision with the puck on his stick. Despite all of his few mistakes being magnified in the media, and sometimes by coaches, Subban boasts the second-lowest defensive-zone turnover rate relative to teammates in the league, and is comparable in the neutral and offensive zones.

His pass-success rates are right there with Doughty, Keith, and Giordano as well, though he attempts more difficult passes on average than all of them, which can lead to bigger rewards. Subban also boasts the highest dump-out success rate in the league, which makes him a phenomenal penalty killer and allows him to get out of desperate situations with ease, but he relies far too much on dump outs the last couple years, when he has the skill to skate and pass the puck out more often. Another weakness in his game is that he simply takes too many penalties, though he draws his share too.

1. Erik Karlsson  
Difficulty Matrix: 1.17/1.25  
Offence: 19.54/25 | Transition: 32.93/40 | Defence: 30.93/35  
Total: 83.40/100

Karlsson has exceedingly low turnover rates relative to his teammates, something obfuscated by the fact that Ottawa's system leads to lots of turnovers, and no defenceman has won more puck battles over the last three seasons. He's not quite at Hedman's level when it comes to removing the puck from opponents, but he's a close second. You already know how great he is with the puck through the neutral zone and in
the offensive zone, so the only thing left to say is: Please let that foot heal nicely, for the good of hockey.

Pronman: Standouts from the USHL Fall Classic

Corey Pronman
19 hours ago

This past weekend I was in Pittsburgh for the USHL Fall Classic, a showcase event where every USHL team competed. Over a hundred NHL, junior and college scouts in attendance and plenty of notable draft eligible and drafted players were on the ice.

Here are some of my takeaways:

Noah Cates, C, Omaha (Philadelphia): Cates wasn’t a standout for me when I watched Omaha, but you saw flashes of why Philadelphia picked him in the fifth-round last June. He possesses great IQ that allows him to do a lot even without dynamic speed or hands, the former of which is more of a glaring weakness. He works hard and displays versatility in terms of which situations he can play, plus he can slot at center or wing.

Nate Clurman, D, Tri-City (Colorado): Clurman has only played in a handful of high level hockey games outside prep school so it was interesting to see how he handled the pace. He was just ok in that regard, looking behind the play a few times and being pressured a little easy. On a tools level though he’s 6-foot-2, skates quite well for his size and showed competence handling the puck. He’s not a top-end guy but I left with him on my radar.

Mathias Emilio Pettersen, C, Muskegon: I was very impressed by the long-time internet wonder boy. For those who are not prospect nerds, he has had a continuously active HFBoards thread dating back to 2006. In an interview on the weekend he also admitted he used to read it when he was younger. His skill and offensive IQ stood out to me. He makes such quick and proper reads on top of being able to execute difficult plays. He’s small but he’s on my NHL radar this season as a potential second or third round pick.

Jachym Kondelik, C, Muskegon: Kondelik has improved his skating a lot, thus elevating himself to a legitimate NHL prospect. He was one of the Czech Republic’s top players at the under-18s last spring. He’s not a dynamic player but at 6-foot-7 just getting around ok, and showing quality skill with the puck will draw attention.

Tyler Madden, C, Central Illinois: The third overall pick in the most recent USHL draft had a good showing last weekend. He’s small but highly skilled and dictated puck possession when he was on the ice. I would like to see an extra gear in his skating, especially at his size, but I do think he’s still worth monitoring for the NHL draft.

Nick Perbix, D, Omaha (Tampa Bay): Perbix was an intriguing sixth round pick by Tampa last season as a second year draft eligible player. He’s a great skater for a 6-foot-5 defenseman. He’s a smart puck mover as well. At times, he seemed a little caught up in the USHL pace, but everyone I talks to praises his hockey sense, so I imagine that will be more of a quick adjustment than an issue for him. He also could be a little more physical. For a 1998 at this level he’s expected to be good so you don’t want to overreact but he made a strong impression on me to elevate his prospect stock especially for his first exposure to high level hockey. Big defensemen who can skate and move the puck are not easy to find.

Clayton Phillips, D, Fargo (Pittsburgh): Phillips was the highest picked player at the showcase and while he wasn’t fantastic, he showed flashes of why he was a third round pick. “His decision making is getting better and quicker, his footwork is great, he can really shoot the puck and he can join the rush,” said Phillips’ coach Cary Eades. His skating is a clear standout ability (with his shot being a secondary standout ability), as he gets up the ice at an elite level, but improving his reads at both ends will go a long way. However, he was one of the youngest players in his draft class so I don’t want to ding him too much for being a little behind.

Andong Song, D, Madison (New York Islanders): Song generated a lot of hype when the Islanders picked him in the sixth round of the 2015 draft since he was born in Beijing and there was hopes of a Chinese-born player making it to the NHL. Sadly, I don’t think that’s a reality. He has a pro frame and skates decent for his size, but doesn’t display NHL skill or have good enough instincts with the puck.
Sampo Ranta, LW, Sioux City: I wasn’t a huge fan of Ranta coming into the showcase, but he swayed me somewhat with his performance. He skates very well, works hard at both ends of the rink and showed a high-end shot, notching several goals from mid-distance including a hat trick in one game. His skill isn’t great but he’s competent with the puck and can gain the zone. The Wisconsin commit showed he’s worth a potential pick in June.

Bode Wilde, D, USNTDP: Wilde had one of the better performances I’ve seen from him (and while I know him I haven’t seen 50 games of him) this past weekend. When he’s on like this, he’s a dynamic player who skates and handles the puck at a high-end level in a 6-foot-2 frame. His decisions were better than I’ve seen before, but he did still make the odd mistake. Still if he’s this player all season he could be a top five or ten prospect.

Tomas Vomacka, G, Lincoln (Nashville): Vomacka was a little up and down but you saw why he was an NHL draft pick. He’s big, athletic and while he doesn’t have a ton of structure in his game you see that he has the IQ to get to pucks with more development. He’s also a player who wears his emotions on his sleeve, as after a goal in a close game that would have been tough to stop he tried to break his stick over the top of the net.

Other prospect tidbits:

In Swift Current of the WHL, the line of Tyler Steenbergen (Arizona), Aleks Heponiemi (FLA) and Glenn Gawdin (previously STL now unaffiliated) could be the best in the CHL this season. Combined, they have 29 points in their first 3 games. Heponiemi is the driving force on that line. He’s such a gifted playmaker who puts his team in positions to succeed, although Steenbergen is highly skilled too and knows how to finish chances.

Alexei Toropchenko (STL) had a good NHL camp and has carried it to the OHL where he has been fantastic for Guelph. He’s such a good skater for a 6-foot-3 forward and plays with great intensity on each shift. His skill isn’t high-end, but he knows what to do with the puck, and early on is generating over 4 shots a game and scoring 2 points a game in a very small sample.

FIVE THINGS WE LEARNED FROM THE NHL PRE-SEASON

By: Jared Clinton Oct 2, 2017

The NHL pre-season isn’t the best predictor of what’s to come in the regular season, but it can give us a hint as to what to expect when the games actually matter.

Generally speaking, the standings at the end of the NHL pre-season don’t tell us all that much. If they did, the New York Islanders, who finished the exhibition slate with the league’s best record, could start planning their parade route. They’re not about to do that, though.

For the most part, the games are played with partial NHL rosters and with veteran players who are simply getting back into game shape before the regular season begins. That’s why we get scenarios like the Islanders leading the league, the Vegas Golden Knights as one of the pre-season’s highest-scoring teams and a Colorado Avalanche club that keeps pace with the Chicago Blackhawks and Minnesota Wild in the Central Division.

But just because these games are a tune-up for the real thing doesn’t we can’t glean anything from the half dozen-plus games that each squad plays. In some cases there are small details, one facet of the game, that a club shows a proclivity for in the early going that’s worth watching. In others, we get confirmation of what we already know. And in some instances, especially when it comes to young skaters, we get a glimpse of a player who looks more than ready for the challenge the NHL brings.

Hockey fans have seen all of that and more over the past couple weeks, so here are five things we’ve learned from the 2017-18 pre-season:

Don’t take penalties against the Winnipeg Jets

Last season, Winnipeg’s power play was mediocre at the best of times and the Jets finished the season as the 18th-most effective team with the extra man. Now, the pre-season is a small sample, so we’re going to see numbers normalize and come down to a range similar to that of the regular season, but one thing was clear through the exhibition schedule: Winnipeg’s going to be well above the middle of the pack this time around.
Across their eight games, of which the Jets won two, Winnipeg's power play clipped along at 29.5 percent. It was nearly four percent better than the San Jose Sharks' power play, which ranked second in the pre-season. The Jets' biggest weapon on the power play was — surprise — Patrik Laine, who wired home four goals with the man advantage, all of which came on one-time blasts. Laine added another two assists to lead the team with six power play points, but he wasn't the only one clicking on the power play. Dustin Byfuglien tied Laine's output with two goals and six points, Nikolaj Ehlers managed one goal and five points, Mark Scheifele had one goal and four points and Blake Wheeler put up three assists.

If only the Jets could get their penalty kill operating at the same rate...

Connor McDavid is set to pick up where he left off

The pre-season usually lends itself to some head-scratchers among the league's top scorers. Case in point, Los Angeles Kings defenseman Jake Muzzin is tied for third in league scoring through the pre-season, putting up three goals and eight points in five games. The name atop the preseason scoring leaders, however, is about as far from surprising as it gets, as Connor McDavid, one season removed from winning the Art Ross, Hart and Lindsay trio of trophies, paced the league with 10 points in five games.

Yes, there’s no way McDavid averages two points per game in the regular season, but it’s a sign he’s just as ready as he was last year to take the league by storm. Not only that, but McDavid’s one year older, one year more experience and chances are we could be seeing another Art Ross come his way by season’s end. He was the only player to notch 100 points last season and no one will doubt his ability to exceed the century-mark this campaign. Really, if everything goes right, there’s a chance we even watch McDavid set the post-lockout record and become the first player since Joe Thornton in 2005-06 to score 125 points.

The Montreal Canadiens are far better than their pre-season record

There’s nothing to be gained from finishing the pre-season with a perfect record. There’s no award and, really, it’s meaningless given a fair share of those games are played without full-scale NHL rosters and there are even a few split-squad games thrown in there from time to time. That said, there’s always a bit of consternation from fans of those teams who can’t manage to win at least one game during the exhibition slate, and that was the case for the Montreal Canadiens through six pre-season tilts. And, while losing six straight in the pre-season would be bad enough, the fact that Montreal was outscored 25-9 through those contests made it a bit more unsettling.

Thankfully, the final two games of the pre-season were likely more indicative of what we can expect out of the Canadiens this season. Against the Florida Panthers on Friday, Montreal played a defensively sound game and skated away with a 3-1 win. The next night against Ottawa, the Canadiens lambasted the Senators and banged home goal after goal en route to a convincing 9-2 victory.

The Canadiens have much more offensive punch than they showed through the early part of the pre-season and are much better defensively than giving up 25 goals across six games. This is, after all, a Claude Julien-coached team. If nothing else, they’ll be sound in their own end and you can expect a far better performance from start to finish once the games really matter.

Clayton Keller shines and that bodes well for rookie campaign

Unlike previous years, there is no prohibitive favorite for the Calder Trophy. There’s no Laine or Auston Matthews. There’s no McDavid or Jack Eichel or Artemi Panarin. There’s no single player who stands out above the rest of the crop. But if anyone’s Calder stock went up in the pre-season, it was Clayton Keller’s.

Of course, every team is playing games at different speeds and veterans aren’t going out and giving absolutely everything in the pre-season, but Keller looked every bit the NHL-ready winger that Arizona hoped he would be this season. In four games, he managed three goals and eight points, and it’s not as if his numbers are skewed at all by one big game. He potted two goals and three points in his first, two assists in his second, added a goal in his third and finished the pre-season schedule Saturday with two more assists against a Sharks team that dressed what was basically an opening-night roster.

Keller is going to start the season in a top-six role, of that there’s almost no doubt, and it wouldn’t be surprising if he ended up manning the top line in short order if he continues to produce. One season removed from dual NCAA rookie-of-the-year honors and a standout performance at the World Championship, Keller is one freshman to keep your eyes on.

The Carolina Hurricanes could be the league’s most defensively sound team

Again, let’s note that the pre-season isn’t the ultimate proving ground and there’s still a full 82-game schedule to be played before we can make any proclamations about who was what and where some teams deficiencies lied across the 2017-18 campaign. With that out of the way, though, can we stop and talk about the Carolina Hurricanes for a minute?
Of all teams expected to take a step forward this season, the Hurricanes are the most obvious candidate thanks in large part to the work GM Ron Francis has done to build a young, talented squad that has been supplemented by veteran pieces. But throughout the pre-season, coach Bill Peters had Carolina operating as such a cohesive defensive unit that getting shots against the Hurricanes, let alone scoring, was an incredibly tall task.

Carolina’s 15 goals against put them into a three-way tie for the sixth-fewest across the exhibition schedule, but the more impressive mark was the shots against per game. The Hurricanes allowed 24.6 shots per game, the fewest of any team by close to one shot per outing. Even against the pre-season’s highest scoring team, the Oilers, the Hurricanes only allowed 21 shots, and that’s against an Edmonton lineup that was basically an opening-night squad, including McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Milan Lucic, Jussi Jokinen, Patrick Maroon and Ryan Strome. Carolina’s 6-2 victory was Edmonton’s only loss of the pre-season.

If that’s how Carolina can defend this season, and if Scott Darling puts up a save percentage close to his .925 mark in the pre-season, we could be looking at the league’s most improved team by a long shot.

SCHILKEY, FOEGELE SHINE IN PRESEASON SERIES
Written by Nicholas Niedzielski
Published: October 02, 2017

It may have only been the pre-season, but last weekend saw the Checkers give fans a reason to get excited for the upcoming campaign.

Heading to Lehigh Valley for a pair of exhibition games, the Checkers came out firing on all cylinders, blowing out the Phantoms 8-1 on Friday before taking the following night’s rematch 5-2.

“We had good pace out there and good speed,” said assistant coach Peter Andersson. “We played fast. I think that was the key for this weekend.”

The roster, which didn’t include the last few rounds of NHL cuts, featured a mix of experience levels but leaned more heavily on the younger crop of players. Having gone through a long run up all summer, the prospects were eager to show their worth.

“They were ready,” said Andersson. “Most of them played up in Traverse City too so they were game ready. That was good to see. It’s training camp so everyone needs to show us that they want to play here.”

The rookies stepped their game up for the exhibition series, accounting for 10 of the 13 goals that the Checkers scored, with the duo of Nick Schilkey and Warren Foegele leading the charge. Donning Charlotte sweaters for the first time, the pair finished the weekend slate atop the team scoring list, notching seven goals between them.

“They’ve been scoring and played well too,” said Andersson of the two rookies. “Schilkey works hard and he’s in the right position to score. [Foegele] is a strong forward, good speed and a good shot.”

Schilkey, an undrafted forward who inked an AHL deal with Charlotte this past offseason, has made a name for himself over the past few weeks, earning an invitation to NHL camp in Raleigh. Getting into his first game action with the Checkers, the 23-year-old took full advantage, picking up five points across the pair of contests, including a hat trick in the series opener.

“In the couple of practices before coach told me to shoot the puck more so I just kind of continued that and used my shot,” said Schilkey. “It started with that opportunity on the power play right off the bat [in Friday’s game] and then after that good things happened.”

Hot on his heels was Foegele, a touted third-round draft pick coming off an MVP performance in last year’s OHL playoffs. The forward didn’t miss a beat jumping into game action with Charlotte, picking up five points across the pair of contests.
“I thought as a group we all did really good,” said Foegele. “You could see from the results that we were all clicking and playing a fast-paced game. I was fortunate enough to get some lucky bounces and get great passes from my linemates.”

While the end results of preseason games don’t carry much (or any) weight, they were both skaters’ first experiences with the pro level of play in a game setting. For Schilkey, his extended summer played a strong part in his early success.

“I think the speed up in Traverse City was pretty good,” said Schilkey. “A lot of guys are coming off of summer hockey so it’s not as detailed as you’d like it to be, but at least the speed is there. Going through the camp up in Raleigh was huge for getting up to pace with those guys and getting used to that speed. That really prepared me for sure.”

For Foegele, the key was treating things like business as usual.

“You’re obviously a little nervous playing your first professional game but for myself I just tried to stay calm,” said Foegele. “I’ve been playing hockey long enough so I just tried to stick to what I do.”

The duo are set to embark on their first seasons of pro hockey, something that comes with its fair share of ups and downs. But with the volume of young players currently in the room, they won’t have to look far to find guys in similar situations.

“There’s a huge familiarity there,” said Foegele. “There’s a lot of rookies here and they’re all in the same position as me as first-year pros. We have a great leadership group and we just try to take any bit of information from the older guys and try to translate that onto the ice.”

Schilkey has been impressive over the course of the last few weeks, but his being on an AHL contract puts him in a fight to stay on the Checkers’ roster heading into this coming weekend’s season opener.

“I sure hope so,” said Schilkey when asked whether he has done enough to show he belongs in Charlotte. “I think the preseason games were good for just knowing that I can play with these guys. I want to be here real bad. Going out there and having a good weekend was huge but the work is far from done. I just have to keep working hard and see what happens. It’s about the work ethic and hopefully the bounces keep coming.”

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ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Minnesota Wild will start the regular season without veteran left wing Zach Parise, who has been slowed by a back injury.

General manager Chuck Fletcher said after practice Monday that Parise would not travel to games at Detroit on Thursday and at Carolina on Saturday. Fletcher said Parise was “having a hard time getting over the

1076031 Minnesota Wild

Wild’s Parise has ailing back, will miss at least 2 games

Staff Report
Associated Press OCTOBER 2, 2017 — 3:30PM
Zach Parise out another week as Wild assigns Luke Kunin to Iowa

By Rachel Blount  OCTOBER 2, 2017 — 1:45PM

As much as Zach Parise wanted to play in Thursday’s season opener at Detroit, the Wild winger said last week that he didn’t want to be in the lineup until he was completely healthy. Monday, when it became clear he would not meet that threshold, General Manager Chuck Fletcher announced Parise will not make the team’s opening-night roster.

Fletcher said the team decided to “slow [Parise] down a little bit” during his recovery from a back injury. The forward will skate on his own during a two-game road trip that ends Saturday at Carolina, with the goal of being ready to return to practice next Monday.

Parise participated in only a couple of practices during training camp and missed all seven preseason games. Fletcher called the choice to leave him home a “joint decision” made in consultation with team doctors.

“Zach actually feels great, but he’s having a hard time getting over the hump, having a hard time getting to 100 percent,” Fletcher said. “So we’re just going to pull it back a bit. The way the schedule sets up, we have two games each of the next three weeks, so I think it’s smart to give him the time he needs to get closer to 100 percent and feel better.

“He’s in great shape. He’s been skating. He feels great. But we’ve just got to make sure we do the right thing here. It’s a long season, and we all agreed there’s no rush just to play Thursday.’’

While Parise is experiencing less pain and has made progress in his recovery, Fletcher said the winger still is working to regain his strength and his full range of motion. The general manager confirmed that Parise had been training well all summer, then “had a little bit of a setback” about two weeks before training camp began.

Fletcher would not address whether the injury is related to the herniated disc that kept Parise out of the playoffs in 2016. While the long-term prognosis is unclear, Fletcher noted Parise’s back did not cause him any problems last season.

“There’s no reason to believe he can’t get back to 100 percent this year,’’ Fletcher said. “The key is doing the right things so we can maximize the number of games he plays this year.”

The Wild sent forward Luke Kunin to its AHL affiliate in Iowa and put defenseman Ryan Murphy on waivers. Murphy will be assigned to Iowa if he clears.

That left 12 healthy forwards on the ice at Monday’s practice, including winger Daniel Winnik. The veteran free agent still has not signed a contract and would have to take a pay cut to stay with the Wild. Winnik made $2.25 million last season with Washington, and as of Monday, the Wild is only $866,409 under the salary cap.

Fletcher said the Wild still has room to add a player, but he left open the possibility of picking up someone via waivers. The opening-day roster, with a maximum of 23 players, must be submitted Tuesday by 4 p.m. Twin Cities time.

“We’re going to have to afford somebody,” he said. “We’re going to need a player to play. We will see what happens here in the next 24 hours. There are a couple different possibilities that we’re looking into. So we’ll make a decision here in the next day or two.”

Kunin received a warm sendoff from Fletcher and coach Bruce Boudreau before his trip south. Both lauded the 19-year-old’s performance in his first NHL training camp, even though the Wild chose to start the season with Joel Eriksson Ek as its third-line center.

Fletcher said he sent Kunin to Iowa because he wasn’t going to be among the Wild’s top nine forwards. In the AHL, Fletcher expects Kunin to play on the top line and on special teams while getting about 20 minutes of ice time per game. The 2016 first-round pick played in six of seven preseason games, scoring one goal.

“He’s a real important part of our future,’’ Fletcher said. “He had a great camp. I think everybody sees why we drafted him and why we believe in him. [Starting in Iowa] is more of a long-term play for him.”

The Wild’s roster will be finalized Tuesday afternoon.

By DANE MIZUTANI | dmizutani@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press
training camp. Fletcher said the setback occurred about two weeks before the start of the Wings in Detroit.

The team was hoping Parise, 33, would return to practice some time this week and be available for Thursday’s season opener against the Red Wings on Thursday and Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday.

Fletcher said the plan, for now, is for Parise to return to the team next Monday when the they get back from the two-game road trip.

“He is feeling better,” Fletcher said. “He’s getting better from where he was about three weeks ago. In my world view, it doesn’t make sense to have him play Thursday and rush into this. If this was Game 7 of the playoffs, he would play. … It’s a long season, so we’re going to give him the time and space he needs to feel better.”

