



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017



Youth is served as Canes finalize opening night roster

Posted 5:18 p.m. yesterday

The Carolina Hurricanes have a roster for their home opener against the Minnesota Wild, and it features plenty of youth.

Three rookies, including 2017 first-round pick Martin Necas, made the cut following the team's preseason camp. Necas, 18, will be one of 14 forwards on the opening-night roster.

Necas will be joined by fellow rookies Janne Kuokkanen (center) and Haydn Fleury (defenseman).

As part of the final effort to prepare for the season, the Hurricanes also on Tuesday returned defenseman Jake

Bean to his junior team, the Calgary Hitmen. The team also placed forward Ilya Stempniak on injured reserve with an upper-body injury.

The Canes open the season Saturday night with a 7 p.m. puck drop at PNC Arena.



Mayor Issues Proclamations to Celebrate Hurricanes

Oct. 6 is 'Carolina Hurricanes Day,' fans encouraged to wear Canes colors to school, work

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

October 3rd, 2017

The beginning of the Carolina Hurricanes' 20th Anniversary season is just days away, and City of Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane is drumming up support for the hometown team.

The Mayor issued two proclamations, the first of which was made at the We Love the Hurricanes luncheon on Monday and dubbed this week in Raleigh "Carolina Hurricanes Week."

At Tuesday's bi-weekly city council meeting, which was attended by Canes ambassador Erik Cole, McFarlane issued a second proclamation to declare Friday, Oct. 6 as "Carolina Hurricanes Day," in which "residents and visitors in the greater Raleigh and Triangle region are encouraged to show their love and support of the team by wearing their Carolina Hurricanes colors to school and work."

Canes Set Opening Night Roster

Necas, Kuokkanen, Fleury remain with the team

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

October 3rd, 2017

The Carolina Hurricanes finalized their 23-man Opening Night roster on Tuesday, signaling an official end to training camp as the 2017-18 regular season approaches.

The Hurricanes made two final roster moves following Tuesday morning's practice, returning defenseman [Jake Bean](#) to his junior team, the Calgary Hitmen of the Western

Pencils down. Time's up. Turn your papers in.



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Hockey League, and placing forward [Lee Stempniak](#) on injured reserve.

[SEE OPENING NIGHT ROSTER](#)

Names on the Canes' active roster, then, include forwards [Martin Necas](#) and [Janne Kuokkanen](#) and defenseman [Haydn Fleury](#).

Necas was selected 12th overall by the Hurricanes in the 2017 NHL Draft and showcased his speed, skill and hockey smarts in six preseason games to earn a spot on the Opening Night roster. Much of the same was seen from Kuokkanen in the exhibition season, and the two teenagers have proven too versatile and valuable to part with, at least for now.

"Those guys have done a lot through the preseason and played very well," head coach Bill Peters said. "I think they've earned the respect of their teammates with the quality of their play to the point where guys like playing with them because they're intelligent players who make plays."

How long Necas and Kuokkanen stick around will be sorted out in the coming weeks and could be somewhat dependent on the health of Stempniak. The Canes could give Necas a nine-game look before making a final decision on his status without burning the first year of his three-year, entry-level contract.

Stempniak, shelved with an undisclosed injury, is expected to miss another 10 days to two weeks, Peters said.

"He's just not right. It's something that's not coming around. We have to be patient with it," he said. "He's missed a lot of hockey here at an important time of year. We've got to find

out what's going on and get it fixed, and from there be patient with the recovery to get him back into shape."

In the case of Bean, it was an inevitable game of numbers. As a 19-year-old Canadian Hockey League skater, Bean is ineligible to play in the American Hockey League until age 20.

"The realistic thing is that we don't have enough ice time available for him for where he's at in his development. He had a wonderful camp and was excellent in the exhibition games," Peters said. "He's got a high hockey IQ, so when he plays in a high-level game with good players, he's even better. ... There's nothing more he could have done to make our team. We're pretty deep at that position right now."