The recent development has to be concerning for the team considering Parise has dealt with back issues in the past and still has eight years remaining on his multi-million-dollar contract. He missed the 2016 playoffs because of back issues, and while it wasn’t a problem for him last season, it appears to be an injury that could linger for the rest of his playing days.

Asked if this is the same injury that kept Parise out of the postseason two years ago, Fletcher deflected saying, “I can’t even remember.”

“There’s no reason to believe he won’t get back and be 100 percent again,” Fletcher added. “The key is doing the right things so we can maximize the number of games he plays this season.”

Wild’s Zach Parise will miss first two games of season

By DANE MIZUTANI | dmizutani@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press

After suffering through back issues this preseason, veteran forward Zach Parise will miss the first two games of the regular season, Wild general manager Chuck Fletcher said on Monday afternoon.

The team was hoping Parise, 33, would return to practice some time this week and be available for Thursday’s season opener against the Red Wings in Detroit.

But Parise still hasn’t been cleared for contact, so the team has decided to give him more time to try to get back to 100 percent.

“He’s having a hard time getting over the hump,” Fletcher said. “After speaking with the doctors over the weekend, we’re just going to slow him down a bit, pull it back a bit. … I think it’s smart to give him the time he needs to get closer to 100 percent.”

What exactly does 100 percent mean in this scenario? Fletcher said it has to do with Parise having “strength” and “full range of motion” when on the ice.

“He’s made progress,” Fletcher said. “It doesn’t make sense to start him at 80 percent.”

Fletcher said the setback occurred about two weeks before the start of training camp.

“At this stage he feels a lot better than where he did,” Fletcher said. “This is sort of a joint decision. Let’s just pull it back and give him a little bit more time.”

That means the Wild will be without their $98 million forward against the Red Wings on Thursday and Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday.

Fletcher said the plan, for now, is for Parise to return to the team next Monday when the they get back from the two-game road trip.

“He is feeling better,” Fletcher said. “He’s getting better from where he was about three weeks ago. In my world view, it doesn’t make sense to have him play Thursday and rush into this. If this was Game 7 of the playoffs, he would play. … It’s a long season, so we’re going to give him the time and space he needs to feel better.”

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Top Wild prospect Luke Kunin will start season in minors

By DANE MIZUTANI | dmizutani@pioneerpress.com | Pioneer Press

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“He’s made progress,” Fletcher said. “It doesn’t make sense to start him at 80 percent.”

Fletcher said the setback occurred about two weeks before the start of training camp.
Added coach Bruce Boudreau: “We need a guy like Luke playing 20 minutes a game down there (in Iowa). He’s going to get a lot more out of it than sitting around here. Do I have faith in him if we had to bring him up? Absolutely.”

That means Kunin likely will be back in the NHL this season.

The Wild also placed defenseman Ryan Murphy on waivers. He will join the Iowa Wild on Tuesday if he clears waivers.

In the wake of the announcement that Zach Parise will miss the first two games of the season, the Wild only have 11 available forwards on the official roster.

That means the Wild might have to get creative to fill out their front line for the Oct. 5 season opener against the Detroit Red Wings.

Perhaps the most obvious option is veteran Daniel Winnik, who is still with the team on a professional tryout. But the Wild only have $866,000 of salary cap space to work with, and considering Winnik made $2.25 million last season, he would have to take a significant pay cut to sign.

Asked whether he thinks the Wild can afford Winnik, Fletcher responded, “Well, we’re going to have to afford somebody.”

“We’re going to need a player to play,” Fletcher said. “We’ll see what happens here in the next 24 hours. There are a couple different possibilities we’re looking into.”

Pioneer Press LOADED: 10.03.2017

1075999  Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets notebook | No surprises expected on 23-man roster

By Adam Jardy
Posted Oct 2, 2017 at 9:00 PM Updated Oct 2, 2017 at 9:00 PM

There doesn’t figure to be much drama in the offing as the Blue Jackets submit their regular-season roster to the NHL.

Due by 5 p.m. Tuesday, the list of 23 players they will finalize is expected to have no surprises.

As it stands, what you see is what you get. That means no Boone Jenner or Jordan Schroeder (injuries) or Josh Anderson (contract impasse).

“Things could interchange as the season goes on,” coach John Tortorella said Monday morning. “That may change something along the way, if they (Jenner or Schroeder) get healthy, but right now this is what we have.”

The list stands at 13 forwards, eight defensemen and two goalies.

Preseason bubble players such as Ohio State product Zac Dalpe, former first-round pick Pierre-Luc Dubois and Sonny Milano all appear destined to make the cut after a camp that saw 60 initial invitees.

Milano, 21, will play on a line centered by Nick Foligno and opposite Oliver Bjorkstrand. He’s played seven NHL games the past two seasons but has 32 goals and 46 assists in 117 American Hockey League games during the same span.

“It’s a really good story this camp,” Tortorella said of Milano. “I wasn’t sure where he fits, because he’s pushed each year in the organization as far as climbing up that ladder. You can see he understands the game a lot more away from the puck.”

Although he’s listed as day-to-day, Jenner’s streak of 175 consecutive games played will come to an end. Schroeder (upper body) is also day-to-day.

Carlsson: ‘Good camp’

After essentially being thrown into the fire during last year’s postseason, defenseman Gabriel Carlsson has also staked his claim to a roster spot. Tortorella praised his ability to shake off mistakes. The coach also expressed hope that his game will continue to grow on the offensive end.

“I think he’s got a great mind-set,” Tortorella said. “He’s a long body. Understands positioning. He’s had a really good camp.”

Carlsson played two regular-season games last year and then all five playoff games against Pittsburgh, when he had a plus-1 rating.

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1076000  Columbus Blue Jackets

Anderson, Blue Jackets reach deal for upcoming season

By Adam Jardy
Posted Oct 2, 2017 at 10:59 PM Updated Oct 2, 2017 at 11:46 PM

Restricted free agent Josh Anderson and the Blue Jackets have reached a deal for the upcoming season, his agent confirmed late Monday.

The contract, which was first reported by Sportsnet.ca hockey writer and NHL Network insider Elliotte Friedman, is reportedly a three-year deal for $1.85 million per season.

Anderson’s agent, Darren Ferris, confirmed a deal had been reached in a text to The Dispatch. No terms were immediately available. A message to Blue Jackets general manager Jarmo Kekalainen was not immediately returned.

In 78 games last season, Anderson had 17 goals and 12 assists. A fourth-round pick in the 2012 draft, the 23-year-old Anderson has 18 goals and 16 assists in 96 career appearances for the Blue Jackets.

The Blue Jackets were set to enter the season with a full complement of 23 players: 13 forwards, eight defensemen and two goalies. Rosters must be submitted by 5 p.m. Tuesday, meaning they would have to make room for Anderson somehow. He does not appear on the roster on the team’s official website.

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1076002 Columbus Blue Jackets

Disjointed preseason still paid dividends

By Adam Jardy
Posted Oct 2, 2017 at 7:55 AM
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PITTSBURGH — Outwardly, this hasn’t seemed to be the smoothest of preseason camps for the Blue Jackets. In addition to the expected turmoil that comes with assessing players, building fitness through brutal conditioning and making roster cuts, a number of other factors have turned checkers into chess for coach John Tortorella and the front office.

It’s been a little bit of everything. There’s been a lingering injury to a lineup standard who didn’t miss a game last season. There’s been the ongoing recovery of another key player while recovering from an offshore surgery. Visa issues delayed a member of the team’s first line from arriving on time. Oh, and then there’s been a contract impasse to deal with, too.

On the eve of his team’s final preseason game, Tortorella dismissed the notion that it’s been an unsettled preseason.

“I think the camp has been smooth,” he said Friday. “I’m not a big guy to worry really about the record of the preseason. We’re very satisfied as far as the looks we’ve given people and some of the questions that have been answered and some questions that are still there that are still unanswered. It’s been a good camp.”

The next day, the Blue Jackets went to PPG Paints Arena and dispatched the defending Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins 3-0 in a game that featured first-choice lineups from both teams. One of the question marks for the preseason was answered when Brandon Dubinsky made his debut and looked no worse for wear, leading the team in hits and also taking faceoffs with his surgically repaired right wrist.

Boone Jenner wasn’t in the lineup, and he hasn’t been seen save for some solitary skating after practices are over as he deals with an undisclosed middle-body injury. Restricted free agent Josh Anderson wasn’t in the lineup, either, as he continues to work for a new contract. Alexander Wennberg centered the top line with Artemi Panarin on his left and Cam Atkinson on the right.
its draft-and-develop experiment, has progressed into an elite middle man, while Little remains a highly regarded two-way centre.

Byfuglien is gargantuan and one of the most offensively skilled blue-liners in hockey, yet is still prone to ill-timed blunders that drive fans crazy. Enstrom remains the small, steady puck-moving defenceman who has difficulty staying healthy.

Added by way of the NHL Draft in recent years are last year’s rookie sensation, born-to-score right-winger Patrik Laine (who fired 36 goals last season and netted five in this year’s seven-game pre-season slate), exhilarating left-winger Nikolaj Ehlers, top-notch defencemen Jacob Trouba and Josh Morrissey and much-maligned goalie Connor Hellebuyck, who has had a solid training camp this fall. Acquired via trade is blue-liner and former NHL rookie of the year Tyler Myers, while goalie Steve Mason, forward Mathieu Perreault and defenceman Dmitry Kulikov are aboard because of free agency.

No significant drop-off in offensive production is expected this season but the club’s success will come down to its ability to defend.

Assistant coach Charlie Huddy, the longest-serving member of the Jets bench staff, said he’ll work with the finest group of blue-liners the team has assembled in its short history in Winnipeg.

“We have eight or nine guys who can play in the NHL,” he said. “We have great depth and it’s fun to be able to work with those guys because they all want to get better.”

Beyond the regulars on the back end, East Grand Forks, Minn., product Tucker Poolman looks NHL-ready now, but could begin the season with the Manitoba Moose, while Sami Niski and Nelson Nogier will play with the AHL club. The Jets are also high on recent draft selections Dylan Samberg, Jonathan Kovacevic and Leon Gawanke, and haven’t given up on Logan Stanley.

The prospects pantry is stocked up front: forwards Kyle Connor, Jack Roslovic and Brendan Lemieux are knocking on the door, and Jansen Harkins and Kristian Vesalainen will likely be pushing for employment in a year or two.

There is legitimate reason for optimism and lofty goals. And a lot of the pressure is coming from inside the locker room.

The captain was asked recently how he views transformation since 2011.

“I think talent-wise we’ve come a fair ways,” Wheeler says. “It’s tough, because you inherit a group of guys and maybe not necessarily the direction that they wanted to go. So it took time to assemble where we’re at today.

“There were some really good hockey players on that team, but over time you start to accumulate talent and a new team starts to take shape, more of what they were trying to build.”

Ladd and Pavelec were considered fundamental pieces in the future success of the team, which had transferred that spring from the hockey wasteland of Atlanta, the only city to lose two franchises in the NHL’s post-1967 expansion history.

Both players have since taken their leave. Ladd was dealt to Chicago near the 2015-16 trade deadline, while Pavelec earned most of his US$4.7 million last season playing with the Moose before he accepted a one-year deal in the summer with the New York Rangers at a reduced rate.

The rest of that cast of characters from the original team, including head coach Claude Noel, left town a while ago. Noel was turfed in January 2014 after the team suffered uninspired losses to Tampa and Columbus, falling to 19-23-5 and 10 points back of the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

He was replaced by current head coach Paul Maurice.
Connor was also spotted in a number of drills. Matthias partnered with Marko Dano and Nic Petan. Laine, Adam Lowry alongside Brandon Tanev and Joel Armia and Shawn Line rushes on Monday had centre Mark Scheifele with Mathieu trim a player before the roster deadline. Saturday in Calgary. If he stays off the injured reserve list, the Jets must Copp is listed as day to day after blocking a Mark Giordano slapshot on injuries and missed practice Monday. Jets head coach Paul Maurice A pair of centres, Andrew Copp and Matt Hendricks, are both nursing injuries are now a factor in who plays in Wednesday's season-opener. The Jets must declare a 23-man roster by 4 p.m. Tuesday, although Maurice said he hasn't ruled out carrying eight blue-liners to begin the campaign. Steve Mason is expected to start in the Winnipeg net Wednesday with Connor Hellebuyck as his backup. Mason, signed as a free agent July 1, said the group is relieved the grind of training camp is in the rear-view mirror. "It's nice that it's over and done with and we can focus on meaningful games and finally put everything we've been working on the last couple of weeks to use," he said. "For the last two weeks we've been going at it pretty hard, working on things diligently, and making sure that each and every (pre-season) game was put to good use. "I think our last game in Calgary (a 3-2 shootout defeat), even though we were missing a couple of key guys in the lineup, we went in there and executed a pretty good road game so that was good to end on pretty positive note and focus here now on a tough task with Toronto." Maurice said the players assigned to the Moose all had solid training camps. "We're pleased with their progress... four positive meetings (with them)," said Maurice, noting Lipon, in particular, is very close to being an NHLer. "JC Lipon had a great camp where I have no problem putting him in the lineup now. I still have him slightly behind other guys, but... he closed that gap in camp."

Roslovic led Manitoba in scoring last season — his first year of pro — that gap in camp."

"I've played with both of (Little and Ehlers) last season and we had some chemistry between the three of us and got some success, so I'm excited. Hopefully, they're as excited as I am," said the 19-year-old Finn. Laine's comment generated a smart-alecky "No" from Ehlers, seated to his right in the Jets dressing room. "OK, you're not," Laine said. "But I'm still excited and looking forward to Wednesday." Winnipeg still has eight defenceman up — Dustin Byfuglien, Toby Enstrom, Jacob Trouba, Josh Morrissey, Tyler Myers, Dmitry Kulikov, Ben Chiarot and Poolman. Maurice said he hasn't ruled out carrying eight blue-liners to begin the campaign. Steve Mason is expected to start in the Winnipeg net Wednesday with Connor Hellebuyck as his backup. Mason, signed as a free agent July 1, said the group is relieved the grind of training camp is in the rear-view mirror. "It's nice that it's over and done with and we can focus on meaningful games and finally put everything we've been working on the last couple of weeks to use," he said. "For the last two weeks we've been going at it pretty hard, working on things diligently, and making sure that each and every (pre-season) game was put to good use. "I think our last game in Calgary (a 3-2 shootout defeat), even though we were missing a couple of key guys in the lineup, we went in there and executed a pretty good road game so that was good to end on pretty positive note and focus here now on a tough task with Toronto." Maurice said the players assigned to the Moose all had solid training camps. "We're pleased with their progress... four positive meetings (with them)," said Maurice, noting Lipon, in particular, is very close to being an NHLer. "JC Lipon had a great camp where I have no problem putting him in the lineup now. I still have him slightly behind other guys, but... he closed that gap in camp."

Roslovic led Manitoba in scoring last season — his first year of pro — with 13 goals and 35 assists in 65 games. Lipon had 12 goals and 30 points in 71 games, while Lemieux supplied 12 goals and 19 points in 61 games with the Moose. Spacek had a sensational final junior year with the Red Deer Rebels of the Western Hockey League, scoring 30 goals and adding 55 assists, before joining Manitoba for the last four games of the regular season. He contributed one assist. Meanwhile, the Moose today sent three players to their ECHL affiliate, the Jacksonville Icemen, including goalie Jamie Phillips, forward Elgin Pearce and blue-liner Chris Dienes.

Manitoba opens the 2017-18 season in Grand Rapids against the defending league-champion Griffins on Friday. Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 10.03.2017

Jets close to opening-night lineup after demoting Lemieux, Roslovic, Spacek and Lipon

Jason Bell
Posted: 10/2/2017 11:40 AM

The look of the Winnipeg Jets’ opening-night roster is getting clearer after a handful of forwards was sent down to the Manitoba Moose Monday morning.

Brendan Lemieux, Jack Roslovic, Michael Spacek and JC Lipon were all assigned to Winnipeg’s American Hockey League affiliate. Lipon must clear waivers before officially joining the Moose.

Winnipeg now has 15 forwards, eight defencemen and two goaltenders still with the NHL club, including forward Kyle Connor and defenceman Tucker Poolman.

The Jets must declare a 23-man roster by 4 p.m. Tuesday, although injuries are now a factor in who plays in Wednesday’s season-opener.

A pair of centres, Andrew Copp and Matt Hendricks, are both nursing injuries and missed practice Monday. Jets head coach Paul Maurice confirmed Hendricks will not play Wednesday against Auston Matthews and the Toronto Maple Leafs at Bell MTS Place (6 p.m., Sportsnet, TSN 1290).

Copp is listed as day to day after blocking a Mark Giordano slapshot on Saturday in Calgary. If he stays off the injured reserve list, the Jets must trim a player before the roster deadline.

Line rushes on Monday had centre Mark Scheifele with Mathieu Perreault and Blake Wheeler, Bryan Little with Nikolaj Ehlers and Patrik Laine, Adam Lowry alongside Brandon Tanev and Joel Armia and Shawn Matthias partnered with Marko Dano and Nic Petan.

Connor was also spotted in a number of drills. Laine, who fired five goals to tie Matthews and Edmonton Oilers rookie Kailer Yamamoto for the pre-season goal-scoring lead, said he’s pumped about the potential of his trio.

"I’ve played with both of (Little and Ehlers) last season and we had some chemistry between the three of us and got some success, so I’m excited. Hopefully, they’re as excited as I am," said the 19-year-old Finn. Laine’s comment generated a smart-alecky "No" from Ehlers, seated to his right in the Jets dressing room.

"OK, you’re not," Laine said. "But I’m still excited and looking forward to Wednesday." Winnipeg still has eight defenceman up — Dustin Byfuglien, Toby Enstrom, Jacob Trouba, Josh Morrissey, Tyler Myers, Dmitry Kulikov, Ben Chiarot and Poolman. Maurice said he hasn’t ruled out carrying eight blue-liners to begin the campaign.

Steve Mason is expected to start in the Winnipeg net Wednesday with Connor Hellebuyck as his backup.

Mason, signed as a free agent July 1, said the group is relieved the grind of training camp is in the rear-view mirror. "It’s nice that it’s over and done with and we can focus on meaningful games and finally put everything we’ve been working on the last couple of weeks to use," he said. "For the last two weeks we’ve been going at it pretty hard, working on things diligently, and making sure that each and every (pre-season) game was put to good use. "I think our last game in Calgary (a 3-2 shootout defeat), even though we were missing a couple of key guys in the lineup, we went in there and executed a pretty good road game so that was good to end on pretty positive note and focus here now on a tough task with Toronto." Maurice said the players assigned to the Moose all had solid training camps. "We’re pleased with their progress... four positive meetings (with them),” said Maurice, noting Lipon, in particular, is very close to being an NHLer. "JC Lipon had a great camp where I have no problem putting him in the lineup now. I still have him slightly behind other guys, but... he closed that gap in camp."

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Meanwhile, the Moose today sent three players to their ECHL affiliate, the Jacksonville Icemen, including goalie Jamie Phillips, forward Elgin Pearce and blue-liner Chris Dienes.

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Jets go with Old Faithful on the wing

BY PAUL FRIESEN, WINNIPEG SUN
They tried Kyle Connor and they auditioned Nic Petan, but the Winnipeg Jets will turn to Old Reliable to play left wing on the top line to start the NHL season.

Mathieu Perreault will skate alongside Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler against the Leafs here, Wednesday, after younger players failed to grab one of the most coveted spots on the roster through training camp.

“It looks like it,” Perreault said after practice, Monday. “I love that, actually. I've got to play with them a little bit the last two years, and we always seem to produce. So I'm very excited.”

Young stars Patrik Laine and Nik Ehlers will flank centre Bryan Little on a second scoring line.

But it’s clear which line will get the heavier assignments, beginning Wednesday.

“We’re going to be given some tough assignments, especially at home,” Wheeler acknowledged. “We're going to play against the other teams’ best defensive players.”

Perreault, with his veteran smarts and non-stop motor, fits into that role better than the still-developing Connor and Petan — particularly on a team whose top priority this season is to cut down goals against.

“He had a really good camp,” Maurice said of the 29-year-old Perreault. “It fits. It's easy.”

It certainly takes the gamble out of the position. The Jets know what they’ll get from Perreault.

“The game Scheif and I need to play, Matty plays that game tremendously well,” Wheeler said. “He’s hard on every puck, he's relentless on the forecheck, responsible in our own end.”

Winnipeg’s lineup looks stacked on the top two lines, but mostly blue-collar beyond that.

Maurice downplayed concerns about his bottom six, saying it should have similar production to last season.

“We feel we're going to score at least as many goals as we did last year,” Maurice said. “And goal-scoring wouldn’t have been the thing that you circled over the summer as the area we needed to improve. We finished seventh.

“It'll be the defensive part of the game that defines the wins and losses.”

THE SUPPORTING CAST

Injuries will affect the look of Winnipeg's bottom six going into Game 1.

Matt Hendricks has been placed on injured reserve, meaning he's out for at least one game, while Andrew Copp's status for Wednesday is up in the air.

Copp’s spot on the third line, with Adam Lowry and Joel Armia, was taken by Brandon Tanev in Monday's practice.

Why Tanev?

“He’s a big part of the penalty killing,” Maurice said. “He gets in on the puck really well. Adam and Joel do some other things very well, but having a little bit of speed with them works.”

Tanev embraces his role, whether it's temporary or not.

“Now when the points are on the line, the work starts,” he said. “Throughout the pre-season my game got stronger each game, and that's what it's about.”

“That's something you relish, playing the dirty minutes of the game, and doing anything you can for the team.”

The fourth line, assuming Copp misses Game 1, appears to be Shawn Matthias with Petan and Marko Dano.

That would leave Connor as the odd man out, although that's still better than being sent down to the American Hockey League's Manitoba Moose.

Connor certainly isn’t breathing any easier.

“It’s all business from here,” Connor said. “We've got to get into the grind of it now. You never know. It's a tough league. Every day... you've got something to prove.”

If Copp isn’t assigned to IR, the Jets need to release one more player to get down to the 23-man limit.

EIGHT IS ENOUGH

All four players sent down to the Moose, Monday, were forwards, leaving eight defencemen still with the Jets.

Maurice says he’s OK with that, for a while.

“I don’t love it over the long term, because of practice stuff,” the coach said. “There’s not enough reps in there. But short-term – we play here, we’re going to go on the road for three – I wouldn’t rule that out.”

Rookie Tucker Poolman proved too good to send down, so he and Ben Chiarot – Chiarot would have to clear waivers to join the Moose – are potentially looking at seats in the press box, to start.

“I was excited to find out what was going to happen,” Poolman said. “I'm happy about it, for sure. With the summer and the rehab and coming into my first camp, I really didn't know what to expect.”

Surgery on both his shoulders didn’t stop the University of North Dakota product from looking right at home during camp and the pre-season.

GONE, NOT FORGOTTEN

Here’s Maurice on the four players sent down to the Moose.

On Brendan Lemieux: “Brendan Lemieux made huge, physical strides this year. He put an awful lot of time in this summer, and it showed in his speed... He's got some nice hands around the net. We really see that developing into that power-forward game.”

On Jack Roslovic: “We look at him as the opportunity to be that next centreman out of that group that comes in and plays for the Jets.”

On Michael Spacek: “He might be a guy that doesn’t have to go to the minors, just to be in a position to play right away.”

On Brandon Apartment: “He’s a young player who can go from the AHL to the NHL at centre. But this is his first year pro, so there’s lots of time there.”

On Jack Lipon (who has to clear waivers): “JC had a great camp. I have him slightly behind other guys, but he closed that gap very well at camp.”

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 10.03.2017

1076104 Winnipeg Jets

JETS SEND FOUR TO MOOSE, KEEP POOLMAN

PAUL FRIESEN, WINNIPEG SUN

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Cut-down day for the Winnipeg Jets produced no surprises, Monday, but some difficult decisions still remain.

The Jets sent four players down to the American League’s Manitoba Moose: forwards Jack Roslovic, Brendan Lemieux, JC Lipon and Michael Spacek.

Lipon is the only one who has to clear NHL waivers before joining the Moose.

The moves leaves players like Kyle Connor, Brandon Tanev, Marko Dano and Nic Petan breathing a little easier.

But with Andrew Copp and Matt Hendricks injured, the Jets are still at 25 players, two more than the roster limit.

Hendricks has been placed on injured reserve and won’t be available for Wednesday’s season-opener against Toronto.

Head coach Paul Maurice says he’ll know more about Copp’s status for the game on Tuesday.

Assuming Copp is not placed on IR, the Jets would have to cut one more player before Wednesday’s game.

“It’s all business from here,” Connor said. “We’ve got to get into the grind of it now. You never know. It’s a tough league. Every day… you’ve got something to prove.”

Of those to stay on the roster this long, 24-year-old rookie defenceman Tucker Poolman might be seen as the most pleasant surprise.

“I was excited to find out what was going to happen today,” Poolman said. “I’m happy about it, for sure. With the summer and the rehab and coming into my first camp, I really didn’t know what to expect. So I just tried to come in every day and compete and try to learn. I’m just going to keep doing that.”

Surgery on both his shoulders didn’t stop the University of North Dakota product from looking right at home during camp and the pre-season.

With Ben Chiarot still around, too, the Jets still have eight defencemen, a scenario head coach Paul Maurice says he could live with, for a while.

“I don’t love it over the long term, because of practice stuff,” Maurice said. “There’s not enough reps in there. But short-term – we play here, we’re going to go on the road for three – I wouldn’t rule that out.”

The Jets will go into Game 1 with Mathieu Perreault skating on a line with Jayson Megna is.

Pacific) deadline or be reassigned to the Utica Comets. That’s where the NHL deal and make the 23-man roster before the Tuesday (2 p.m.

Against the Oilers last Saturday, Sutter centred Darren Archibald and Brandon Hendricks, who are very dangerous.”

“It’s nice as a coach to have a guy you can put out against top-end guys who are very dangerous.”

On this week’s Pat-cat, Jeff Paterson and Jason Botchford discuss the battle for roster spots and try to figure out the opening night line-up.

In theory, it makes sense.

Sutter won 13 of 19 draws against the Edmonton Oilers on Saturday and was a key part of holding the NHL’s offensive juggernaut to one power-play goal. His new deployment will also take pressure off Bo Horvat to function in that capacity and concentrate more on building offensive chemistry with Sven Baertschi and Brock Boeser.

It will also balance out minutes and workloads. Allowing Henrik and Daniel Sedin to log a more manageable 15 to 16 minutes a night and not mix it up with top lines will help. So will giving Green another push from from the bottom-six mix because Sutter did have 17 goals last season with a right hand and wrist that weren’t right down the stretch.

Run all this competitiveness-by-committee stuff by Sutter and you get a nod of acceptance.

Brandon Sutter still managed 17 goals last season with a wonky right hand.

Labelled a “foundational player” by general manager Jim Benning when acquired two years ago from the Pittsburgh Penguins, the 28-year-old centre is at the point in his career where winning trumps everything — even the security of four years left on his five-year, US$21.875-million contract extension.

Playing meaningful games in March and being in contention for a wild-card playoff position would be considered a victory for a team in transition. And knowing nothing weighs on the psyche like constant losing — the Canucks came within a setback last November of matching a franchise futility mark of 10-straight losses — Sutter is open to anything and everything.

“You hit March 1, you want to be right in the mix of it (playoffs),” said Sutter. “You get to a point in your career when you’re established where you just want to win — you don’t care about anything else. There are a lot of the guys in the room who feel like that.”

That’s great. But can this club really exceed the prediction of only 75 points?

“With the balance we have in our lines, we can make people think twice about it (prediction),” stressed Sutter.

Against the Oilers last Saturday, Sutter centred Darren Archibald and Jayson Megna. Archibald, who is on an AHL contract, will either sign an NHL deal and make the 23-man roster before the Tuesday (2 p.m.

Pacific) deadline or be reassigned to the Utica Comets. That’s where the waived Megna is.

In the season-opener this Saturday against the Oilers at Rogers Arena, Sutter’s wingers are probably to be determined.

CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 3, 2017

1076105 Vancouver Canucks

‘Foundational’ player Sutter accepts key ‘fourth-line’ role

Ben Kuzma
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If you have the right mix of guys who understand what our job is, we can be pretty good defensively, and if you are against top-line guys, you're going to get offensive chances, too," reasoned Sutter. "Top guys want to spend time in the offensive zone and if you can hem them in (in their own zone), they can get frustrated.

“We've got four pretty good lines, no matter how they shape up. We're going to see even minutes across the board and we have that depth. We have 12 forwards who can play 12 to 18 minutes a night.”

The big question for the season-opener is whether Thomas Vanek is the right fit for the Sedins. Green had Markus Granlund, a proven and productive winger for the twins last season, between Loui Eriksson and Jake Virtanen at practice Monday. Who he has with Sutter in the opener will depend on the roster deadline and who's going to sit.

It could be Sutter between Archibald and Derek Dorsett. It could be Sutter between Sam Gagner and Virtanen. And if Archibald makes the roster, a veteran is going to be exposed on waivers.

"Everybody is on the bubble, we have to cut one more player," said Green. "The young guys have played well, but we're down to 24 (players) and we have to let one more go."

OVERTIME: Henrik Sedin had a maintenance day Monday. Alexander Burmistrov wasn't in regular line rotations Monday and Green referred to the centre/winger as a possible “rover” this season. Andrey Pedan was placed on waivers Monday and if he clears Tuesday, the defenceman will join goalie Richard Bachman and forwards Megna and Michael Chaput, who cleared Monday. PTO candidate Ryan White (concussion) is still following NHL protocol.

Pedan is pointless in 13 career NHL games and had five goals and five assists in 52 AHL games last season. He's on a one-year, two-way extension that pays US$750,000 at the NHL level. Pedan will have arbitration rights next summer.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.03.2017

The Athletic / Bourne: When it comes to roster cuts, teams see a lot that fans can’t

Justin Bourne
15 hours ago

Ah, October. Up here in Canada there’s a familiar little nip in the air, the leaves are turning bright and beautiful shades of reds, yellows and oranges, and hockey GMs are dragging players’ NHL dreams out to the woodshed and axing them with barbarous vigor.

Inhale deep and soak in all that goodness, won’t you? It’s a wonderful time of year for hockey fans, even if it comes with the merciless ubiquity of pumpkin spice.

While it’s less fun for the actual players awaiting official word on their hockey future, most look forward to ending the uncertainty. They obviously want to know where they’re playing, but also it’s nice to know why they’ve received their assignment. It’s the rare time of year when a player hears directly from the horse’s mouth about themselves in the big picture, not just about a play they made the night before.

Fans get to see where these guys are headed, and they probably have a good idea why, but without being behind the scenes with the team every day, that “why” is always going to lack some depth.

So from the outside looking in, it often appears that teams make some baffling roster decisions. And of course, that does happen. But other times, an organization views a player differently based on some information the fans don’t have access to.

So as cuts are happening around the league, I thought it would be fun to go into some of those specific things a team knows and sees that a fan simply can’t. Some affect the players’ current performance on the ice, others will in the future, and they all factor in varying degrees to the “why” some seemingly great players get cut for what appears to be those with less ability.

The basics
I won’t bother going too deep on the stuff fans know they don’t know, but it is worth noting that work ethic in the gym and in practice are very real things. There’s an odd perception that players today are all fitness machines, and they all work hard, and you can’t be a pro unless you’re 100 percent committed.

Yeah you can, guys. Some people just win the genetic lottery. It can be depressing to see how truly talented some of these players are.

Teams can see which guys are relying purely on their skill, and who’s putting in the extra work. If you have two players of similarly talent, work ethic beyond games can be a tiebreaker. Over time, the aggregation of marginal gains can make a difference on the ice.

Also in the “basics” category would be personality. Is the player well-liked? That’ll never show up in anyone’s stats, but most people have worked with a miserable person. You just want to leave their aura. Likable people make work a place others want to be. And if they want to
be at work, they’ll stick around longer and come in earlier, and maybe get that one percent better that makes the difference.

This leads to qualities that are typically seen as leadership. Does the player have his teammates’ respect? Does he hold others accountable and make others better? There are plenty of well-liked jokers who drag people down.

Players who show discipline and demand it from others can lead to a culture of discipline that spills over onto the ice. As fans, it’s tough to know which guys are always a part of the solution, and which cause the problems.

More in-depth

An interesting thing happens if you do video work long enough: you’ll go weeks without talking about your most underrated players, because they never show up on the tape. They’re always in the right position so they don’t stand out and you don’t want to stand out in the video room — so coaches don’t think about them until a fairly long period of time where they realize, “Hey, I can really trust that guy I never think about.”

You can go to bed feeling great about a player of yours who had two points in a game one night. Then you wake up and watch the video, and realize they were absolutely awful positionally, they provided their teammates no support, and they hurt you more than they helped. And meanwhile, a player who got blanked may have been tremendous.

With the amount of moving parts in a hockey game, one watch is nowhere near enough to pay attention to all your guys. So it’s with video that organizations come to know which of their guys do things “the right way” consistently — which makes everyone better at their respective roles — and they value them.

Another thing teams see goes beyond what fans may view as straight-up performance. It’s performance relative to the role and expectation placed on a player.

Sometimes in training camp a player will be asked to prove he can play a more defensive role. Maybe the team knows the player is good offensively, but their top six or top nine is all accounted for, and the only way this player can make the team is by showing he can play a different role. In an instance like this, that player’s statistical output would be of no importance to the team.

This can happen season-long in the AHL. If an NHL team is stacked at center and needs a winger, they may ask their AHL team’s best center to learn the wing. If the NHL team needs penalty killers, maybe a player almost ready to make the leap gets taken off the power play so they can get more shorthanded minutes and learn to penalty kill.

We can judge a player’s performance, and that’s obviously important. But knowing why a player is given their respective minutes isn’t something most are privy to.

And lastly, it’s tough to know how much of a player’s afforded opportunity is status-driven. Opportunity within an organization is not necessarily handed out on merit at training camp. Teams do not want walk-ons out-performing their coveted draft picks, as vehemently as they’ll deny that. Scouts and managers are too proud, and too defensive of their own jobs, to let themselves appear to have made a mistake if two guys are close enough skill-wise.

Sometimes promises are made to get players to sign. Sometimes deals have to be made with agents. Sometimes compromise has to be made internally. These bits of information aren’t available at the lower paygrades, but there’s no doubt they effect who sticks and who doesn’t, and most of that stuff won’t ever come anywhere near the fans. It’s just the politics of the internal machine.

When teams are making these decisions, it’s hard to really calibrate how much any of these behind-the-scenes factors matter. The reality is, you want the best players, black and white, cut and dried.
Monahan is 22—he celebrates his birthday on Oct. 12. Gaudreau is 24, born in August 1993, about 14 months after Jagr celebrated his second Stanley Cup championship with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Flames have tried a revolving cast of wingers on their top line ever since Jiri Hudler was traded away to Florida, after winning the 2015 Lady Byng Trophy as the NHL’s most gentlemanly player, and it looks as if they’ll stay, for the moment, with Micheal Ferland. But Hudler was magical playing with the two—a heady, smart hockey player, who created space on the ice for Monahan and Gaudreau. Physically, Hudler is the exact opposite of Jagr—a compact 5-foot-10, 183 pounds, compared to the 6-foot-3 Jagr, who was always able to fend checkers off with his enormous wingspan. Even at his advanced age, Jagr found ways of protecting the puck until his linemates—most recently, Aleksandr Barkov and Jonathan Huberdeau—found the seams in the defence. The hope in Calgary is that he can do the same with whoever he plays with, and that he is the catalyst—for this season anyway—in propelling the Flames into the playoffs.

The one worrisome factor might be Jagr’s recent playoff results. He hasn’t won a championship since his second NHL season. In 2013, the Bruins picked him up from Dallas at the end of another lockout-shortened season and in 22 playoff games, Jagr picked up 10 assists, but no goals. In his last trip to the playoffs, with Florida in the spring of 2016, Jagr had two assists in six games. It means his last playoff goal came with the 2012 Flyers, the year they were eliminated in the second round.

The year he spent in Dallas by the way, his coach was Glen Gulutzan, currently in his second season behind the Flames’ bench. Jagr scored 14 goals and 26 points in 34 games for a Stars’ team that wasn’t going to make the playoffs—hence the move to Boston as a rental.

Still, there is a personal connection there and maybe that tipped the balance, Gulutzan knows what he’s getting; and Jagr does, too.

Jagr, at this stage of his career, is a mythical, larger-than-life figure and his presence could be galvanizing in the Flames’ dressing room. Jagr enters the season fourth on the all-time games played list (1,711), with Gordie Howe, at 1,767, the all-time leader, followed by Mark Messier (1,756) and Ron Francis (1,731). Accordingly, Jagr needs to get into 56 games this season to tie Howe, and 57 pass him. This will be his 24th NHL season; Howe and Chris Chelios played 26.

Jagr’s commitment to off-ice training is legendary, and it is what has kept him in the game—that, and the joy he rediscovered in hockey after his time in Russia. Jagr came into the league, without a word of English, and was mentored in the early days in Pittsburgh by a veteran Czech player, Jiri Hrdina. He had a childlike playfulness to him in those early days; and that quality seemed to be lost in the mid-part of his career, which featured three tough seasons with the Capitals.

I saw him for the first time way back in the fall of 1989, when I was in the Czech Republic for a week, travelling with the Flames. One day, we made a trip up to the Czech training centre to interview Robert Reichel, who’d been drafted by the Flames the year before. At that point, Reichel, Bobby Holik and Jagr were the Czech Republic equivalent of the Kid Line, and their best hope to match the great young Russian line of the era, Sergei Fedorov, Alex Mogilny and Pavel Bure. The political winds were shifting in Eastern Europe at that point, and smart NHL GMs understood that these players would eventually make their way to North America. The only question was when. The next summer, Pittsburgh drafted him fifth overall—and Jagr was, after about half a season of growing pains, the perfect complement on a Penguins’ team that had his hero, Mario Lemieux, leading the way.

In every one of his recent NHL stops, Jagr has received a key card for the building, so that he can work out at odd hours. Occasionally, he is discovered in the weight room in the middle of the night. Just how much is left in the tank remains to be seen. Florida, in the midst of an organizational reset, chose to move on. They didn’t see Jagr as a fit—instead choosing to recruit an experienced Russian, Evgenii Dadonov, to play on the top line with Barkov and Huberdeau, which left Jagr unemployed and looking for work.

For a time last week, it looked as if Jagr might just give up his pursuit of an NHL job and play for Kladno, his hometown team, again. Then on Saturday, the outlook brightened. Jagr tweeted out a picture of his cat, a bottle of tequila, and a smattering of $20 bills scattered about, writing: “Look, I just tell my cat, there is a chance to play in the NHL this year”—and he ended the tweet with three happy-face emojis. It kept Jagr off the ice this past weekend, to ponder any final NHL options that were presented. Calgary made an offer, figuring: Here goes nothing. Well, why not? If the greatest player in the universe, Connor McDavid, is plying his trade three hours north of the Stampede City, then why can’t they turn to one of the greatest of all time to add even more spice to the rapidly improving prospects for this year’s Battle of Alberta.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.03.2017

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The Athletic / The Kid at 30: Sidney Crosby talks about holding off a dynamic generation of young NHL stars

Josh Yohe 21 hours ago

The rest of the locker room was empty, with the Penguins’ regulars completing a practice and departing with the regular season only days away.

Then walked in Sidney Crosby, sweat dripping off his face, another of his legendary post-practice, on-ice workouts in the books.

He’s still atop the hockey world, and his regime has never changed. But he’s 30 now, and surely his body is weary from consecutive Stanley Cup runs. He hears Connor McDavid’s footsteps loud and clear, his seat atop hockey’s throne threatened for the first time in a decade.

Is Crosby’s time as “best player in the world” about to end? He hasn’t a clue, but those around him seem to think otherwise.

Crosby first saw McDavid play five years ago, during the lockout, when the Oilers superstar was an underage phenomenon with the Erie Otters, who play two hours north of Pittsburgh. The Penguins captain acknowledged then that “he reminds me a lot of myself.”

Five years later, Crosby remains impressed with the 20-year-old rising star.

“I think Connor is an unbelievable hockey player,” Crosby said. “And I know he’ll keep getting better and better.”

It’s reasonable to wonder if McDavid’s presence — he did outlast Crosby for the Art Ross and Hart trophies last season — could provide some motivation for Crosby. After all, Crosby has won everything. There are the three Stanley Cup championships, two Olympic gold medals, the two Conn Smythe trophies, the unforgettable World Cup of Hockey performance, the two Art Ross trophies and two Hart trophies.

He may need motivation at this point, and it may come in the form of maintaining his perch.

Many believe that Crosby’s most recent playoff brilliance vaulted him into a group with the greatest players of all-time. There’s literally nothing left for him to accomplish. Rather, now, he battles time while hoping to add some more championships to his resume.

Does McDavid’s presence push him?

“Well,” Crosby said, “I’m pretty motivated by nature. To be honest, I just want to keep winning. That’s the most important thing to me. There are so many motivating factors for me, anyway, and why I play the game. I’m just trying to be my best. People can form their own opinion (about the
world's best player). I'm just trying to be the best player I can be. That's all."

History is working against Crosby remaining atop the game for much longer. A look at the all-time greats says so:

• Wayne Gretzky was widely considered to be overtaken by Mario Lemieux as the world's best player by the late 1980s, before Gretzky had turned 30.
• Lemieux went into semi-retirement at age 31.
• Steve Yzerman, Crosby's childhood idol, only scored more than 30 goals in a season twice after turning 30.
• Peter Forsberg, who stylistically was quite similar to Crosby, saw his numbers begin to drop significantly at 31, although injuries played a role in his decline.

So why will Crosby be different? And why won't McDavid — or even Auston Matthews — overtake him soon?

“Sid’s a little different,” said Bill Guerin, the Penguins assistant general manager who was Crosby’s right wing during the team’s 2009 Stanley Cup triumph.

Guerin even made something of a prediction.

“He’s going to be better at this age,” Guerin said. “You’ll see. You become more mature as a player, more mature as a person. He’s not old by any stretch yet. At this age, you have figured out so many things about this league. And then you have to consider that he’s so much smarter than most players. You start using your mind so much more at this age, and his mind is better than anyone else’s. The physical skills are all still there, just like they were a long time ago. And they’ll still be there. And he’s so much smarter, I think you’ll see him at his best for a long time.”

Guerin bristles when he speaks of the criticism Crosby received two years ago during his curious slump.

“Everyone then thought he was on the decline a couple of years ago,” Guerin said. “Everyone was saying it. It was so ridiculous, all the things I heard. I guess he wasn’t done.”

Since then, Crosby’s been on an utterly dominant run.

His very first NHL linemate isn’t surprised.

“I’ve seen guys hit that decline around 30,” said Mark Recchi, who played into his 40s. “Sometimes there are guys who don’t take great care of themselves in their late 20s, and when they hit their early 30s, yeah, it happens. But Sid? Oh my. His skills are right where they’ve always been, right when he was 18. I think he’s stronger than he’s ever been, to be honest. He still moves like he always has, and I think he’ll be better down low than ever because he’s so strong. Everything about him on the ice right now is awesome. Everything.”

Key words: “Down low.” Crosby has played much closer to the net since Mike Sullivan took over as head coach. In what isn’t a coincidence, he’s scored 74 goals in 123 regular-season games under Sullivan. Looking to shoot more on the power play, he notched 14 goals on the man advantage last season, the best total since his rookie season.

Much like Jaromir Jagr, if Crosby’s speed and one-on-one ability finally begins to fade — and it will, eventually — he can still rely on his unparalleled strength to dominate down low.