Deep indeed, perhaps the deepest the Canes have ever been on the back-end - and that's with an average age of just 23.3. Fleury, the Canes' 7th overall pick in the 2014 NHL Draft, is prepared to make the jump to the NHL in his second professional season. Expect to see him pair with [Trevor van Riemsdyk](#) on Saturday night.

Goaltender [Scott Darling](#), acquired and subsequently signed in the offseason, is expected to be the Canes' Opening Night starter.

The Hurricanes will take a day off on Wednesday before returning to the ice as a group of 23 for practice on Thursday and Friday.

Then, at long last, it's time to drop the puck.

"The guys have been good," Peters said. "The effort and intensity has been real good."



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Introducing the 2017-2018 Carolina Hurricanes Opening Night Roster

The road to the playoffs starts with Game 1. Who will be on the ice?

by [Jake Crouse@jake_crouse94](#) Oct 3, 2017, 5:18pm EDT

Some offseason additions meant a new veteran face to the 2017-2018 [Hurricanes](#), but the story of the roster release this year is the hungry young players who forced their way onto the opening night lineup.

The fresh faces include 2017 1st round pick [Martin Necas](#), who earned his way on the roster with an outstanding performance during training camp. If Necas plays ten games, he'll automatically activate the first year of his three-year entry-level contract, so it's questionable that he'll play many games, but it's certainly interesting to see.

Forward [Janne Kuokkanen](#) also makes the roster after a stellar year with London of the Ontario Hockey League, tallying 62 points in 60 games for the Knights, and Haydn Fleury, who posted a +16 with the Checkers last year, joins the team.

Former Hurricane [Justin Williams](#) headlines the list of experienced roster additions. For those young millennials and new fans who maybe missed it, Williams is famous in Raleigh for his Stanley Cup tenure with the Hurricanes in 2006, when he scored the empty-netter to seal the 3-1 Game 7 victory.

Three former [Blackhawks](#), two with Stanley Cup experience, also joined the roster. Goalie [Scott Darling](#) is expected to be the opening day starter, Bill Peters announced today. Defenseman Trevor Van Riemsdyk and forward [Marcus](#)



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[Kruger](#) both joined the Canes through a pair of transactions with the Vegas Golden Knights this summer, switching red jerseys for, well, red jerseys.

To round out the experienced additions, [Josh Jooris](#) saw only half the season with the nearly-league-worst [Coyotes](#), but he's on the roster for opening night as well.

[Lee Stempniak](#) is expected to join the roster eventually, but is currently on the injured reserve list. The final cut from camp, defenseman [Jake Bean](#), will return to the Calgary Hitmen of the Western Hockey League for his final season of junior hockey.

There's a lot more than new jerseys and 20-year anniversaries to be excited about this year.

Here's the full opening night roster, with the [release from the team](#) below.

Forwards

- [Derek Ryan](#) (7)
- [Jordan Staal](#) (11)
- Justin Williams (14)
- Marcus Kruger (16)
- Josh Jooris (19)
- [Sebastian Aho](#) (20)
- [Brock McGinn](#) (23)
- [Elias Lindholm](#) (28)
- [Joakim Nordstrom](#) (42)
- [Victor Rask](#) (49)
- [Jeff Skinner](#) (53)
- Janne Kuokkanen (59)

- [Teuvo Teravainen](#) (86)
- Martin Necas (88)

Defensemen

- [Haydn Fleury](#) (4)
- [Noah Hanifin](#) (5)
- [Klas Dahlbeck](#) (6)
- [Brett Pesce](#) (22)
- [Justin Faulk](#) (27)
- Trevor van Riemsdyk (57)
- [Jacob Slavin](#) (74)

Goalies

- [Cam Ward](#) (30)
- Scott Darling (33)

HURRICANES RELEASE OPENING NIGHT ROSTER

Bean returned to WHL; Stempniak placed on injured reserve

Ron Francis, Executive Vice President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has completed its roster moves for the opening of the 2017-18 season.