Crosby insists his body feels as good as ever and that age hasn’t caught up to him.

“I feel really good, actually,” he said. “I feel great.”

Crosby had a prophetic moment during the 2012-13 lockout. Then, he was 25 and had missed 101 games during the previous two seasons because of a life-altering bout with concussions.

On a quiet day at the Penguins’ old practice facility during the lockout, Crosby suggested that all the games he had missed might help preserve his legs into his 30s. He actually compared himself — half jokingly, half seriously — to a race horse that had dealt with injuries in younger years, only to thrive in its later racing years.

Five years later, the future has arrived and his legs look as good as ever.

“I do everything I can to be in the best condition I can be in,” he said. “If my body feels any different right now, it’s because of all the playoff games we’ve been through in the last two years. But it has nothing to do with my age. I feel great.”

While Crosby’s game appears very much at peak level, his production might even receive a boost this year because of a very special linemate. Jake Guentzel exploded onto the scene last season for the Penguins and found himself as a legitimate candidate for the postseason’s MVP award as he led the playoffs with 13 goals.

He and Crosby have been inseparable this training camp following practice, as they partake in drills together. Their chemistry last season was impossible to ignore.

“I wouldn’t just kind of know where the other person is going to be,” Guentzel said.

Crosby’s teammates have a pretty good idea of where he’ll be. They expect him to be on top of the game for a while longer.

Justin Schultz has played with Crosby and McDavid.

“They’re both incredible,” he said. “And they both have pretty similar personalities. Sid’s just, you know … it’s Sid. There’s something special about him, something different.”

Crosby is probably a better leader than he’s ever been, too. There once was a time when he didn’t speak much in the locker room, even though he’s been the captain for more than a decade. He’s quiet by nature, but he talks a little more now.

Maybe it’s a 30 thing.

“If I wouldn’t say he talks a ton,” Bryan Rust said with a laugh. “But, when he talks, we all listen. I can tell you that much.”

Crosby can listen, too. He hears a special generation of young players knocking down doors, looking to overtake him.

“‘I can’t control who people think is the best,’” he said. “‘I just want to be the best player I can be, the best teammate I can be. And that’s what I’ll try to do.’

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The Athletic / The Most Interesting Men on the NHL Waiver Wire: Oct. 2

Jonathan Willis
13 hours ago

It is a busy day in NHL waiver land, with 36 different players putting in appearances. Given how close we are to the league’s Tuesday roster finalization deadline, most of these players are either final cuts or the closest thing to them, so there’s quality out there, too.

Let’s get into it.
Curtis McKenzie, LW, Stars

McKenzie finally jumped to the NHL full-time last season, but a crowded depth chart in Dallas means he doesn’t get to stay there with the Stars. He’s a perfectly respectable fourth-line player, though: he’s physical, he kills penalties, he chips in offensively and last season he was part of a line that did pretty well both by shot and goal metrics. At 26, he’s in the prime of his career, and his $700,000 cap hit is easily digestible.

There’s no high-level upside here, but I can guarantee that worse players will hold down NHL depth jobs this season.

Matt Read, RW, Flyers

The thing most working against Read is his $3.625 million cap hit. He’s had a tough few seasons, but he’s still brings a lot to an NHL roster. He contributes offensively, he plays a physical game, he kills penalties; there’s a lot here to like. He’s undeniably overpaid, though, and very few teams can afford to absorb that cap hit without sending money the other way at this point in the season.

Still, Philadelphia is obviously capable of carrying his contract, so why is he on waivers if he’s still a useful, versatile, NHL player? As Charlie O’Connor explains, the Flyers have their reasons, and his appearance on the wire today does not necessarily mean that he’s AHL-bounded.

Kerby Rychel, LW, Maple Leafs

It wasn’t all that long ago that Rychel was considered a blue-chip prospect. The 19th overall pick in the 2013 draft was a two-time 40-goal man in junior. That combined with an imposing 6-foot-1, 213-pound frame and a willingness to use it made him extremely interesting to NHL teams, despite concerns about his skating and defensive play.

He’s on waivers today because of difficulties translating that potential to the pro game. Rychel did score a career-high 19 goals for the Marlies last year, but with 11 of them coming on the power play it’s fair to question how much he’d be able to produce at 5-on-5. He still has a path to the NHL, but it’s more likely to be in a bottom-six than top-six role. Is that enough upside to convince a team to put him on its major-league roster today?

Malcolm Subban, G, Bruins

Another famous prospect and first-round pick (24th overall in 2012), Subban has played four AHL seasons and never had a save percentage below .911. This might make him seem like a no-brainer selection. Not only is there still some potential there, but those minor-league numbers suggest a player who can step into a backup role today.

The wrinkle is that Subban has been outperformed by his goaltending partner for three straight years, first by journeyman Jeremy Smith and then by fellow prospect Zane McIntyre. Both Smith and McIntyre were lit up in decently long NHL cameos last year, so perpetually being outperformed by them isn’t a great sign. Betting that Subban is capable of holding down a backup job now would be a gamble, and no coach is going to thank a GM for giving him a No. 2 he can’t count on. Claiming Subban on waivers means giving him that job or running three goalies, which is even worse.

In Brief

Calgary Flames: LW Luke Gazdik, RW Garnet Hathaway. A pure enforcer, Gazdik has eight points and 206 penalty minutes over a 147-game NHL career. Hathaway is a little more promising; he worked his way into a career-high 26 NHL games last season and brings lots of energy and some two-way ability to a roster spot. He’s still a limited player, though, with a single goal through 40 career contests in the majors.

Carolina Hurricanes: LW Phillip Di Giuseppe. Di Giuseppe had a promising rookie season in which he played a high-energy style and put up 17 points in 41 games. His sophomore campaign was far less impressive, unfortunately. Although still reliably energetic, Di Giuseppe’s offensive game disappeared and he steadily played his way out of the league. It’s hard not to wonder whether multiple concussions helped take him off-track.

Chicago Blackhawks: LW Tomas Jurco, RW Jordin Tootoo, G Jean-Francois Berube. These are all familiar names to NHL fans. At his best, Jurco provides both a physical element and scoring touch, but offense has been hard to find for three seasons now and teams are only so patient. Tootoo has played 723 games, mostly as a fourth-liner; the surprise here isn’t that he’s on waivers but that he’s been able to keep himself in the league through his mid-30s. Berube has spent the last few years as a waiver concern for his respective teams, but his numbers haven’t been great at any level and it’s actually a little hard to understand what makes him stand out from all the other fringe-NHL goalies who show up on the wire every year.

Colorado Avalanche: LW Gabriel Bourque. Bourque is closing in on 250 career NHL games, but only six of them came last season. Instead, for the first time since 2010-11, he found himself spending nearly the full year in the AHL. The undersized sparkplug is now 27, and at serious risk of being written off as a journeyman depth option.

Columbus Blue Jackets: RD John Ramage. Ramage has evolved into a pretty decent depth defenceman over the years. Despite a modest frame he’s reliably physical, and he’s clearly worked on adding offensive elements to his game, going from just one point as an AHL rookie to back-to-back 25-point campaigns. He’s now 26, though, and will need to catch some breaks to have even a few years in a third-pairing role in the majors.

Dallas Stars: LD Patrick Nemeth. The Stars have long had a pile of defensive prospects and been loath to waive any of them. They appear to once again be keeping eight defenders, but this time they couldn’t find room to keep Nemeth off limits to their opponents. That may be a blessing in disguise: assuming he clears waivers, Nemeth can count on steady minutes to work on his game for the first time in ages. My guess is that he does. He’s a big defensive defender with some good qualities but he’s somewhat one-dimensional and there are a lot of players available today.

Detroit Red Wings: LW David Booth, RD Ryan Sproul. Booth has always been a useful two-way player, but his offense has declined considerably from the height of his career. He scored 30 goals in 2008-09, the year before that infamous Mike Richards hit, but when he left the league in 2015 he was down at fourth-line scoring levels. His numbers in Russia last year don’t look great and he turns 33 next month. I wanted to take a longer look at Sproul, a big righty who has always had decent AHL numbers, but he’s coming off a serious knee injury and turns 25 this season so there’s a better-than-even chance he clears waivers.

Minnesota Wild: RD Ryan Murphy. Carolina finally gave up on their 12th overall selection from the 2011 draft, and he couldn’t stick with the Wild either. A wonderfully gifted offensive defenceman, Murphy has manifestly failed to develop the other qualities necessary to hold down a regular NHL job. I’ve always been intrigued by the idea of keeping someone like Murphy around as the seventh defenceman for a coach willing to run an 11 forward/seven defenceman lineup, because he’s the kind of right-shooting power play specialist that can be hard to find.

Montreal Canadiens: C Byron Froese, LW Andreas Martinsen. Froese is a tremendous minor-league scorer, but couldn’t translate it to the NHL numbers, but he’s coming off a serious knee injury and turns 25 this season so there’s a better-than-even chance he clears waivers.

New Jersey Devils: LW Brian Gibbons, LD Brian Strait. It’s been interesting watching Ray Shero lean on players he knows from Pittsburgh in New Jersey, and both of these skaters fall into that category. In the right situation, Gibbons can produce, but the undersized 29-year-old had just 36 points over a full AHL season a year ago. Strait spent three years with the Isles as a No. 7 defenceman, but fell out of the league last year and these days is a recall rather than opening night option.
New York Islanders: RW Steve Bernier, RW Stephen Gionta. Between these two, the Islanders put nearly 1,000 games of NHL experience on waivers this morning. Bernier came in just shy of the point-per-game mark in the minors last year, while Gionta mostly stuck in the NHL as an end-of-roster energy guy/defensive specialist. Both are totally adequate fill-in pieces, but over 30 and vulnerable because of it.

San Jose Sharks: LW Brandon Bollig, LW Brandon Mashinter, G Troy Grosenick. Bollig and Mashinter are both serviceable as physical fourth-line players, but they’re also older and coming off full seasons in the AHL so there’s little reason to think either gets picked up. Grosenick had a stunning AHL season last year after three forgettable campaigns, but it’s hard not to be skeptical of him given that he’s a 28-year-old with a checkered history.

St. Louis Blues: G Jordan Binnington. Binnington had decent AHL numbers last season, but was eclipsed by fellow prospects Pheonix Copley and Ville Husso on a great Chicago Wolves team. He’s a reasonable third-string goalie, but as a prospect is less appealing than either Subban or Jared Coreau, who cleared waivers yesterday.

Tampa Bay Lightning: C Cory Conacher. Tampa has had great success with undersized forwards, including Conacher. They shipped him out midway through a great rookie season in 2012-13, getting Ben Bishop back in the deal. Conacher returned to his first NHL organization last season and was great for AHL-Syracuse and fine during a major-league recall.

Toronto Maple Leafs: LW Colin Greening, C Chris Mueller, C Ben Smith, RD Vincent LoVerde, G Garret Sparks. The Leafs may be one of the youngest NHL teams, but the Marlies are going to be old. Greening and Smith have had fairly long careers as major-league depth guys, while Mueller and LoVerde have been minor-league mainstays for years. Sparks is the most interesting of the five because he’s still a prospect of some importance. A stint as Toronto’s backup in 2015-16 was underwhelming, but he went 21-9-0 in the minors last year with a .922 save percentage.

Vancouver Canucks: LD Andrey Pedan. Pedan has never been the sum of his parts. The 6-foot-5 defender loves to play physical hockey, can hammer the puck, and has an impressive top gear, too. It looked like he might be putting it together with Vancouver’s farm team in 2015-16, when he had 21 points in 45 games and earned a major-league recall, but he regressed badly last season and fell down the Canucks depth chart. He’s 24 and teams tend to be more patient with both big players and defencemen, but even so he needs a big year.

Vegas Golden Knights: RW Teemu Pulkkinen. Pulkkinen bounced around last year, and it’s easy to understand why. He’s a somewhat one-dimensional player, but the dimension he brings is goal-scoring. He just hasn’t done it enough to stick in the majors, and after a disappointing half-season in the AHL last year he’ll need to work his way back into contention for an NHL job.

Washington Capitals: RW Anthony Peluso. Another pure enforcer, Peluso has 14 points and 209 penalty minutes over 142 career NHL games.

Winnipeg Jets: RW J.C. Lipon. Lipon is a nasty little agitator, and most coaches have a soft spot in their heart for that player-type when he dresses for them. The question is whether he can score enough to win an NHL depth job. He had great AHL numbers in 2015-16, but his scoring pace fell off last season and he’ll need to improve it if he’s going to stick.

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The Athletic / Pronman: Standouts from the USHL Fall Classic

Corey Pronman

16 hours ago

This past weekend I was in Pittsburgh for the USHL Fall Classic, a showcase event where every USHL team competed. Over a hundred NHL, junior and college scouts in attendance and plenty of notable draft eligible and drafted players were on the ice.

Here are some of my takeaways:

Noah Cates, C, Omaha (Philadelphia): Cates wasn’t a standout for me when I watched Omaha, but you saw flashes of why Philadelphia picked him in the fifth-round last June. He possesses great IQ that allows him to do a lot even without dynamic speed or hands, the former of which is more of a glaring weakness. He works hard and displays versatility in terms of which situations he can play, plus he can slot at center or wing.
Nate Clurman, D, Tri-City (Colorado): Clurman has only played in a handful of high level hockey games outside prep school so it was interesting to see how he handled the pace. He was just ok in that regard, looking behind the play a few times and being pressured a little easy. On a tools level though he's 6-foot-2, skates quite well for his size and showed competence handling the puck. He's not a top-end guy but I left with him on my radar.

Mathias Emilio Pettersen, C, Muskegon: I was very impressed by the long-time internet wonder boy. For those who are not prospect nerds, he has had a continuously active HFBoards thread dating back to 2006. In an interview on the weekend he also admitted he used to read it when he was younger. His skill and offensive IQ stood out to me. He makes such quick and proper reads on top of being able to execute difficult plays. He's small but he's on my NHL radar this season as a potential second or third round pick.

Jachym Kondelik, C, Muskegon: Kondelik has improved his skating a lot, thus elevating himself to a legitimate NHL prospect. He was one of the Czech Republic's top players at the under-18s last spring. He's not a dynamic player but at 6-foot-7 just getting around ok, and showing quality skill with the puck will draw attention.

Tyler Madden, C, Central Illinois: The third overall pick in the most recent USHL draft had a good showing last weekend. He's small but highly skilled and dictated puck possession when he was on the ice. I would like to see an extra gear in his skating, especially at his size, but I do think he's still worth monitoring for the NHL draft.

Nick Perbix, D, Omaha (Tampa Bay): Perbix was an intriguing sixth round pick by Tampa last season as a second year draft eligible player. He's a great skater for a 6-foot-5 defenseman. He's a smart puck mover and quicker, his footwork is great, he can really shoot the puck and he has had a continuously active HFBoards thread dating back to 2006. He's big, athletic and while he doesn't have a ton of structure in his game you see that he has the IQ to get to pucks with more development. He's also a player who wears his emotions on his sleeve, as after a goal in a close game that would have been tough to stop he tried to break his stick over the top of the net.

Other prospect tidbits:

In Swift Current of the WHL, the line of Tyler Steenbergen (Arizona), Aleksi Heponiemi (FLA) and Glenn Gawdin (previously STL now unaffiliated) could be the best in the CHL this season. Combined, they have 29 points in their first 3 games. Heponiemi is the driving force on that line. He's such a gifted playmaker who puts his team in positions to succeed, although Steenbergen is highly skilled too and knows how to finish chances.

Alexei Toropchenko (STL) had a good NHL camp and has carried it to the OHL where he has been fantastic for Guelph. He's such a good skater for a 6-foot-3 forward and plays with great intensity on each shift. His skill isn't high-end, but he knows what to do with the puck, and early on is generating over 4 shots a game and scoring 2 points a game in a very small sample.

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The Athletic / LeBrun: One-on-one with Panthers coach Bob Boughner on expectations, analytics and more

Pierre LeBrun

19 hours ago

Bob Boughner was named the 15th head coach in Florida Panthers history on June 12. Boughner was Dale Tallon's pick after a thorough coaching search following the team's failure to make the post-season last year. It also came after a turbulent year which saw Tallon put back in coaching search following the team's failure to make the post-season last year. It also comes after a turbulent year which saw Tallon put back in charge as GM. It was important to Tallon to get a young coach on the rise for a young Panthers team which has impressive talent but also needs molding. Boughner, 46, gets his first crack at being an NHL head coach after years as owner and head coach of the OHL's Windsor Spitfires, and the last two seasons as assistant coach in San Jose.

I caught up with the former NHL defenceman and two-time CHL coach of the year on the eve of the NHL season:

LEBRUN: Bob, you're a rookie NHL head coach but far from a rookie in hockey by any other definition; you've certainly worked your way toward this opportunity. You've been to a million training camps over your life as a player, junior head coach and assistant coach in the NHL, how different is it to finally run the ship at this level?

BOUGHER: It is different, yes. I've thought a lot since the day I got hired about my opening remarks to the team. I was excited about it, and anxious to get the first day over with and get the system and plan rolling out. So far so good. There's a lot more responsibility as far as being the head coach when it comes to media, having your staff working in the right ways, you're overseeing everything from the training staff to injury reporting to travel, there's a lot more responsibility that goes into it but I'm enjoying it.

LEBRUN: You were a head coach for a long time in Windsor and more recently an assistant coach in the NHL with the Sharks; what do you draw from those experiences that can help you now?
BOUGHNER: On the business side, I learned a lot in Windsor. I felt comfortable behind the bench. My experiences in San Jose obviously helped me. Pete (DeBoer, Sharks head coach) was a fantastic guy to work for and I learned a lot from him. I stepped back and I watched him a lot, knowing in the back of my head this is something I wanted to do. I just took a lot of time with Pete and asked him about a lot of situations. There’s things that he taught me: don’t confuse the situation, be very clear, be transparent, be honest. He would always tell me that even guys in the NHL need to be taught on a daily basis and the structure has to be reinforced every day. And he’s right. I’ve taken a page out of his book a bit that way.

LEBRUN: Coaches are always evolving but when you talk hockey with people, you’ll often say, ‘That’s a Ken Hitchcock team,’ or ‘that’s a Claude Julien team.’ Guys have their calling card as veteran coaches. What is a Bob Boughner team in the NHL?

BOUGHNER: There’s a couple of ways to describe it. I think it’s going to be aggressive, a fast-paced kind of game, people are going to notice there won’t be a lot of East-West hockey. It’s going to be a lot of North-South, put pucks behind people, getting on the chase and puck recoveries. We’re going to work hard away from the puck, we’re going to get on top of you and try to take every inch of ice we can. We want to look to limit entries, we want to be a hard-defending team on entries. Hopefully we’ll be one of the better defensive teams in the league. I’m a defence-first coach. I understand obviously that you got to give guys their creativity, but for me, everything happens with good defence. So I guess that’s how I’d describe my team.

LEBRUN: You’ve got an addition in Evgenii Dadonov that we haven’t seen on this side of the ocean in a few years. What can we expect from him and what do you think his adjustment will be like?

BOUGHNER: First of all, he seems like a great person. He’s always got a smile on his face at the rink, he’s always working hard. He really wants to prove people wrong. He came here as a kid and I think wasn’t ready for it yet. He went back to the KHL. Now he’s back and I think he’s got something to prove. That’s great. Putting him on that line with (Jonathan) Huberdeau and (Aleksander) Barkov — it’s been awesome since Day 1. And I think Hubie and Barky are pumped to have a guy like that. He’s a playmaker, he’s got some speed to his game, he just really controls the pace of the play.

LEBRUN: When you look at the Atlantic Division and where this team fits in in terms of contending, I think a lot of us look at you guys as a team that can get in...

BOUGHNER: Yes, that’s our goal. People talk about setting goals, like winning the Stanley Cup, we don’t talk about that, our goal is to make the playoffs. People saw last year what happens, once you get in, it’s anybody’s game. I think we have a lot of good parts. One thing for this team is that it really has to stay healthy. They haven’t had a chance to show what they can do. If this group is healthy, from the goaltender on out, we’ll be a tough team to play against. We’ll win our fair share of games. But for me, as the new guy coming in here, I wanted to change the identity, the culture, getting guys playing the right way. I think the rest will take care of itself. There’s enough talent here to be a playoff team for sure.

LEBRUN: Clearly you impressed Dale Tallon when you first interviewed. What was that meeting like and what do you think you did to impress him?

BOUGHNER: I’ve known Dale along the way a little bit. When I sat down with him, I made a pretty comprehensive package when I walked in there, I basically talked about his team, things I would change, I talked about personnel, depth charts, had video to support everything. I really did my homework. I think that impressed him. But secondly, he asked me what would be the most important thing I could bring to the team and I’ve always felt (as a player) I was a leader and culture guy in the room, so I was flat out straight with him. I told him I didn’t think the team (last season) thought it could win every night, I thought they were inconsistent. One night you had a high-flying team, the next night you sit back and let
When that will be is anyone’s guess as the Flames have yet to make any sort of announcement.

But that didn’t stop the players on what would be his ninth NHL squad from grinning ear-to-ear.

After all, of all the stars in the NHL, the 45-year-old Hall of Fame shoe-in is the only true rock star.

"To put it in perspective – he came in the league and I was five years away from even being a thought," chuckled 19-year-old Flames winger Matthew Tkachuk, whose father, Keith, was drafted the same year as Jagr, 1990.

"It's crazy to think about. He was winning MVPs and Cups before I was born. It's an exciting day for us to have a player like that come in and have as much knowledge as he does. Personally I'm going to get as much as I can out of having him on the team. We've all heard the stories about what a legend he is and I'm excited to hear them first hand."

Of all the reasons it appears GM Brad Treliving has finally pulled the trigger on Jagr after a summer of heavy contemplation, Tkachuk and young teammates like Sam Bennett underlined what may be two of the biggest upsides: the excitement it has created in the group and the biggest risk in it all is that he disrupts the leadership in the room, which is something Treliving likely discussed at length with all stakeholders.

Having a coach who dealt with Jagr before helps in terms of vouching for the legend’s character, no doubt.

Next it’s just a matter of getting that sizeable posterior of his in town so the real excitement can begin.

"I might be a little star-struck at first but if I do get the opportunity to play with him I’ll definitely try to take advantage of it. He's got all the tools and is so strong down low – it's something I can work with him on."

The biggest risk in it all is that he disrupts the leadership in the room, which is something Treliving likely discussed at length with all stakeholders.

"It’s pretty cool for a lot of us," said captain Mark Giordano, unable to wipe the grin off his face following a week in which all the talk in Calgary revolved around the team’s lackluster pre-season and the controversy surrounding the team’s arena impasse.

"He’s one of the greatest players of all time. He’ll bring in a little spark and bringing him in adds another dimension to your team."

Like the possibility he might be a compliment to Gaudreau and Monahan on the top line. He may also be the perfect third liner alongside Bennett, armed with the capability of being able to chip in on the power play as he has hundreds of times.

"That would be amazing," said Bennett of the possibility he just got a new linemate.

"He can be a little different – he does his own thing and it has been working for a long time so he knows what he’s doing and what works for him. It might seem a little different than everyone else but it’s his business."

Fact is, at $1 million, as reported by Sportsnet’s Elliotte Friedman, there’s very little pressure for Jagr to contribute on the ice as he did last year with 16 goals and 46 points.

That would be a massive bonus.

He brings so many other things, including a return of the Calgary-based Travelling Jagrs who were almost as happy as the players when news broke of the deal.

"You're bringing in a guy who’s been one of the best players in the league for a long time and he’s still really effective, still really hard to play against," Flames captain Mark Giordano told reporters in Calgary. "He protects the puck so well and makes so many good plays down low."
Winger Michael Frolik has some experience playing on the same team as Jagr. The two have represented the Czech Republic together at various international tournaments over the years. "He’s very big in Czech. Anywhere he walks or goes everybody knows him," Frolik said. "He’s like a god to Czechs. I think if he runs for President people would vote for him."

Flames head coach Glen Gulutzan knows first hand what Jagr can bring to the table. Gulutzan was the head coach for the Stars during the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season when Jagr called Dallas home. "I think the biggest thing is you look at his age and just what he can do," Gulutzan said. "He’s physically a specimen but his hockey IQ is off the charts and that’s what allows him to be behind Wayne Gretzky [for No. 2 all-time] in scoring. It’s hard to explain some of the things he does. There’s some ‘wow’ moments in watching him play."

Gulutzan spoke on the phone to Jagr yesterday. He worked with him and admired the player when he was a member of the Dallas Stars.

— Roger Millions (@RogMillions) October 2, 2017

This isn’t the first time Flames general manager Brad Treliving has bolstered his team’s roster at the 11th hour. One year ago Kris Versteeg was inked to a contract on the eve of the regular season.

"Having a guy like Jaromir come in at this time of the season shows that we want to have the pieces in place to try to win and we don’t want to wait and we’re excited about the challenge ahead," Versteeg said. "They obviously gave us the pieces and now it’s about going out there with the product we have and trying to make it happen. It’s really up to us now."

Jagr, 45, was selected fifth overall in the 1990 NHL Draft. 14 spots ahead of a young American forward from Malden Catholic High School named Keith Tkachuk—the father of Jagr’s new teammate (and potential linemate) Matthew Tkachuk.

"To kind of put it in perspective, he came into the league and I was five years away from even being a thought," the young Tkachuk said. "It’s crazy to think about. He was winning MVPs before I was born, winning Cups before I was born."

Sportsnet.ca / The reality of drafting teenagers: All NHL prospects are different

Mark Spector
October 2, 2017, 6:42 PM

It is wholly unfair, and you’d think we would learn.

But this week opens with open talk around the National Hockey League about whether Olli Joulævi was a mistake, or if Jesse Puljujarvi is a bust. Will Curtis Lazar ever play? And what about Toronto’s Kasperi Kapanen, the 22nd-overall pick in the 2014 draft?

If Kailer Yamamoto — the 22nd-overall pick in 2017 — can make the Edmonton Oilers, does that mean Sami’s son isn’t ever going to play?

The reality is this is what happens when we draft 18-year-old players. Some turn into Matthew Tkachuk, who made Calgary and had an impactful 18-year-old season, while others are like teammate Sam Bennett, who was drafted higher by the Flames in 2014 and (hopefully) will begin to have a meaningful impact on the Flames roster this winter.

In the 2016 draft, Auston Matthews and Patrik Laine were thought to be clearly a level above the rest, and that school of thought has borne itself out. But while No. 3 pick Pierre-Luc Dubois finally appears ready to make Columbus after a shift from centre to left wing, No. 4 pick Puljujarvi was sent to AHL Bakersfield on Sunday by the Oilers.

He’s not a bust. He’s a six-foot-four 19-year-old trying to figure out the game after one season in North America.

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The two stud defencemen in that 2016 draft were Mikhail Sergachev and Joulevi. Today, Joulevi just isn’t ready for NHL prime time in Vancouver, while Sergachev has already been dealt and looks like he’ll play in Tampa this fall.

“We just feel he needs to continue to get stronger,” Canuck GM Jim Benning told the Vancouver Province. “We talked to him about the battles. He’s going to continue to work on those things. We’re going to be patient with him.

“We think he’s going to be the player we drafted — a real good NHL player for a long time. We just have to show patience with him.”

Benning also sent down young hopefuls Nikolay Goldobin, Jordan Subban and Anton Rodin. But Io and behold, Jake Virtanen — much maligned in Vancouver last season — arrived in great shape and looks ready for full-time employment in Vancouver. Sometimes there are lessons that must be learned, maturity that needs to be gained. All kids are different, right?

In Toronto, the Maple Leafs are counting on young players like Matthews, Mitchel Marner, William Nylander and Connor Brown. There may even be room on that roster for another sub-21-year-old player, even if the Leafs had one at camp.

In Columbus, Sonny Milano, the 16th-overall pick in the 2014 draft, looks like he’ll break camp with the team. So do Dubois, Gabriel Carlsson (No. 29 in 15), and the undrafted Markus Hannikainen — all appear to be making the cut on a very good Columbus team.
But the days of 18-year-olds making the Oilers were supposed to be gone. Well, perhaps no one informed Yamamoto of that.

“He doesn’t change his game,” Oilers head coach Todd McLellan said Monday. “A lot of 18- or 19-year-olds, they bring something to the table, but then they either get too safe or they get too risky. Yamamoto plays the game the same way night in, night out. He’s very intelligent, so you can trust him, whether it’s penalty kill, power play, in the D-zone.

“Trust is a big thing for young players when they enter the league. The coaching staff, they all have to trust him. I think Yamo has earned that.”

Then there’s Mark Jankowski in Calgary, the long-awaited 21st-overall pick from 2012 — the Jay Feaster era in Calgary. He was drafted as a high schooler, spent four years at Providence College, another year at AHL Stockton, and darned if he doesn’t look like a pretty decent prospect today.

“And he’s right about on schedule,” Flames head scout Tod Button told the Calgary Herald. “We talked it out, and it was a well-thought-out process. [Sean] Monahan was playing right away, then [Sam] Bennett was playing, then last year with [Matthew] Tkachuk. You had to have patience with [Jankowski].

“He wasn’t a guy who you’d just plug-and-play in two or three years. It would be four or five years.”

Of course, then there’s Lazar in Calgary ...

Can’t he hurry up a tad?

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Sportsnet.ca / The definitive ranking of the NHL’s top 23 defencemen over three seasons

Andrew Berkshire

October 2, 2017, 12:54 PM

Last year around this time, with the help of some smart people, I posted a series of articles ranking the top-20 NHL players at each position over the previous three seasons. We’re going to do the same thing this year, but change it up fairly significantly as well.

Like last year, the list will be limited to players who have participated in 2000-plus 5-on-5 minutes over the past three seasons in order to get an adequate sample size of play to draw from.

Like last year, this is a complicated task that requires outside input, and whenever I take on a project this large I like to rely a little on people smarter than myself. The framework of the rankings is built on the input I got last year from Dom Luszczyszyn, Steve Burtch, and Jonathan Willis, while this year I received additional input from Luszczyszyn again and Dominic Galamini, as well as the ideas of smart people like Manny Perry and Tyler Dellow.

Statistics for this project were collected from Sportlogiq, Natural Stat Trick, Puck IQ, Hockey Reference, NHL.com, and Luszczyszyn’s Game Score database. Each statistic was individually weighted in categories, scored as a percentile from the highest score at the position in order to award a score to each player.

This year for all forward positions I adjusted the categories slightly, taking five points from transition play and adding it to offense, while adding a new category for difficulty of minutes played that is applied as a multiplier to all categories. As such, the highest theoretical score would now be 125 points instead of 100 if a player were to be the best in the NHL at every single statistic while playing the toughest minutes in every category in the difficulty matrix, but no one scores that high so practically we’ll keep the numbers out of 100 even after the adjustment. The categories for defencemen have not changed, even though the weightings of statistics within them have, so it’s 25 points for offence, 40 points for transition play, and 35 points for defence.

The breakdown of points available for defencemen is weighted heavily towards transition, as that’s the area they have the most impact, with 25 points for offence, 40 points for transition, and 35 points for defensive play.

Also new this year is weighting season scores by how recent they are, using the same breakdown as Galamini does with his HERO charts; 22.2 per cent for 2014-15, 33.3 per cent for 2015-16, and 44.5 per cent for 2016-17.

Here are the statistics used in each category:

For offence: 5-on-5 and power-play goals, primary assists, secondary assists, scoring chances, high-danger scoring chances, scoring chances generated for teammates, shot attempts, passes to the slot completed, penalties drawn, and on-ice goals for relative to teammates per 60 minutes, and offensive zone pass completion rate.

For transition play: 5-on-5 outlet passes, stretch passes, controlled carries out of the defensive zone, neutral-zone passes, controlled entries into the offensive zone per 60 minutes, Corsi, and Corsi relative to teammates, and pass completion rates relative to teammates in the defensive and neutral zones.

For defence: 5-on-5 and short-handed loose-puck recoveries by zone, pass blocks, stick checks, body checks, penalties taken, and successful dump outs per 60 minutes, on-ice goals against relative to teammates, on-ice shot attempts against relative to teammates per 60 minutes, dump-out success rate relative to teammates, and turnover rates relative to teammates by zone.

For difficulty of minutes played: Puck IQ’s competition faced percentages, Game Score’s quality of competition, Game Score’s quality of teammates, PDO, offensive zone starts percentage, 5-on-5 time on ice, and overall time on ice.

With all that information out of the way, let’s get to the rankings. This year we’re adding a few extra, doing the top 23 at each position. For the defence position, 163 players qualified.

23. Jeff Petry

Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25


Total: 64.92/100

Playing behind Weber and Subban in Montreal has been great for Petry, as he soaks up slightly easier competition and dominates at both ends. While Petry’s defensive style does lead to him getting walked once in awhile, but you have to look at the forest for the trees, and his offensive impact is phenomenal.

Petry is an aggressive player without the puck, attacking puck carriers early to attempt to gain possession. That aggression can lead to him being beat, but his on-ice results are stellar, especially on the penalty kill where his mobility helps counteract the numbers disadvantage. Once he’s gained the puck, he’s a strong transition player that prefers to make short passes out of the zone, but struggles a little with success rates. Luckily his excellent skating allows him to move the puck out of danger with control when he has to.

22. Ryan Suter

Difficulty Matrix: 1.19/1.25

Offence: 13.54/25 | Transition: 29.18/40 | Defence: 22.26/35
There’s an effortlessness about Suter’s game that reminds me a little bit of Chris Pronger, specifically how he glides around the ice without ever looking like he’s expending much energy. Maybe he isn’t, since he’s able to play so much and maintain such a high level of play while taking on the second-toughest minutes of any defenceman the last three years.

Suter is a solid puck handler and playmaker, but his biggest strength is his transition game, not just because of his skating. Suter is a precise passer in the defensive and neutral zones. Defensively his skating allows him to be in great position at nearly all times, and as you might expect, his turnover rate in the defensive zone is very low.

19. Jaccob Slavin
Difficulty Matrix: 1.19/1.25
Offence: 15.70/25 | Transition: 25.94/40 | Defence: 23.44/35
Total: 65.08/100

Accounting for everything, no defenceman in the NHL has a tougher job than Oliver Ekman-Larsson. He doesn’t get much help in Arizona, and faces top competition every night. That may change this season as the Coyotes added some quality to their defensive group, but for the last three years Ekman-Larsson was sort of on an island.

He’s a stellar all-around, balanced defenceman who is good at pretty much everything, with specific standout strengths like a deceptive shot from the point and strong positioning. If he has a weakness, it’s completing passes in the defensive zone, but that could be an issue with so much pressure being applied to him.

20. Colton Parayko
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25
Offence: 15.74/25 | Transition: 27.02/40 | Defence: 22.59/35
Total: 65.35/100

The reason the Blues likely felt comfortable trading Kevin Shattenkirk, Colton Parayko has been incredible from the moment he entered the NHL, bringing a nice balance of play with and without the puck that gives St. Louis the ability to ice two first pairings on defence.

Parayko is a strong even-strength playmaker and play driver who creates a lot of offence for his team. He had a bit of a rough season transitionally last year, which may just come with the territory of a sophomore year playing tougher minutes. If he can adjust to a tougher job this season, his results should be even stronger.

18. Jared Spurgeon
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25
Total: 65.68/100

Underrated and underappreciated – maybe those things are related? – Spurgeon is known more as a strong offensive player, but he measures even better defensively and in transition. A large percentage of his offensive impact does come from his ability to move the puck up the ice and create opportunities for his teammates to play in the offensive zone.

Spurgeon isn’t the strongest in puck battles, so he contributes most on defence by being a support player to receive passes and exit the zone cleanly, and he boasts an extremely low turnover rate in every zone, leading to fewer high-danger chances against.

17. Kris Letang
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25
Offence: 15.76/25 | Transition: 27.06/40 | Defence: 23.49/35
Total: 66.31/100

Another player who’s known more for offence than anything else, Letang may have been one-dimensional at one time, but he’s a very rounded player as he enters his 30s. Injuries may have robbed us of almost half of Letang’s career since 2011, but the time that he has been healthy, he’s made the most of.

Letang is an incredible puck battler in his own zone, and since he’s the Penguins’ best puck-moving defenceman, he’s often the key to their transition game overall. Though the Penguins won the Stanley Cup without him, it’s not a coincidence that they were outshot consistently as they did it.

16. John Klingberg
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25
Offence: 19.36/25 | Transition: 27.30/40 | Defence: 19.71/35
Total: 66.36/100

Klingberg took a slight step back in his third season in Dallas, but remained very strong overall, and especially offensively. In the neutral and offensive zones, Klingberg is dynamic, and efficient, breaking opponents down with precise passing and dangerous pinches that create a lot of goals.

In the defensive zone though, Klingberg is prone to dangerous turnovers and he misses passes that can put his teammates on their heels. He makes up for it with his aggressive style, but it can be frustrating for his coach to watch someone so talented mess up so often.

15. Justin Faulk
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25
Total: 66.42/100

Despite a booming shot and scoring lots of goals, it’s the rest of Faulk’s game that’s really been moving the needle in recent years. He’s still prone to the odd horrible turnover, but he’s clearly worked hard to round out his game and become better defensively.

He’s been more aggressive in breaking up passing plays, which has led to some impressive success on the penalty kill, making him the current leader in the Hurricanes’ incredible defensive unit.

14. Seth Jones
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25
Offence: 11.22/25 | Transition: 30.45/40 | Defence: 25.41/35
Total: 67.09/100

When Seth Jones mentioned in an interview this off-season that his goal is to win a Norris one day, I raised my eyebrow a bit because I didn’t
think he was in that tier of players. He's not quite there, but he's much closer than I thought he was. Jones isn't a big offensive guy, but he's amazing without the puck, one of the league's stronger puck battlers. He's also extremely strong in transition, using his reach and skating to move the puck up the ice well, though his bigger strength is hitting players in stride with passes coming out of the defensive zone. He's a very accurate passer who rarely turns the puck over in the defensive zone.

13. Torey Krug
Difficulty Matrix: 1.12/1.25
Offence: 16.03/25 | Transition: 31.06/40 | Defence: 20.03/35
Total: 67.12/100

He plays very sheltered minutes for a top-four defenceman, but Torey Krug takes full advantage of it. Krug is a power-play dynamo who plays stronger defence than people give him credit for, probably because he only comes up to Zdeno Chara's knees.

While he's great offensively, Krug's biggest asset is his ability to bring the puck up the ice, something the Bruins defence has struggled to do without him in recent years. His play at and between the blue lines is exemplary, as very few defencemen dump the puck out less often, or complete as many clean zone exits.

12. Roman Josi
Difficulty Matrix: 1.15/1.25
Offence: 18.96/25 | Transition: 29.97/40 | Defence: 18.27/35
Total: 67.20/100

Josi is a unique specimen, as he's genuinely amazing offensively and in transition, and those attributes make up for the fact that without the puck he's quite bad. Only one defenceman rated among the top 60 over the last three years scored lower defensively (Nick Leddy) than Josi, yet because he's so excellent with the puck, he remains an elite defenceman.

Josi is arguably the best pure puck rushing defenceman in the game, and one of the few who takes the risk of getting shots from close to the net, trusting in his speed to get back into plays that fail. Josi's weakness without the puck is pretty easy to ignore when he's putting goals in either himself or by setting up teammates, and running the Predators transition game.

11. Alex Pietrangelo
Difficulty Matrix: 1.18/1.25
Total: 68.13/100

Pietrangelo narrowly missed out on the top 20 last year, and some additional contextual stats pushed him up to where many believe he should be, right in top-10 range. Pietrangelo plays the fifth-toughest minutes of any defenceman in the league, and he responds with a balanced game centred on his ability to move the puck up the ice.

His favourite move is to skate the puck out of the defensive zone and hit a forward in stride with a pass in the neutral zone, and he's very good at it, boasting low turnover rates in every zone. If Pietrangelo has one weakness, it's the penalty kill. He's very bad at it, but plays there a ton. It's a confusing choice.

10. Dustin Byfuglien
Difficulty Matrix: 1.18/1.25
Total: 67.88/100

Playing the fourth-toughest minutes in the NHL among defencemen, Byfuglien is another beneficiary of the added contextual stats and new weightings. Byfuglien has a bit of trouble when it comes to transition because of his slow acceleration leading him to get caught a little when he tries to carry the puck, not to mention he has a high neutral-zone turnover rate, but in the offensive and defensive zones he's still very strong.

Defensively, Byfuglien can sometimes get lost chasing the puck carrier, perhaps a leftover hitch in his game from when coaches kept trying to make him a forward, but he's very good managing the puck in dangerous areas, and while he loses the puck a fair amount in the neutral zone, he defends the neutral zone very well, recovering more loose pucks there than almost any other defenceman.

9. Cam Fowler
Difficulty Matrix: 1.14/1.25
Total: 67.99/100

This one might be a little controversial since Fowler has a lot of doubters, but one thing to keep in mind when you look at his on-ice stats is that he's played with a lot of bad partners who have been anchors for him. Individually, Fowler does everything you want a complete player to do. He's very high event, recording tons of puck touches, while boasting some of the lowest turnover rates relative to his teammates in the entire NHL in all three zones, really high pass-success rates, makes great decisions at both blue lines, and rushes the puck well. He could be far more aggressive defending the neutral zone, but every player has weaknesses.

8. T.J. Brodie
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25
Total: 68.13/100

Brodie had a rough season last year after being split from his longtime partner in Giordano. Individually though, his play didn't really drop off outside of the offensive zone. He still registered stellar defensive numbers, especially on the penalty kill, recovering a ton of loose pucks in the defensive zone, and managing some of the lowest turnover rates in the NHL in dangerous areas.

Brodie is also a stellar transition player, boasting some of the best zone-exit and entry-numbers in the NHL among defencemen. His Corsi took a hit last year, but his inputs that create those shot attempt differentials didn't, so expect him to rebound in 2017-18 with either Hamonic or Giordano.

7. Brent Burns
Difficulty Matrix: 1.12/1.25
Total: 68.93/100

The reigning Norris Trophy winner sticks in the same spot as last season, which isn’t to say that the voters got it wrong last year since this is a three-year sample, but ... Burns does play pretty soft minutes for a top-end defenceman, with Marc-Edouard Vlasic soaking up the toughest jobs to let Burns run wild offensively. It's a strategy that works amazingly well for the Sharks, but may make Burns look slightly better than his seventh-spot ranking.

Burns is the most dominant offensive defenceman in the game today, he scores goals like a high-end forward, and shoots like a gatling gun, and he’s actually really strong without the puck too, using his speed and strength to win puck battles all over the ice. Where he shows some weakness is in transition, where he turns the puck over quite a bit, and
has among the lowest pass-success rates in the defensive and neutral zones in the NHL. In a lot of ways, Burns’ style is chaos at both ends, and most of the time he and his team thrive on that chaos.

6. Duncan Keith
Difficulty Matrix: 1.17/1.25
Total: 72.18/100

Added statistics that emphasize passing and turnover numbers are a huge plus for Duncan Keith’s ranking, as he jumps up seven spots. Keith is the safest defenceman in the NHL in the defensive zone, boasting the lowest turnover rate relative to his teammates, while being heavily involved in zone exits. Keith can rush the puck, but his passing is so pinpoint accurate that he prefers not to, which probably saves him some energy over the course of a season.

Defensively Keith is one of the better players in terms of gap control in the league, and while his goal totals seem to be dropping, he remains one of the best playmaking defencemen in the NHL.