The Hurricanes returned defenseman Jake Bean to his junior team, the Calgary Hitmen of the Western Hockey League (WHL). The team also placed forward Lee Stempniak on injured reserve with an upper-body injury. The Hurricanes' season-opening active roster includes two goaltenders, seven defensemen and 14 forwards.



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Checkers Find Goalie Tandem In Nedeljkovic and Smith

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: October 03, 2017

One of the biggest battles in Checkers training camp up to this point has been between the pipes.

The team started with the offseason with four solid options at the position – veteran Jeremy Smith, Martin Ouellette, Alex Nedeljkovic and rookie Callum Booth. Ouellette was the first to head to the ECHL's Florida Everblades, while the duo of Nedeljkovic and Booth backstopped the Checkers during their two preseason contests in Lehigh Valley.

With Smith joining the Checkers following that weekend slate, the coaching staff had a choice to make, and went with the tandem of Nedeljkovic and Smith, opting to assign Booth to the Everblades.

"I know them both," said Vellucci of his goalie tandem. "I've been fortunate enough to coach them both in Plymouth and they're both really good goalies, good at playing the puck, good hockey sense. I know what they're capable of so I feel very comfortable with them."

Smith was brought in by Carolina over the offseason as a strong veteran presence, while Nedeljkovic returns for his second pro year, giving the Checkers what they believe to be a strong one-two punch.

"I know Ned's going to have a good bounce back year," said Vellucci. "I know Smitty had a great year last year, so I feel fine with our goaltending."

As for who will take the reins as a starter, Vellucci isn't rushing that decision.

"We're going to develop them both," he said. "We only play two-game series for the first few weekends in a row so we'll probably split them in those. And then from there see who's playing well and who's not."

NEW-LOOK OFFENSE

With yesterday's assignments of Lucas Wallmark and Phil Di Giuseppe to Charlotte, the Checkers enter the 2017-18

campaign with each of their top seven scorers back on the roster. That alone is enough to draw fans' excitement for the team's attack, but the real danger could come from what they've drawn into the fold.

"I think we added some good offense with some good scorers," said Vellucci. "More speed up front with [Nicolas] Roy and Goat [Julien Gauthier] and [Warren] Foegele, so I think we've added what we needed to."

Despite their overall success a year ago, especially down the stretch, the Checkers had their fair share of issues on the offensive side of the puck, specifically a power-play unit that ranked last in the league and went scoreless in the postseason. With a bevy of new and returning weapons, the aim is to eliminate those problems.

"Last year the team got to the playoffs but lacked in special teams and lacked in scoring," said Vellucci. "So we're going to concentrate on those. With the guys we added up front, I think we're going to score more."

If last weekend's blowout preseason victories in Lehigh Valley proved anything, it was that the Checkers' new-look offense could create a lethal attack in Charlotte.

"The first game it was special teams," said Vellucci. "We went four-for-six on the power play and that obviously helps. And then just a good forecheck and some good five-on-five play. We've got speed and we've got size. We've got guys who can shoot it."

INJURY UPDATE

The Checkers couldn't avoid the injury bug during the quick two-game preseason swing, as Brenden Kichton was caught up high and has been forced to the sidelines.

"He's going to be out for a while with a fracture in his mouth area from when he took a puck there," said Vellucci. "He'll be out for a while, not sure when he'll be back."

Kichton, an offseason addition with a strong knack for the offensive side of the game, will be missed on the Charlotte blue line, as he figured to slide into one of the team's top two pairings. With a wrench thrown into those plans, the coaching staff will turn to one of the two remaining defensemen in camp.



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"It's either Welsey or Ganly," said Vellucci of who would slot in for the injured Kichton.