5. Mark Giordano
Difficulty Matrix: 1.17/1.25
Offence: 15.21/25 | Transition: 30.89/40 | Defence: 27.13/35
Total: 73.23/100

The way Giordano plays is like a prototypical old-school defenceman that Don Cherry loves; he hits hard, sticks up for his teammates, moves the puck well, and he can score at big moments. Giordano is the heart of the Flames defence, leading rushes as one of the NHL’s most successful passers, and a puck-battle machine.

Giordano, like many players on this list, doesn’t turn the puck over often especially in the defensive zone, which leads to very few scoring chances against when he’s on the ice. There’s a reason why everyone that plays with Giordano takes a step forward analytically.

4. Victor Hedman
Difficulty Matrix: 1.16/1.25
Total: 73.48/100

The first defenceman on the list above the 75th percentile in all three areas, Victor Hedman is a near perfect specimen for the modern NHL. A giant who moves like a waterbug, who can dangle at one end and crush players into the boards at the other, Hedman has developed into the best even-strength playmaker in the NHL from the back end.

Defensively he’s a puck-retrieval machine in all three zones, and no defenceman removes possession from opponents as often as he does. He does have some issues with turnovers, where he’s closer to league average than the elite, but he recovers so well that I doubt the Lightning worry about it much.
Jake Virtanen, 21, and Brock Boeser, 20, first-round draft picks from 2014 and 2015, led the Canucks in scoring during the National Hockey League pre-season and have earned spots on the opening-night roster for Saturday’s game against the Edmonton Oilers at Rogers Arena.

But the Canucks’ youth movement, fed by a prospect pool that has deepened dramatically the last two years, is reflected as much by the players who haven’t made the NHL team as the few who have.

Fifth-overall draft picks Elias Pettersson, 18, and Olli Juolevi, 19, are developing this season in Europe. Second-round picks in June, Kole Lind and Jonah Gadjovich are back in junior after impressive training camps as 18-year-olds. Talented forwards Adam Gaudette, 20, and William Lockwood, 19, are playing college hockey.

Ottawa Senators’ second-round pick Jonathan Dahlen, 19, and former San Jose Sharks first-rounder Nikolay Goldobin, 21, will start this season with Vancouver’s Utica Comets farm team after joining the Canucks organization in trades at last year’s deadline. Their teammates include prize college and junior free-agents Griffin Molino, 23; Jalen Chatfield, 21, and Zack MacEwen, 21. The Comets’ goalie is outstanding prospect Thatcher Demko, also 21.

“We used to have two or three of those guys; now we have seven or eight,” veteran Canuck winger Daniel Sedin said of the team’s stack of prospects. “It has changed a lot. They’re fighting amongst themselves to get a spot (in the NHL), and pushing the older guys to stay on the team. I just think it makes a better dynamic.”

Canucks general manager Jim Benning and hockey operations president Trevor Linden believe Boeser and Virtanen are merely the first-wave of young players who will transform the team over the next few years.

“Three years ago, we had a 101-point team and made the playoffs,” Linden said. “But I think even our fans could see there was nothing coming behind that (group of players). We recognized there needed to be this next group, and we’re starting to see some of that next group emerge now.

“When I went to (the Canucks’ summer) prospects camp three years ago, I was mostly looking at the college free agents we had. This year, it was pretty fun. We’ve come a long way. Obviously, what happens on the ice here (in the NHL) is paramount. But there’s a whole other layer beneath it that is exciting for us.

“There’s starting to be a critical mass of young players marching towards the NHL.”

Many of these prospects, of course, won’t develop into NHL players or will struggle to make an impact if they do. But the Canucks’ drafting, trading and aggressive pursuit of young free agents has significantly improved their odds of player-development success.

The scope and origins of this transformation are unprecedented in franchise history. Former general manager Pat Quinn built the 1990s Canucks into a Stanley Cup finalist through a couple of great draft picks (Linden and Pavel Bure) and some blockbuster trades, including a six-player extravaganza with the St. Louis Blues.

A decade later GMs Brian Burke and Dave Nonis also used a combination of trades and draft picks to build the foundation for a Canuck team that eventually became one of the best in the NHL and stayed there for nearly a decade.

But in terms of a reconstruction and getting as many prospects as possible into the talent pipeline, there has never been anything in Vancouver like we’re starting to see.

“Development camp this summer really showed me how deep the prospect pool is,” Boeser, the high-scoring winger from the University of North Dakota, said after Monday’s practice. “It kind of woke me up to how good this team could be in the future.”

Virtanen, a power-forward who appears to have made the Canucks after a difficult development year in Utica last season, added: “There’s such a deep pool of prospects that guys are pushing each other. That’s good to have in an organization. Everyone’s fighting for a job. It’s pretty sweet.”

It won’t be so sweet if Virtanen is re-assigned Tuesday. But there seems little chance of that.

He and Boeser co-led the Canucks with four goals apiece during the pre-season and have handled whatever challenge has been put in front of them.

Beyond this – regardless of whether coach Travis Green acknowledges it – there is an organizational need to prove to frustrated fans that the Canucks’ rebuild is working, and there are exciting, young players worth cheering for.

Although Green said Monday that scoring totals get too much attention and there are many details unseen by fans that young players must learn in order to play in the NHL, it’s difficult to imagine Boeser or Virtanen being sent to Utica so Vancouver can keep plucky 27-year-old minor-league forward Darren Archibald, who was industrious and impressive during the pre-season but has a low NHL ceiling and won’t inspire anyone to purchase Canucks tickets.

“I think fans get connected to young players who come in, and they can watch them grow,” Linden said. “Watch them become pros. That’s the connection point. You’ve got to be patient; that’s the thing. This is something this market hasn’t seen in many years.”

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.03.2017

1076120 Websires

This is going to be a monthly exercise.

We’re going to evaluate the top prospects of the Montreal Canadiens, and different players are going to be featured depending on what they show as the season progresses. There may very well be better prospects in the organization than the 10 that appear on this first edition of the list, but we’re starting with the players who have exhibited signs they have an NHL future.

We’re skipping forward Charles Hudon, who figures to be a fixture in Montreal for the majority of this season. He’s worked through three AHL seasons to get to this point, and we believe he’s moved past the stage of being a prospect. It’s time to see if he’s a full-time player.

To kick things off, we reached out to the best possible source to let us know what each player must do to climb their way up the ranks.

Martin Lapointe, who won two Stanley Cups over 15 seasons of playing in the NHL, served as the Canadiens director of player development for five seasons before taking over as director of player personnel in July.

He’s a man who talks straight, and he gave us exceptional insight on the prospects of the organization and what they must focus on.

1. Charlie Lindgren, 23, G.


SN: Any doubt this kid is ready for prime time?

Lapointe: To me, he can be back up anytime. For me, mentally, physically, he’s ready. He can be a backup anytime right now.
There’s nothing for him to work on to become a professional at this level. He’s proven he’s a mature kid. Coming from college — there is a difference coming from college than junior guys. You can have your exceptions in junior, but college guys usually are more mature and more pro-ready. He’s definitely that.

2. Victor Mete, 19, LD.
Drafted: Fourth round, 100th overall, 2016.

SN: What did you see in Mete that made for a recommendation out of development camp that he should get a good look with a partner like Shea Weber to start camp?

Lapointe: I want to be patient with the players and with young players in particular, but I think if you’re lacking in something and the young kid can bring that something you’re lacking … and if it doesn’t seem to faze him right in, night out … and if you can skate, retrieve pucks and move pucks, you can play. If you can do those three things and you’re able to defend, that’s what it comes down to. He’s smart enough to be able to defend against NHL players, in my opinion. Now there’s the factor of, “Are we going to burn him?”

But if you’re missing something or lacking something in your system, and you find a player who can fill the void, the age doesn’t matter. That’s my opinion.

He looks confident. He doesn’t second guess himself, he’s not caught in between. His passes are on the tape. When he gets the puck, he knows what he’s going to do with it. He knows he doesn’t have to do too much with it. He moves it to open space. That’s what you want to see. I wish defencemen played like that more often.

3. Noah Juulsen, 20, RD.
Drafted: First round, 26th overall, 2015

SN: We know Juulsen is solid in his own end, but does he have more offensive upside than he’s shown?

Lapointe: He’s going to be a Victor Mete with more size and strength. That’s all he has to do. As simple as that. He doesn’t need to go end-to-end with the puck. I don’t see him as an offensive defenceman; I see him as a puck-moving defenceman that can skate and will be tough to play against when he reaches his potential physically. I don’t think he’s reached that potential yet. He needs to fill out more.

4. Michael McNiven, 20, G.

SN: Michael has been through some tough things at a young age, from losing his mother to not being drafted, and yet he’s coming off his best year of hockey. What does that say about him?

Lapointe: He’s had some tough things happen to him in his past, and he has a lot of character. He’s proven to us this year that he wants to be a player and that he’ll do whatever it takes to become a good pro. He lived in Montreal over the summer [with Canadiens prospect Simon Bourque’s family] and he trained with our guys, lost some pounds here and lived a healthier lifestyle.

We can give them all the resources, but at one point they have to take onus of it themselves. He’s doing that, and he did that last year.

5. Martin Reway, 22, LW.

SN: What’s the potential for Reway?

Lapointe: He’s got all the skills to be a top-six forward, and if he can put it all together shape-wise … He lost a full year [2016-17 with a rare heart condition] and the medication he was on made him gain 15 pounds. And when you don’t play for a full year, it’s tough to come back from that.

6. Brett Lernout, 22, RD.
Drafted: Third round, 73rd overall, 2014.

SN: What’s going to get this guy to the NHL?

Lapointe: When it’s tough to play against him, that’s what I like. When he gets involved physically and just keeps his game simple and moves the puck up, that’s all we ask of him. Play hard, be hard to play against, be physical and just make hockey plays. He’s not going to be an offensive player, and we all know that. But being able to make steady plays shift in, shift out is going to get him to the next level. Be consistent in that role and move pucks up the ice, and don’t be flashy.

He looks like a hockey player, he’s shaped like a hockey player, and now he has to be more mature in his game and bring that physicality on a consistent basis. He needs to really cherish that role and really believe that if he does that on a nightly basis, he’ll play 15 years in the NHL.

7. Michael McCarron, 22, C/RW.

SN: When he was drafted, the general sense was that he’d be a five-year project. We’re in Year 5, and the most frequent criticism is that he doesn’t win enough battles for the puck for a player his size. Is that fair?

Lapointe: I’m not going to sit here and B.S. you; we all have eyes and we all know hockey to a degree, and it’s true that he needs to work on winning puck battles he shouldn’t lose. Because he’s 6-foot-6, his centre of gravity is a lot higher than most people. I think he needs to work on his core and his balance more than anything else, and obviously his first couple of skating strides — as everyone is aware.

I think he’s made strides, taken some good steps, but winning more puck battles when he goes in the corners and finishing more checks instead of missing checks is what we need to see. His timing is off still, I find. He wants to be on the puck, but sometimes he gets there and misses a check that turns into him being behind and having to backcheck. I want him to be more stick on puck, creating loose pucks, and I want him to grab those and come out of the corners with those loose pucks. Winning it and coming out of the corners and making plays; that’s what I’m missing from him.

He’s matured a lot and he wants to do the right thing. He stayed in Montreal and trained with a bunch of guys — Torrey Mitchell and Max Pacioretty — and he’s got the right mindset. He’s gotta put everything together. He’s a big guy and it takes time.

8. Ryan Poehling, 18, C.

SN: Fans seem to be really high on this player. What can you tell us about him?

Lapointe: I don’t know much about him because I haven’t seen him play college. I’ve only seen him in development camp. But from what I see right now, he’s going to be an NHL hockey player for sure. When? I don’t know. But to play at 16 years old in college played at St. Cloud State in
2016-17], that’s pretty impressive on its own. To play with men, too, it’s tough. It’s not easy.

He just plays the right way. He plays a 200-foot game, makes plays. He doesn’t have Martin Reway’s hands, but he makes really solid hockey plays. He’s a smart player and he can skate. He’s also going to fill out that 6-foot-2 frame. I think he’s going to play soon.

9. Will Bitten, 19, C/RW.

DRAFTED: Third round, 70th overall, 2016.

SN: We see a player with breakaway skill and nice finishing abilities. What do you see?

Lapointe: I like Will’s competitiveness, but sometimes he competes the wrong way. He tries to hit guys, be physical, and he wastes a lot of energy doing that. I see him jump to hit a guy, and he’s smaller and wasting a lot of energy with that. I want him to go into those battles, but instead of finishing a guy and trying to put him in the fourth row I’d rather see him try to dig pucks out. Knock the player off balance with a hit and win the space to come out of the corner. He’s quick. I think he has a tendency of — when things aren’t going well — he wants to come out like a pinball. That’s not going to be his game at the next level.

I just tell him to compete below the waist. I want him to be pest in the guy’s hands, the guy’s feet, the guy’s stick to come out with pucks. I want him to be like Brendan Gallagher. Gallagher doesn’t necessarily hit guys shoulder to shoulder, he hits guys in the hip, in the ass and in the hands and comes out with a lot of pucks. Or the puck stays there and the second wave of the forecheck comes in and grabs it. I don’t want Will to be overly physical for no reason. That’s an easy fix. He has the compete and wants to do the right thing, so I want him to work smarter.

10. Simon Bourque, 20, LD.

DRAFTED: Sixth round, 177th overall, 2015.

SN: What’s going to get this player over the hump?

Lapointe: He has to make quicker decisions with the puck, I think in juniors he got put on the first power play and had more of an offensive role. When Thomas Chabot came to the Saint John Sea Dogs, he had more of an offensive role. But Bourque should be a quick puck-mover. I think he has a lot of thinking in his game right now. Too much can hurt his game. I think he’s caught a bit in between of wondering if he’s an offensive guy or a solid puck-mover. I think he needs to focus on just one and go with it, and I don’t think he should go offensive. He should just focus on being a steady puck-mover.

I think his skating needs to improve. He gets caught in those wide tracks and in that wide stance, so it’s not as efficient. But I think his skating can be really strong. It can be a lot better.

BONUS: Nikita Scherbak, 21, LW/RW.

DRAFTED: First round, 26th overall, 2014.

SN: I’m sure you noticed we left Scherbak out of our top 10. After watching him in training camp, we see a guy with an NHL body, who has worked hard and dedicated himself in the last two years to becoming more of a pro. But we’re often baffled by how frequently he appears to be on the wrong side of the puck. Is that a question of hockey sense or what?

Lapointe: For me it’s about maturity. You need to play a 200-foot game. Even all the skill that skill guys have — they can’t always play on one side of the puck and only be offensive. At one point in a hockey game, you’re going to have to play defence. It could be your second shift of the game. If you’re not able or willing to do that, you won’t be able to play because the coach won’t be willing to put you on the ice. Right now, he wants to play offensive, but he needs to play a 200-foot game. He might only have to play two shifts in the defensive zone, but he has to be able to chip a puck out and not lose the puck and get a turnover from it, because when that happens it looks like he doesn’t care about the play.

I think he’s cheating offensively, hoping that the puck will squirt loose. Details of the game are tough to do and demand more energy than what he tried to do by grabbing a puck at the end of his stick. If you don’t get your body involved physically, it’s less demanding. But he needs to understand he needs to get his body involved and that it’s going to hurt. You need to be huffing and puffing sometimes to win a puck, but hockey’s played like that. Winning puck battles — you may not score from it on this shift, but maybe you’ve done that part to help your teammate score. Maybe your teammate won’t score, but at least you’ll have been playing the right way. Scherbak needs to be willing to play the right way to make things happen and know his name might not end up on the scoresheet. That’s okay.

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Sportsnet.ca / Calgary Flames players, coach react to team adding Jaromir Jagr

Mike Johnston

October 2, 2017, 5:35 PM

Jaromir Jagr played his first regular-season NHL game on Oct. 5, 1990. Most current members of the Calgary Flames weren’t even alive then, while others were either in diapers or attending elementary school.

The future Hall of Famer agreed to a one-year deal with Calgary on Monday, injecting both skill and veteran savvy into what was already shaping up to be a promising Flames roster.

Suffice it to say, members of the Flames were thrilled when they heard the news.

“You’re bringing in a guy who’s been one of the best players in the league for a long time and he’s still really effective, still really hard to play against,” Flames captain Mark Giordano told reporters in Calgary. “He protects the puck so well and makes so many good plays down low.”

Winger Michael Frolik has some experience playing on the same team as Jagr. The two have represented the Czech Republic together at various international tournaments over the years.

“He’s very big in Czech. Anywhere he walks or goes everybody knows him,” Frolik said. “He’s like a god to Czechs. I think if he runs for President people would vote for him.”

Flames head coach Glen Gulutzan knows first hand what Jagr can bring to the table. Gulutzan was the head coach for the Stars during the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season when Jagr called Dallas home.

“I think the biggest thing is you look at his age and just what he can do,” Gulutzan said. “He’s physically a specimen but his hockey IQ is off the charts and that’s what allows him to be behind Wayne Gretzky [for No. 2 all-time] in scoring. It’s hard to explain some of the things he does. There’s some ‘wow’ moments in watching him play.”

Gulutzan spoke on the phone to Jaromir yesterday... He worked with him and admired the player when he was a member of the Dallas Stars.

— Roger Millions (@RogMillions) October 2, 2017

This isn’t the first time Flames general manager Brad Treliving has bolstered his team’s roster at the 11th hour. One year ago Kris Versteeg was inked to a contract on the eve of the regular season.

“Having a guy like Jaromir come in at this time of the season shows that we want to have the pieces in place to try to win and we don’t want to
wait and we’re excited about the challenge ahead,” Versteeg said. “They obviously gave us the pieces and now it’s about going out there with the product we have and trying to make it happen. It’s really up to us now.”

Jagr, 45, was selected fifth overall in the 1990 NHL Draft, 14 spots ahead of a young American forward from Maiden Catholic High School named Keith Tkachuk—the father of Jagr’s new teammate (and potential linemate) Matthew Tkachuk.

“To kind of put it in perspective, he came into the league and I was five years away from even being a thought,” the young Tkachuk said. “It’s crazy to think about. He was winning MVPs before I was born.”

Mike Babcock acknowledged as much back on Day 1 of training camp.

Training camp has produced very few surprises so far. For those on the bubble, the competition was decided as much by the collective bargaining agreement as what happened on the ice.

In theory, it could also dictate how they proceed with the final round of LTIR. Basically, it amounts to having money to maneuver or being exposed a more proven commodity to the waiver wire. Even though you can usually sneak guys through before opening night, it’s not a guarantee.

All we know for sure is that the NHL asked Lupul to undergo an independent medical examination after he failed a physical with Leafs management. This is an organization with designs on playing well into the spring so the depth will be necessary.

With only low-leverage spots truly up for grabs in camp – fourth-line centre, No. 6 defenceman, etc. – the Leafs opted to prioritize asset management. This is an organization with designs on playing well into the spring so the depth will be necessary.

The Leafs have at least three decisions to make before Tuesday’s roster deadline:

1) Will Andreas Borgman or Calle Rosén stick around for opening night in Winnipeg? The left-shot Swedish defencemen can both be sent directly to the AHL, with Martin Marincin needing waivers. There are only two jobs available for those three men. Borgman appears to have the inside edge after being paired with Connor Carrick for Monday’s practice.

2) Will Roman Polak be released from his PTO or choose to stick around as a practice player? Lamoriello made it clear that the veteran defenceman is not going to be offered a contract right away.

3) Where will first-rounder Timothy Liljegren end up? He’s eligible to be sent to the Marlies, Rogle BK back in Sweden or even the Canadian Hockey League. A decision hadn’t been finalized as of Monday.

When you factor in the uncertain Lupul situation, there’s quite a few balls still in the air.

Overall, this camp was a reminder of how far the Leafs have travelled in a relatively short period of time. Babcock has remarked that they used to just give jobs away – Mark Arcobello, a late-career Brad Boyes and Nick Spaling were part of the opening night roster two seasons ago – but numbers should be a problem moving forward.

It’s a good one to have.

The opening night roster is basically just a snapshot in time. There will be changes and potentially quite quickly.

“The beauty of the NHL is you’ve got a minor-league team,” said Babcock. “You can send guys down, you can bring guys up, you can do lots of things here. It’s not the end of the world if you don’t get it right the first day.

“And just because you get it right the first day doesn’t mean it’s right 10 games in. So we’ll figure it out.”

A look at the Leafs projected lineup for Wednesday’s opener at Winnipeg:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travis Dermott</th>
<th>Kasperi Kapanen</th>
<th>Nikita Soshnikov</th>
<th>Miro Aaltonen</th>
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<td>Didn’t require waivers to be sent to the Marlies.</td>
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With only low-leverage spots truly up for grabs in camp – fourth-line centre, No. 6 defenceman, etc. – the Leafs opted to prioritize asset management. This is an organization with designs on playing well into the spring so the depth will be necessary.
Matthews and Nylander both stay out late after Monday's practice working together on different plays. This is not unusual. The 20-year-old American and 21-year-old Swede are often among the last players to leave the ice after the main practice wraps up. On Monday, they took turns setting the other guy up in front of the net.

"It's mostly just knowing where the pass is going to come from when he comes in from a different area of the ice," Nylander explained.

"Just different angles, getting different pucks in all different areas," Matthews said. "Just working on our shot and release and just getting open in different spots and getting a feel for things. The puck's not always going to be in your wheelhouse so it's about getting used to pucks in your feet and stuff like that."

Matthews and Nylander both generated seven points in four exhibition starts and appear poised to build on the chemistry generated last season. So, in which ways specifically will the pair work better together this season? Well, the goal Matthews scored Friday in Detroit may be a good example. Nylander's forecheck forced a turnover and then he zipped a pass to Matthews in front.

Backhand and buried it from @AM34. #TMLtalk pic.twitter.com/YFsGFthnS0

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) September 30, 2017

"Really nice play by Willy just to get there and force the D to make a play," Matthews said. "He's really good at finding those seams and obviously his skating is second to none."

The aggressive puck pursuit by both players during the pre-season has been noticeable.

"He's a pretty strong guy," Matthews said. "He skates really well, is strong on the puck and I think that's something we weren't too consistent with last year, skating and tracking guys like we have in (this) pre-season. We want to be more consistent with that, because plays like (Friday's goal) end up happening."

Matthews, Nylander explain their growing chemistry

Auston Matthews and William Nylander continue to develop into one of the NHL's best dynamic duos. They both had seven points in four pre-season games. After Monday's practice — which included some extra work after the regular skate — the duo explained why they're reading off each other better now.

Zach Hyman constantly earns kudos for his ability to get the puck back for Matthews and Nylander.

"We think he's the best forechecker in hockey," head coach Mike Babcock said on Monday. "He's at the net for them all the time, creates space for those guys and so they don't share it between three of them as much as they share it between two of them."

But it's actually Hyman who has been impressed with how ferocious his linemates have been in puck recovery this pre-season. "You see the stick lifts," Hyman said with a smile. "They're working hard to get the puck back too. If you work hard and you're as skilled as those guys are then good things are going to happen."

Matt Martin has been noticeable. The aggressive puck pursuit by both players during the pre-season has been not unusual. The 20-year-old American and 21-year-old Swede are often among the last players to leave the ice after the main practice wraps up. On Monday, they took turns setting the other guy up in front of the net.

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Matthews and Nylander both cite their experience last year as being key. They're more comfortable now both in understanding their own abilities and how they apply to the NHL game.

Why "hungry" may be best way to describe Matthews

Jack Eichel offered up a colourful description of Auston last week, but some of his teammates believe "hungry" is really the best way to describe how Matthews is approaching his sophomore season.

"Now, you're hungry," said Nylander, echoing a sentiment espoused by Matthews last week. "Now, you know what's going on and every game you're going to be hungry. It's nothing new. You've been through it before."

"We're coming into our second year, we're confident in our ability," Matthews said of Toronto's young core. "We picked up some good guys in the off-season that will definitely help our team. Everybody wants to take a step forward so we're a pretty motivated group. We want to do better than we did last year. We have higher expectations for ourselves."

* Andreas Borgman was paired with Connor Carrick on Monday and seems to have edged out fellow Swede Calle Rosen for the open job on defence. "Borgman's a big, big, heavy guy. He can really skate. Has great edges on the breakouts," Babcock said.

Rosen, meanwhile, was paired with Martin Marincin in Monday's workout. The Leafs plan to start the season with 14 forwards, which means they have to make one more cut on defence. Toronto practiced with eight defencemen on Monday. Marincin would need to go on waivers while Rosen can go straight to the Marlies.

Leads Ice Chips: Leads final cut on D coming down to the wire

The Maple Leafs made a number of cuts on Monday before practising with 14 forwards and eight defencemen. Centres Dominic Moore and Eric Fehr will stick with the big club, but what about the young Swedes — Calle Rosen and Andreas Borgman — on the blue line? Mark Masters has the latest.

* The Maple Leafs made the following roster moves on Monday:

Loaned to the AHL: Miro Aaltonen, Travis Dermott, Frederik Gauthier, Justin Holl, Andreas Johnsson, Kasperi Kapanen, Kasimir Kaskisuo, Tobias Lindberg, Mason Marchment, Trevor Moore, Andrew Nielsen, Michael Paliotta, Nikita Soshnikov, Dmytro Timashov and Rinat Valiev.

Placed on waivers: Colin Greening, Vincent LoVerde, Chris Mueller, Kerby Rychel, Ben Smith and Garret Sparks.

Meanwhile, Carl Grundstrom was re-assigned to Frolunda HC of the Swedish Hockey League.

After practice, general manager Lou Lamoriello met the media and explained the moves in a wide-ranging media session. Here are some highlights:

* On whether Roman Polak, in camp on a pro tryout, still has a future with the team ...

"Right now, he asked to come back and try to see where he was at and there's a good chance he may stay for a while and continue to work out. He's certainly not back where he was, you know, when he left. The injury he had, that was some injury, to be where he is today is just amazing. It just goes to show you the type of individual he is as far as a competitor. As far as what the future brings, I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if he stayed and practiced. He and I are going to have a discussion today."

On Josh Leivo, who appears destined to once again start the season as a healthy scratch ...

"Josh, once again, is involved in a question of numbers. He's here because we believe in him. We believe in his abilities. He's a National Hockey League player. He just has to wait his time and go from there."
On whether there’s any clarity about whether the Joffrey Lupul contract can go on LTIR ...

“I know as much as you do. As far as his status, his status is the same unless something different develops.”

On his message to Kasper Kapanen and Nikita Soshnikov ...

“You’re just honest with them. I mean, both Sosh and Kaps, you know, they’ve played extremely well. They played well when they were here last year. And unfortunately there comes a business decision involved because they have the ability to go down because they don’t need waivers and when you have the depth that we have now you have to make those decisions. But they’re knocking on the door. They’ll be back in the NHL. And the most important message is: Yes, be disappointed, but don’t let up on the gas. You have to continue to force us to get you back.”

On Miro Aaltonen ...

“He had an outstanding camp. Mike (Babcock) mentioned it was a very difficult decision that we all had to make. And, once again, he had the ability like Kaps and Sosh, to go down, because of waivers and when time’s on your side you use it and you never have to worry about bringing a player up a little late rather than too soon.”

Tie goes to the veterans as Leafs make final forward cuts

There were a handful of jobs up for grabs at Leafs’ camp, and it was the veterans that came away with the openings. For head coach Mike Babcock it can simply come down to experience when he’s deciding between two players, while Lou Lamoriello said that whether or not a player had to pass through waivers was a serious consideration during training camp.

* Lines at Monday’s practice:
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  Leivo
  Gardiner-Zaitsev
  Rielly-Hainsey
  Borgman-Carrick
  Rosen-Marincin
  Andersen
  McElhinney
  Power play units
  Rielly
  Bozak-Kadri-Marner
  van Riemsdyk
  Gardiner
  Matthews-Marleau-Nylander
  Martin (Placeholder for Brown)

TSN.CA / Leafs favour experience over youth as roster trimmed

By Kristen Shilton

The Toronto Maple Leafs’ youth movement may not be over, but it’s no longer the main focus.

Nikita Soshnikov and Kasper Kapanen were NHLers at the end of last season, but an excess of veteran wingers put the youngsters back in the AHL Monday when Toronto trimmed its roster.

Rookie Miro Aaltonen, who had a solid preseason in his quest for a fourth-line centre job, was also sent to the Marlies in favour of keeping veterans Eric Fehr and Dominic Moore for the Leafs to decide between.

For now, the kids will have to wait.

“You’re just honest with them,” general manager Lou Lamoriello said of sending NHL-ready players to the minors. “Both Sosh and Kap, they’ve played extremely well. Unfortunately there’s a business decision involved because they have the ability to go down [without] waivers. When you have the depth we have right now, you have to make those decisions. But they’re knocking on the door; they’ll be back in the NHL.”

The writing was on the wall for Soshnikov and Kapanen since last summer, when the addition of Patrick Marleau and lack of subtraction anywhere else on the wings put them on the outside looking in. Short of an injury, nothing would have earned them a roster spot ahead of veterans the Leafs would risk losing.

Who was the surprise cut by the Leafs today?

Leafs Lunch host Andi Petrillo and co-host Craig Button are joined by TSN 1050 Maple Leafs reporter Kristen Shilton to discuss the cuts the Leafs made to their roster today and if there were any surprises.

Winger Josh Leivo is in a similar situation, but without the added benefit of being waiver-exempt. He spent almost the entire season with Toronto last year, and was scratched for all but 13 games. While Soshnikov and Kapanen will at least get the opportunity to play, Leivo appears destined for the press box as a victim of the numbers game again.

“He’s here because we believe in him, we believe in his abilities,” Lamoriello said of Leivo. “He’s a National Hockey League player. The question is just about waiting for his time and going from there.”

As a centre, Aaltonen found himself in a different conversation than the wingers. Of the three guys fighting for the fourth-line job, he arguably played best these last two weeks. But the 24-year-old, who spent last season with the KHL’s Podolsk Vityaz, also made more mistakes than Fehr or Moore, which was the ultimate tipping point.

[Fehr and Moore] are veterans, they know how to play,” said Leafs head coach Mike Babcock. “I thought Aaltonen had a really good camp, he’s real competitive. We expect him to be back. But Fehr and Moore right now, just because they know the league and they’re reliable, that’s what we’ve decided to do.”

“He had an outstanding camp,” Lamoriello added of Aaltonen. “It was a very difficult decision we all had to make. When time is on your side, you use it, and you never have to worry about bringing up a player a little late rather than too soon.”

The Leafs were less cautious a year ago, when six rookies populated their opening-night roster and eight played at least 20 games over the course of the season. Indications now are Toronto will have just a single freshman on the roster when the season opens Wednesday in Winnipeg – Andreas Borgman or Calle Rosen.

The Swedish defencemen, who signed with the Leafs this off-season, survived Monday’s cuts, but to avoid risking losing Moore, Fehr or Leivo, Toronto will carry just seven blueliners. Four of those spots appear
Leaves Ice Chips: Leafs final cut on D coming down to the wire

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Martin Marincin has been on the bubble throughout camp, but would require waivers too, while Rosen and Borgman do not. It’s not inconceivable that Marincin is waived, but his penalty-killing abilities suggest he’ll get one last shot to prove himself.

“I’m happy I made it this far,” Borgman said. “Now I just want to work hard, keep going and hopefully I’ll be on the roster every day. [I’ve been] a little bit nervous, but you know how to play hockey. Maybe not here to the fullest, but you’re getting there.”

Rosen is a stronger skater than Borgman, which lends itself well to the Leafs’ system, but Borgman’s physicality adds an edge to Toronto’s blueline. Both are strong puck movers. Choosing between them will be the toughest decision the front office has to make out of this camp.

“We knew of their abilities. In Borgman’s case, he was [the Swedish Hockey League’s] Rookie of the Year by the end of the year,” Lamoriello said. “In Rosen’s case, he played in an elite league and people had an eye on him. [Director of Player Evaluation] Jimmy Paliotta was following him for a long period of time. We obviously haven’t been disappointed.”

The Leafs have until 5 p.m. Tuesday to submit their final 23-man roster to the NHL. Babcock has said several times over the course of camp they may not get the roster chemistry right immediately, and if that’s the case there will be no hesitation in making a change.

Should that be needed, Toronto hasn’t had a pool of talent this deep to substitute from in years.

“We’re a long way from sorting it all out, but it gives us a place to start,” Babcock said. “We have time so we’re buying it. It’s very tight...in deciding what we have to do. There’s a business side to the game too, so we’ll work it all out.”

Futures of Polak, Liljegren up in the air

What makes the Leafs final roster pare down a bit easier is that two of the three cuts needed to be made are essentially already done.

Defencemen Roman Polak and Timothy Liljegren remain on the 26-man slate, but neither will be part of the active roster come Wednesday. Polak remains in Toronto on a Professional Tryout, and can stick around the Leafs as a practice player indefinitely without counting towards the roster. He can also opt to leave and sign with another NHL team at any time.

Polak is still working his way back from a fibula break in Game 2 of the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs last April. He appeared in one preseason game with Toronto after participating in all of training camp.

What is Polak’s future with the Leafs?

Leaves Lunch host Andi Petrillo and co-host Craig Button are joined by TSN 1050 Maple Leafs reporter Kristen Shilton to get the latest on Roman Polak’s status with the Leafs.

“He asked to come back and try to see where he was at,” Lamoriello said. “There’s a good chance he might stay for a while, continue to work out, but he’s certainly not back to where he was when he left. That injury he had was some injury. To be where he is today, it’s amazing. As far as what the future brings, I wouldn’t know. I wouldn’t be surprised if he stayed and practised.”

Liljegren can either return to Rogle BK of the Swedish Hockey League or remain with the Marlies. The 18-year-old, who was the Leafs’ first-round draft choice in June, was also drafted by the OHL’s Niagara IceDogs, but Lamoriello has removed any possibility of him taking the junior route.

Liljegren appeared in two preseason games for the Leafs and showed further signs of improvement after getting a feel for the Leafs system at July’s development camp. Like the rest of their young players, the Leafs aren’t in any hurry to move Liljegren along.

“There’s been no decision on Timothy yet,” Lamoriello said. “His progress has been outstanding. Right now, while we have some time, we’ll just use it. He’ll practise with the Marlies and we’ll make a decision in a short period of time.”

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TSN.ca / Lamoriello: Liljegren, Polak won’t make Leafs

TSN.ca Staff

Roman Polak will not be signing with the Toronto Maple Leafs after completing his professional tryout with the team.

General manager Lou Lamoriello said Polak may, however, stay with the team as a practice player while he continues his recovery from a playoff leg injury.

Lamoriello also said 2017 first-round pick Timothy Liljegren will either spend the season with the AHL’s Toronto Marlies or in Sweden.

Lamoriello said Liljegren will practice with the #Marlies until they make final decision on Sweden vs. AHL for him

— Kristen Shilton (@kristen_shilton) October 2, 2017

Both Polak and Liljegren were on the 26-man roster released earlier Monday by the team.

Polak, who has played 186 games with the Maple Leafs over the past three seasons, was injured in a leg-on-leg collision with Washington Capitals defenceman Brooks Orpik in Game 2 of the Maple Leafs’ first-round series against the Capitals.

The Maple Leafs will be left with 24 players on their roster with Polak unsigned and Liljegren assigned. Lamoriello said the team will keep all 14 forwards listed on Monday’s roster and drop to seven defencemen.

According to TSN Maple Leafs Reporter Kristen Shilton, the team will send either Andreas Borgman or Calle Rosen to the Toronto Marlies before Tuesday’s deadline to submit opening night rosters. Neither player needs to pass through waivers to reach the Marlies.

The team’s 14 forwards will be: Zach Hyman, Auston Matthews, William Nylander, James van Riemsdyk, Tyler Bozak, Mitch Marner, Patrick Marleau, Nazem Kadri, Leo Komarov, Matt Martin, Eric Fehr, Connor Brown, Dominic Moore and Josh Leivo.

The Maple Leafs open their season on Wednesday night against the Winnipeg Jets.

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TSN.ca / Puck pursuit a key part of Matthews, Nylander growth
Linemates Auston Matthews and William Nylander stayed out late after Monday’s practice working together on different plays. This is not unusual. The 20-year-old American and 21-year-old Swede are often among the last players to leave the ice after the main practice wraps up. On Monday, they took turns setting the other guy up in front of the net.

“It’s mostly just knowing where the pass is going to come from when he comes in from a different area of the ice,” Nylander explained.

“Just different angles, getting different pucks in all different areas,” Matthews said. “Just working on our shot and release and just getting open in different spots and getting a feel for things. The puck’s not always going to be in your wheelhouse so it’s about getting used to pucks in your feet and stuff like that.”

Matthews and Nylander both generated seven points in four exhibition starts and appear poised to build on the chemistry generated last season. So, in which ways specifically will the pair work better together this season? Well, the goal Matthews scored Friday in Detroit may be a good example. Nylander’s blue collar hustle forced a turnover and then he zipped a pass to Matthews in front.

Auston Matthews and William Nylander continue to develop into one of the NHL’s best dynamic duos. They both had seven points in four pre-season games. After Monday’s practice—which included some extra work after the regular skate—the duo explained why they’re reading off each other better now.

“The aggressive puck pursuit by both players during the pre-season has been noticeable,” Matthews said of Toronto’s young core. “We picked up some good guys and that’s something we weren’t too consistent with last year, skating and tracking guys like we have in (this) pre-season. We want to be more consistent with that, because plays like (Friday’s goal) end up happening.”

Matthews, Nylander explain their growing chemistry

The Maple Leafs made a number of cuts on Monday before practising with 14 forwards and eight defencemen. Centres Dominic Moore and Eric Fehr will stick with the big club, but what about the young Swedes—Calle Rosen and Andreas Borgman—on the blue line? Mark Masters has the latest.

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- Placed on waivers: Colin Greening, Vincent LoVerde, Chris Mueller, Kerby Rychel, Ben Smith and Garret Sparks.

- Meanwhile, Carl Grundstrom was re-assigned to Frolunda HC of the Swedish Hockey League.

- After practice, general manager Lou Lamoriello met the media and explained the moves in a wide-ranging media session. Here are some highlights:

  - Rosen can go straight to the Marlies.
  - Defencemen on Monday. Marincin would need to go on waivers while Rosen, meanwhile, was paired with Connor Carrick on Monday and seems to have edged out fellow Swede Calle Rosen for the open job on defence. "Borgman’s a big, big, heavy guy. He can really skate. Has great edges on the breakouts," Babcock said.

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- Rosen, meanwhile, was paired with Martin Marincin in Monday’s workout. The Leafs plan to start the season with 14 forwards, which means they have to make one more cut on defence. Toronto practiced with eight defencemen on Monday. Marincin would need to go on waivers while Rosen can go straight to the Marlies.

Matthews last week. “Now, you’re hungry,” said Nylander, echoing a sentiment espoused by Matthews last week. “Now, you know what’s going on and every game you’re going to be hungry. It’s nothing new. You’ve been through it before.”

“We’re coming into our second year, we’re confident in our ability,” Matthews said of Toronto’s young core. "We picked up some good guys in the off-season that will definitely help our team. Everybody wants to take a step forward so we’re a pretty motivated group. We want to do better than we did last year. We have higher expectations for ourselves.*

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Matthews, Nylander explain their growing chemistry

The aggressive puck pursuit by both players during the pre-season has been noticeable.

“Really nice play by Willy just to get up there and force the D to make a play,” Matthews said. “He’s really good at finding those seams and obviously his skating is second to none.”

“The concept is straightforward, it’s getting the puck back,” Babcock said on Monday. "He’s at the net for them all the time, creates the condition for other people to score. We think he’s the best forechecker in hockey," head coach Mike Babcock said on Monday. "He’s at the net for them all the time, creates the conditions for other people to score. We think he’s the best forechecker in hockey."
because they have the ability to go down because they don’t need waivers and when you have the depth that we have now you have to make those decisions. But they’re knocking on the door. They’ll be back in the NHL. And the most important message is: Yes, be disappointed, but don’t let up on the gas. You have to continue to force us to get you back.”

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Tie goes to the veterans as Leafs make final forward cuts

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Power play units
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Bozak-Kadri-Marner
van Riemsdyk
Gardiner
Matthews-Marleau-Nylander
Martin (Placeholder for Brown)
TSN.CA LOADED: 10.03.2017

Thousands of line combinations will whir in the blender over the 1,271 games that make up the 2017-18 NHL season, with each bench boss playing the role of chemist to concoct the most potent cocktail.

For some, the lines set for opening night will be crossed out and redrawn before the puck drops for the third period of Game 1. For others, the magic will be there from the start, but may see a shakeup due to injury, slump or game plan. Some coaches prefer a star-studded attack. Others opt for more balance throughout the lineup.

Nonetheless, the magnifying glass is always fixed on the No. 1 line on the board, the engine assembled to drive each club from now until April – or beyond.

So, how do the NHL’s best motors stack up?

TSN ranked the NHL’s projected top lines from top to bottom, based on how they’ve been constructed throughout the preseason or how they’re most likely to shape up for opening night:

1. Edmonton: Patrick Maroon - Connor McDavid - Leon Draisaitl

Scoop: For Todd McLellan, pairing the $168-million duo of McDavid and Draisaitl together is like kryptonite. McLellan did his best to separate them through training camp, slotting Ryan Strome, Jesse Puljujarvi and Kailer Yamamoto to the right of No. 97, but the security of the NHL’s highest-scoring tandem (177 points) from last season proved too much to resist.

2. Dallas: Jamie Benn - Tyler Seguin - Alexander Radulov

Scoop: Two seasons ago, Benn and Seguin combined for 73 goals, second only to Patrick Kane and Artemi Panarin. Now fully healthy, with Ken Hitchcock returning to the Dallas bench and 54-point man Alexander Radulov in tow, they’re hoping to make last season’s miserable finish a distant memory.

3. Tampa Bay: Vladislav Namestnikov - Steven Stamkos - Nikita Kucherov

Scoop: Has Stamkos passed the baton to Kucherov as Tampa Bay’s biggest threat? Friday will mark Stamkos’ first game since Nov. 15, 2016, following knee surgery. He was on fire to start last season, with nine goals and 20 points in his first 17 games – a pace he’d almost have to keep to hold off Kucherov, who finished last season with 40 goals and 85 points in just 74 games.

4. Boston: Brad Marchand - Patrice Bergeron - David Pastrnak

Scoop: Three 30-goal scorers who provide a blend of speed, creativity, tenacity and energy. Bruce Cassidy’s top line seems to have it all, a puck possession monster anchored by one of the best two-way players in league history in Bergeron, who is hoping to ratchet up his offensive production again.

5. Winnipeg: Mathieu Perreault - Mark Scheifele - Blake Wheeler

Scoop: The Jets flirted with creating a true “super line,” linking Finnish sensation Patrik Laine with two players who finished in the top 12 in scoring in Scheifele and Wheeler. The experiment was short lived, with Laine likely to start the season alongside Nik Ehlers and Bryan Little. But Perreault has the hands and veteran savvy to do some damage.

6. Pittsburgh: Jake Guentzel - Sidney Crosby - Conor Sheary

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Scoop: Ninety goals aren’t out of the realm of possibility for this line, even with Hyman, whom Mike Babcock called on Monday “the best fore-checker in hockey.” Despite the call from Leafs Nation for more talent on
the left side, Matthews and Nylander kept chugging along with the aid of Hyman, scoring four goals each this preseason.

Matthews, Nylander explain their growing chemistry

Auston Matthews and William Nylander continue to develop into one of the NHL’s best dynamic duos. They both had seven points in four preseason games. After Monday’s practice — which included some extra work after the regular skate — the duo explained why they’re reading off each other better now.