Both skaters have experience being an extra blueliner for Charlotte and swapping into game action, but neither have been an everyday player yet. Wesley appeared in nine games scattered throughout the first half for Charlotte while spending the majority of his rookie season with the Everblades, turning in an impressive 29 points in 48 games.

Injuries kept Ganly sidelined for much of last season, making two appearances for the Checkers and 11 for Florida, but his rookie year saw him log 26 games for Charlotte.

Who grabs the spot between the two of them will be something to watch for as we draw closer to Friday's opener.

"We'll see how practice goes this week," said Vellucci of how he'll make the decision.



Penguins remain team to beat in Metropolitan Division

Hurricanes, Islanders poised for turnaround; Hischier ready to help Devils

by Mike G. Morreale [@mikemorrealeNHL](#) / NHL.com Staff Writer

October 3rd, 2017

The Pittsburgh Penguins hope to become the first team to win three straight Stanley Cup championships since the New York Islanders won four in a row from 1980-1983, but it won't come easy in the tough Metropolitan Division, where four of the eight teams (Penguins, Washington Capitals, Columbus Blue Jackets, New York Rangers) finished among the top nine in the NHL standings last season.

The Carolina Hurricanes and New York Islanders are two non-playoff teams from last season that look ripe for a turnaround. The line of [Sebastian Aho](#), [Jeff Skinner](#) and [Elias Lindholm](#) brings excitement in Carolina, and [Jordan Eberle](#) could provide [John Tavares](#) the wingman he has needed for the Islanders.

In addition, rookie centers [Nico Hischier](#) (New Jersey Devils) and [Nolan Patrick](#) (Philadelphia Flyers) each should give his team added offensive life and help it challenge the Penguins, whose 111 points were second to the Presidents' Trophy-winning Capitals (118).

Here's a look at how the Metropolitan Division could unfold in 2017-18:

Team to beat: Pittsburgh assumes this title until further notice. The Penguins have the personnel and drive to win it

all again, but coach Mike Sullivan will have to overcome losses in free agency and the 2017 NHL Expansion Draft (Marc-Andre Fleury, [Chris Kunitz](#), [Nick Bonino](#), [Matt Cullen](#), [Trevor Daley](#)). He also needs his core players (Sidney Crosby, [Phil Kessel](#), [Evgeni Malkin](#), [Kris Letang](#)) to remain healthy.

Dark horse: The Hurricanes haven't qualified for the playoffs the past eight seasons, but that streak could end behind a stout defense that includes [Justin Faulk](#), [Noah Hanifin](#), [Brett Pesce](#) and [Jacob Slavin](#). Goalie [Scott Darling](#), acquired in a trade from the Chicago Blackhawks on April 28, will assume the No. 1 role. Skinner remains an elite goal-scorer, Lindholm, [Teuvo Teravainen](#) and [Victor Rask](#) should produce, and Aho, who ranked third in goals among rookies last season (24), will help provide a balanced attack.

Stock rising: [Jake Guentzel](#), Penguins. He is poised to continue his meteoric rise after leading the League with 13 playoff goals in 25 games as a rookie. He led the Penguins with nine points (three goals, six assists) in four preseason games and is set start the regular season at left wing alongside Crosby on the top line.

Player to watch: [Mika Zibanejad](#), Rangers. The 24-year-old begins the season as New York's first-line center after [Derek Stepan](#) was traded to the Arizona Coyotes on June 23. Zibanejad, who agreed to terms on a five-year, \$26.75 million contract July 25, had 37 points (14 goals, 23 assists) in 56 games last season but missed 25 games with a broken leg. Expected to play between left wing [Chris Kreider](#) and either [Mats Zuccarello](#) or [Pavel Buchnevich](#), he could surpass his NHL career-high 21 goals with the Ottawa Senators in 2015-16.



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Rookie to watch: Nico Hischier, Devils. The No. 1 pick in the 2017 NHL Draft has solidified a spot in New Jersey after an impressive preseason when he had seven points (four goals, three assists) in four games. He didn't seem intimidated or out of place at center, and battled in the corners and in front of the net while making it miserable for opposing players looking to take him off his game.