Scoop: Arvidsson, coming off the NHL’s most quiet 31-goal, 30-assist season, seems like a smart bet to start the season with Forsberg and Johansen after first-round pick Kevin Fiala auditioned there.

9. Columbus: Artemi Panarin - Alexander Wennberg - Cam Atkinson

Scoop: How will the Bread Man fare away from Kane? That’s what Blue Jackets fans are dying to know after last summer’s trade for Brandon Saad. The affable Russian collected one goal and four assists in five preseason games.


Scoop: Backstrom is unquestionably the man driving Barry Trotz’s bus — and this year is the first he will not start the season with Alex Ovechkin, who helps form a formidable second wave alongside Evgeny Kuznetsov.

11. Chicago: Brandon Saad - Jonathan Toews - Richard Panik

Scoop: Toews made it known to Hawks management after last spring’s disappointing sweep just how much he and the team missed Saad. Boom. The bet is Saad’s dirty work can bring Toews back to the 0.9 points-per-game he averaged next to him. Chicago’s second line with Nick Schmaltz centring Ryan Hartman and Kane would’ve been ranked a bit lower.

12. Florida: Jonathan Huberdeau - Aleksander Barkov - Evgeni Dadonov

Scoop: Huberdeau and Barkov missed a combined 72 games last season, one of the big reasons the Panthers took two steps back after winning the Atlantic in 2015-16.


Scoop: Tavares reportedly wanted more support around him and he got some in Eberle with a straight-up swap for Strome. The question is if Eberle’s confidence can rebound after last year’s shaky playoff run in Edmonton.

14. Calgary: Johnny Gaudreau - Sean Monahan - Micheal Ferland

Scoop: Jaromir Jagr has only been promised a third-line role, but it may not be long before the 45-year-old finds himself in a top line experiment. The mullet ranked 29th in the NHL in shots produced from the inner-slot last season, according to Hockey Sense.

LeBrun: Jagr chose Calgary over St. Louis

TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun joins Leafs Lunch to discuss the Flames reportedly signing Jaromir Jagr to $1M deal with another $1M in attainable bonuses and talks about why he chose Calgary over St. Louis who was also pursuing the 45-year-old.

15. Anaheim: Patrick Eaves - Ryan Getzlaf - Corey Perry

Scoop: With a new three-year deal, the Ducks are banking Eaves can break 30 goals again, despite the fact the only other time the 33-year-old hit 20 was back in 2005-06 with Ottawa.

16. St. Louis: Jaden Schwartz - Paul Stastny - Vladimir Tarasenko

Scoop: No player has more even-strength goals (87) than the 25-year-old Tarasenko since the start of the 2014-15 season.

17. Buffalo: Evander Kane - Jack Eichel - Jason Pominville

Scoop: The Sabres are wondering whether they’ve found a finisher for Eichel in a rejuvenated Pominville. Eichel can clearly score with the best of them, but his assist total could rocket up with any help from his linemates.

18. Philadelphia: Claude Giroux - Sean Couturier - Jakub Voracek

Scoop: The Flyers’ captain will begin the season on the left wing, a position he has never played in the NHL. The hope is that Couturier’s defensive prowess will free up Giroux to make more magic with Voracek on a line that loves the puck on their stick.


Scoop: For all the talk to start training camp about whether Drouin could play centre, the chatter at the end centred on who would be the unit’s right winger. Gallagher brings sandpaper, but needs a bounce-back season after posting a career-low 10 goals.

20. Minnesota: Nino Niederreiter - Eric Staal - Charlie Coyle

Scoop: Niederreiter, 25, has jumped from 37 to 43 to 57 points over the last three seasons in Minnesota, leaving many wondering just how good he can become. Some in the Wild organization believe he’s only beginning to scratch the surface.


Scoop: There is no shortage of talent and creativity on this line. Zetterberg, who turns 37 next week, quietly produced his best season since 2011-12 with 68 points. Will he be able to do it again as the Red Wings setup shop in Little Caesars Arena?

22. San Jose: Jannik Hansen - Joe Thornton - Joe Pavelski

Scoop: The Joe’s are adding a Jannik. Kevin Labanc earned a long look on the Sharks’ top line, but Hansen — who was quiet in San Jose’s first-round loss to Edmonton — is expected to start the year there.

23. Ottawa: Zack Smith - Kyle Turris - Mike Hoffman

Scoop: Flip a coin. The Sens’ top two lines are near equals, with Bobby Ryan, Derick Brassard and Mark Stone spinning off the Smith-Turris-Hoffman trio to drive offence however long Erik Karlsson remains out. Hoffman (61 points) and Turris (55) were second and third in team scoring last season after Karlsson.


Scoop: Bill Peters’ attack may the most balanced in the NHL, with the luxury to really call any one of three first lines the top line. This trio combined for the most points (139) last season of any of Peters’ current lines.

25. New York Rangers: Rick Nash - Filip Chytil - Mats Zuccarello

Scoop: Raise your hand if you had Chytil, not five months after being picked No. 21 overall, centring the Blueshirts’ top line to open the season. The 6-foot-2 Czech product impressed during camp, netting one goal and two assists in four games, but has work to do to stick for the full campaign. Stay tuned.


Scoop: Calder Trophy candidate Nico Hischier had his best preseason performance on a line with steal-of-the-summer Marcus Johansson and Adam Henrique. If re-united, that line could give this top one a run for the money.

27. Los Angeles: Mike Cammalleri - Anze Kopitar - Dustin Brown

Scoop: Cammalleri, 35, is back in La-La-Land for the first time since 2007-08 and is reunited with the only two skaters remaining from that Kings roster a decade ago.

28. Arizona: Max Domi - Derek Stepan - Clayton Keller
Scoop: Only McDavid (10) and Guentzel (nine) collected more points this
preseason than Keller (eight), who is one of the early favourites for the
Calder Trophy, as he attempts to adjust to life in the desert with fellow
newcomer Stepan.

29. Vancouver: Daniel Sedin - Henrik Sedin - Thomas Vanek
Scoop: Brock Boeser could bring some much needed wheels to the
Sedin, but that test was short-lived during the preseason. It shouldn’t be
ruled out as a future possibility, as Boeser trailed off a bit following a hot
start to the exhibition campaign.

30. Vegas: James Neal - Vadim Shipachyov - Reilly Smith
Scoop: The ‘Real Deal’ Neal may not be 100 per cent to start the season,
but his spot on the depth chart is pretty well locked in. The wild card is
Shipachyov, the 30-year-old Russian transitioning to the NHL for the first
time, after finishing two points shy of Ilya Kovalchuk for the team lead in
St. Petersburg last season despite playing 10 fewer games.

Scoop: This ranking mirrors a lot of preseason standing projections.
Rantanen is still learning his way after a 20-goal rookie season, but there
are plenty of questions about whether or not Andrighetto can repeat the
productive debut he had in an Avalanche sweater late last season.

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USA TODAY / At 30, Penguins’ Sidney Crosby isn’t slowing down

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 5:11 p.m. ET Oct. 2, 2017 | Updated 6:06 p.m. ET Oct. 2, 2017

PITTSBURGH — When Sidney Crosby was 18 he didn’t believe age
should be an impediment to success and 12 years later he believes that
even more.

“I didn’t let age affect anything when I was 18, and I think I won’t let it
affect anything at 30,” Crosby said.

At 30, Crosby has won three Stanley Cups, back-to-back Conn Smythes,
a Hart Trophy, two Art Ross trophies, two Olympic gold medals and a
World Cup. He’s also led the league in goals twice. He’s

The Penguins captain turned 30 on Aug. 7 and didn’t view it as any type
of milestone.

“I feel good,” he said. “I take care of myself. Obviously, you aren’t going
to get any faster at 30, or least there’s only a small chance of that
happening.”

He chuckles. “But I’m still trying to get faster, and whether that happens
or not, we will just have to see.”

It wouldn’t surprise Jim Rutherford, who has often admitted how
impressed he has been with Crosby’s work ethic since joining the team
as general manager in June 2014.

“He gets better and better as each year goes by,” Rutherford said. “He’s
a determined athlete who has prepared his body for the long haul. He’s
not like most guys who turn 30. He is prepared to play at a high level for
a long time.”

In 782 regular-season games, Crosby has 382 goals and 1,027 points.
While helping Canada win the World Cup and Penguins win back-to-back
titles, Crosby has played 209 games over the past two seasons. This
summer he took off a month from skating, instead of the usual two or
three weeks.

Crosby says he constantly works on skating because you get left behind
in the modern game if you can’t skate at a rapid pace.

Even if he can’t will himself faster, Crosby said “you can use your
experience or the things you’ve learned” to ensure you play at a high
tempo.

The decision to take a month off was influenced by the fact that he had
been training intensely since the previous August because of the World
Cup. He had stepped up his training in the summer of 2016 to make sure
he was ready to play high-level games in September.

“I like to have time to train and time to relax and I try to balance it all out,”
he said.

Turning 30 hasn’t historically meant the end of individual trophy winning
for NHL stars.

Current Pittsburgh Penguins owner Mario Lemieux won the last of his six
scoring championships at 31, and might have won others had he not
retired for the first time after winning the title.

NHL all-time scoring leader Wayne Gretzky won one of his 10 scoring
championships the year he turned 30 and captured his last scoring crown
at age 33 when he registered 130 points for the Los Angeles Kings.
When he was 36 and 37, he posted 90 and 97 points, respectively.

Gordie Howe was 34 when he won his sixth and last scoring title in 1963,
and he scored 44 goals and registered a career-high 103 points during the
season he turned 40.

Still, only seven of the top 25 in last season’s point race were 30 or over.
But Rutherford expects to Crosby to hold his place in the game for a
lengthy period.

“I don’t think (Crosby) has ever changed from the time he started playing
hockey,” Rutherford said. “He is determined. He’s focused. He’s having
fun. And now he has all of this experience under his belt. What a legacy
he has built.”

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Boston Bruins

The Bruins placed goalie Malcolm Subban on waivers Monday, and he
will report to Providence if he clears waivers by Tuesday’s noon deadline.
The Bruins were satisfied with the 2012 first-rounder’s camp, but he did
not do enough to beat out Anton Khudobin to secure the No. 2 job behind
Tuukka Rask. “Dobby came in and looked good right away,” Cassidy
said. “He was conditioned and practicing well. He played well. It’s his
spot. He earned it.” . . . The Bruins released Teddy Purcell from his
professional tryout agree . . . The team also assigned Cehlarik, Heinen,
and Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson to Providence . . . Austin Czarnik is still
professional tryout agree . . . The team also assigned Cehlarik, Heinen,
and Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson to Providence . . . Austin Czarnik is still
sick . . . The Bruins held Kuraly, Patrice Bergeron, and Paul Postma out
of practice. Cassidy believed all three would be available for Tuesday’s
session.

Calgary Flames

In a city bogged down by its first winter storm, a sputtering economy, an
annoying arena debate and a beige civic election, Flames fans found
respite Monday in the form of a 45-year-old diversion.

After limping out of the NHL pre-season with a mildly concerning 2:5
record, the Flames were given a sizable bounce in their step with news
Jaromir Jagr would soon be in their midst.

Jaromir Jagr has reportedly pulled
the trigger on a US$1-million deal, plus a $1 million in potential bonuses, to join the Flames.

**Chicago Blackhawks**

Connor Murphy didn't practice because of an upper-body injury he suffered Saturday against the Bruins, and Gustav Forsling missed practice because of a lower-body injury. Quenneville said he expected both defensemen to practice Tuesday. ... The Hawks placed defenseman Michal Rozsival on长期 injured reserve. Rozsival is recovering from a concussion he suffered in April.

The Chicago Blackhawks have assigned forward Vinnie Hinostroza to Rockford of the American Hockey League.

Hinostroza, who was selected by Chicago in the sixth round of the 2012 draft, had six goals and eight assists in 49 games with the Blackhawks last season. He made his NHL debut in 2015.

Chicago also placed defenseman Michal Rozsival on long-term injured reserve on Monday.

**Colorado Avalanche**

Avalanche defenceman Duncan Siemens cleared waivers Saturday morning before practicing with the team that tried to dismiss him. For Siemens, the No. 11 selection in the 2011 draft who has played just four career NHL games, the situation isn’t as strange as it seems.

He’s still under contract, and still has a chance to play in the NHL this season. By Tuesday, however, he is expected to be reassigned to Colorado’s American Hockey League affiliate, the San Antonio Rampage.

**Columbus Blue Jackets**

Restricted free agent Josh Anderson and the Blue Jackets have reached a deal for the upcoming season, his agent confirmed late Monday.

The contract, which was first reported by Sportsnet.ca hockey writer and NHL Network insider Elliotte Friedman, is reportedly a three-year deal for $1.85 million per season.

**Philadelphia Flyers**

There were mixed signals Monday concerning Shayne Gostisbehere’s undisclosed upper-body injury.

The third-year Flyers defenceman was injured in a collision with two Islanders defencemen Sunday as he fired a third-period shot in New York’s 5-2 exhibition win.

After the game, general manager Ron Hextall said he would know in a “day or two” the extent of the injury. Hextall did not have an update Monday.

**Detroit Red Wings**

David Booth earned himself a shot at being in the starting lineup for the Detroit Red Wings.

He signed a one-year, two-way deal Monday, and will play in Thursday’s opener at Little Caesars Arena if he clears waivers. That seems likely, as Booth had to ask for a tryout himself after spending the last two years of his career playing in Russia. Now the Detroit native has a chance to play before his parents.

Ryan Sproul was put on waivers Monday and can be assigned to the minors if he clears. Jared Coreau, Ben Street, Matt Lorito, Dylan McIlrath and Brian Lasoff all cleared and were assigned to Grand Rapids. Jimmy Howard sounded relieved that Coreau cleared even as he is coming off a Calder Cup championship, saying, “you don’t want to lose a good player for nothing. It’s great he’s going to be around with us.”

Goaltender Jared Coreau spoke with Grand Rapids Griffins coach Todd Nelson shortly after he cleared waivers and “he said he’s excited and ready to go.”

Following the noon Monday deadline, the 6-foot-6 Coreau was one of five players waived by the Detroit Red Wings who went unclaimed and will head to Grand Rapids to start the season. The others were forwards Ben Street and Matt Lorito and defencemen Brian Lashoff and Dylan McIlrath.

**Los Angeles Kings**

The Los Angeles Kings confirmed that both goaltender Jack Campbell and forward Justin Auger cleared waivers, which will allow the club to assign both the AHL’s Ontario Reign within 30 days or 10 games without the need for them to clear waivers again. No players who were placed on waivers on Sunday were claimed, nor were any Kings placed on waivers on Monday morning.

There was speculation throughout the preseason that the team could potentially lose Campbell in the waiver process, but to this point, the only player to be claimed since the waiver period opened on September 22 has been Jordan Nolan, who was claimed from Los Angeles by Buffalo last Friday.

**Minnesota Wild**

The Minnesota Wild will start the regular season without veteran left wing Zach Parise, who has been slowed by a back injury.

General manager Chuck Fletcher said after practice Monday that Parise would not travel to games at Detroit on Thursday and at Carolina on Saturday. Fletcher said Parise was “having a hard time getting over the hump.” The 33-year-old played in no preseason games. The goal is for Parise to practice with the team next week.

The Wild assigned center Luke Kunin to their AHL affiliate Monday and placed defenceman Ryan Murphy on waivers with the intent to assign him to Iowa, reducing their training-camp roster to 22 players. That doesn’t include veteran left wing Daniel Winnik, who’s on a tryout contract.

**Montreal Canadiens**

Goalie Charlie Lindgren was sent down to the AHL’s Laval Rocket, while forwards Andreas Martinsen and Byron Froese were placed on NHL waivers. The cuts leave the Canadiens with 24 players in camp (13 forwards, nine defencemen and two goalies) after defenceman Eric Gélinas agreed to a one-year, one-way AHL contract with the Rocket on Sunday. One of the nine defencemen still with the team, David Schlemko, has been sidelined with a hand injury.

**New Jersey Devils**

Defenceman Brian Strait and forward Brian Gibbons were placed on waivers. Both will likely be re-assigned to Binghamton (AHL) if they clear.

**Pittsburgh Penguins**

Patric Hornqvist is unlikely to be in the lineup when the Penguins open the regular season Wednesday night against the St. Louis Blues.

Hornqvist has been skating on his own throughout training camp as he recovers from offseason hand surgery to repair an injury that occurred during last season’s playoffs. Coach Mike Sullivan said Monday that he would like to get Hornqvist into a few practices before he uses him in a game.

**Toronto Maple Leafs**

The Maple Leafs have reduced their roster from 48 players to 26, with three cuts still to come by tomorrow.

Among the 26 players remaining in camp — the regular season starts Wednesday — are veterans Eric Fehr and Dominic Moore, as well as rookie defencemen Timothy Liljegren, Calle Rosen, and Andreas Borgman.

Josh Leivo, who has been knocking on the door for the past two seasons, is also among the 26 players remaining with the NHL group.
Vegas Golden Knights

Monday was going to be difficult for George McPhee, even under the best of circumstances.

The Golden Knights general manager was charged with informing several players that their NHL dream was over for now. But given the events of late Sunday when a gunman perpetrated a mass killing on the Strip, McPhee's burden grew heavier.

“When your phone starts to ping, you know there’s something wrong,” he said. “But all our players and staff were safe.”

Amid the backdrop of a city trying to come to grips with tragedy, McPhee was the bearer of bad news during the day as the Knights looked to reach the NHL roster limit of 23 players. The team had 29 players after Sunday’s 5-3 preseason finale loss to the San Jose Sharks at T-Mobile Arena.

One move made was with Teemu Pulkkinen, the forward who had been acquired from the Arizona Coyotes in the NHL Expansion Draft. Pulkkinen was placed on waivers despite two goals and an assist in four preseason games.

The other move was assigning forward Tomas Hyka to the Chicago Wolves, the Knights’ American Hockey League affiliate. Hyka was second on the team in scoring during the preseason with four goals and an assist in five games.

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets sent four players down to the American League’s Manitoba Moose: forwards Jack Roslovic, Brendan Lemieux, JC Lipon and Michael Spacek.

Lipon is the only one who has to clear NHL waivers before joining the Moose.

The moves leaves players like Kyle Connor, Brandon Tanev, Marko Dano and Nic Petan breathing a little easier.

But with Andrew Copp and Matt Hendricks injured, the Jets are still at 25 players, two more than the roster limit.

Hendricks has been placed on injured reserve and won't be available for Wednesday's season-opener against Toronto.

Head coach Paul Maurice says he'll know more about Copp's status for the game on Tuesday.

Assuming Copp is not placed on IR, the Jets would have to cut one more player before Wednesday's game.

Vancouver Canucks

Andrey Pedan had a good camp, a decent pre-season and needs to play. But not here.

And that’s a good thing.

The improved Vancouver Canucks defenceman was a depth option for the National Hockey League club this season, but being slotted as the No. 7 or No. 8 blueliner wasn’t going to move his development meter.

That’s why it’s not surprising that the 24-year-old was placed on waivers Monday morning as the club works toward setting its roster before the Tuesday deadline at 2 p.m. Pacific. If he clears by Tuesday at 9 a.m., he will be assigned to the Utica Comets, along with forwards Jayson Megna and Michael Chaput and goalie Richard Bachman, who cleared Monday.

Anaheim Ducks Scott Sabourin Sent to minors, San Diego-AHL
Anaheim Ducks Jacob Larsson Sent to minors, San Diego-AHL
Anaheim Ducks Giovanni Fiore Sent to minors, San Diego-AHL
Anaheim Ducks Kaille Kossila Sent to minors, San Diego-AHL
Anaheim Ducks Matt Lorito Sent to minors, San Diego-AHL
Boston Bruins Teddy Purcell Released
Boston Bruins Danton Heinen Sent to minors, Providence-AHL
Boston Bruins Jakub Zboril Sent to minors, Providence-AHL
Boston Bruins Malcolm Subban Waived
Boston Bruins Tommy Cross Sent to minors, Providence-AHL
Boston Bruins Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson Sent to minors, Providence-AHL
Boston Bruins Peter Cehlarik Sent to minors, Providence-AHL
Boston Bruins Jordan Szwarz Sent to minors, Providence-AHL
Calgary Flames Rasmus Andersson Sent to minors, Stockton-AHL
Calgary Flames Jon Gillies Sent to minors, Stockton-AHL
Calgary Flames Jaromir Jagr Signed as Free Agent, One-year contract
Calgary Flames Luke Gazdic Waived
Calgary Flames Garnet Hathaway Waived
Calgary Flames Phillip Di Giuseppe Sent to minors, Charlotte-AHL
Calgary Flames Lucas Wallmark Sent to minors, Charlotte-AHL
Chicago Blackhawks Jean-Francois Berube Waived
Chicago Blackhawks Jordin Tootoo Waived
Chicago Blackhawks Tomas Jurco Waived
Chicago Blackhawks Vinnie Hinostroza Sent to minors, Rockford-AHL
Colorado Avalanche Gabriel Bourque Waived
Columbus Blue Jackets John Ramage Waived
Dallas Stars Curtis McKenzie Waived
Dallas Stars Jason Dickinson Sent to minors, Texas-AHL
Dallas Stars Remi Elie Sent to minors, Texas-AHL
Dallas Stars Roope Hintz Sent to minors, Texas-AHL
Dallas Stars Patrik Nemeth Waived
Detroit Red Wings Matt Lorito Sent to minors, Grand Rapids-AHL
Detroit Red Wings David Booth Signed, One-year contract
Detroit Red Wings Ryan Sproul Waived
Detroit Red Wings Dylan McIlrath Sent to minors, Grand Rapids-AHL
Detroit Red Wings Libor Sulak Assigned to European Team, Lahti (Finland)
Detroit Red Wings Evgeny Svechnikov Placed on IR, Neck
Detroit Red Wings Eric Tangradi Placed on IR, Undisclosed
Detroit Red Wings Tyler Bertuzzi Placed on IR, Wrist
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