The new guy: [Artemi Panarin](#), Blue Jackets. The left wing will challenge linemate [Cam Atkinson](#) for Columbus scoring

lead; Atkinson has led the Blue Jackets in scoring the past two seasons. Panarin, acquired in a trade from the Blackhawks on June 23, is ninth in the NHL with 151 points in the past two seasons and has 41 power-play points (17 goals, 24 assists) in 162 NHL games.

Who will make playoffs: There's a good possibility five teams from the Metropolitan could qualify: the Penguins, Blue Jackets, Capitals, Rangers and Hurricanes.

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Do the Hurricanes have a weak link on defense? Is this former top pick the answer?

By Chip Alexander

calexander@newsobserver.com

October 03, 2017 10:21 AM

NBC hockey analyst Pierre McGuire was extolling an accumulation of defensive talent by the Carolina Hurricanes on Monday, rolling out names and superlatives.

McGuire called defenseman Jaccob Slavin probably the "best-kept secret" in the league and said Noah Hanifin is "just scratching the surface" of his potential. He talked of Justin Faulk being an offensive threat, the understated consistency of Brett Pesce and all that Trevor van Riemsdyk would add to the Canes' blue line this season after winning a Stanley Cup with the Chicago Blackhawks.

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ADVERTISING

The top five defensemen are set – van Riemsdyk the oldest of the five at 26. It's a young, talented and now experienced group that must be the envy of many a general manager in the league.

Canes coach Bill Peters says he has no worries about the sixth D-man, which likely will be rookie Haydn Fleury in the Canes' season-opener Saturday against the Minnesota Wild at PNC Arena.

Asked Sunday how he feels about his sixth defenseman with training camp ending, Peters quickly replied, "Real comfortable. What a great group of six it is. Unreal. As deep as anybody's six."

Last season, the Canes looked at such defensemen as Matt Tennyson, Klas Dahlbeck and Jakub Nakladal in the third pairing. Ryan Murphy also took a turn but the Canes' former first-round draft choice didn't get the job done, eventually was injured and later traded.

Canes general manager Ron Francis traded for van Riemsdyk, believing a better group of six would lead to less

time in the D zone, more offensive zone time and, in theory, more scoring for a team that needs more scoring if it's to qualify for the playoffs for first time since 2009.

Now, another first-rounder will get his chance.

Fleury was taken by the Canes with the seventh overall pick in the 2014 NHL Draft, a year ahead of Hanifin, who jumped into the Canes' lineup at 18 and has played the past two seasons. At 21, it may now be Fleury's time, Fleury's turn.

"This is big," he said during camp. "I've got to put some pressure on myself to come out, make this team this year and show them I'm ready to play here."

After four seasons of junior hockey with Red Deer in the Western Hockey League, Fleury moved up and played his first professional season in 2016-17 with the Charlotte Checkers, the Canes' American Hockey League affiliate.

At 6-3 and 221 pounds, Fleury became "hard to play against," as Peters put it, especially in the second half of the AHL season as the Checkers surged to reach the playoffs. His development had then-Checkers coach Ulf Samuelsson calling it a "breakout season" and led to a chat with Francis at the 2017 NHL Draft in Chicago.

Fleury said when he was drafted in 2014, Francis told him it would be a process getting to the NHL and that he would need to be patient. That's not what 18-year-old first-round picks like to be told, but Fleury said he tried to take it to heart.

This year, Fleury was back at the NHL Draft with his family as younger brother Cale, a defenseman, was drafted in the third round by the Montreal Canadiens. Again, he chatted with Francis, and with Peters.

"Both thought it'd be good idea to come in early and get settled and get ready for the season," he said.



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Fleury was in Raleigh the first week of August. He put in off-ice workouts with Canes trainer Bill Burniston and was among the first players at the informal team skates at Raleigh Center Ice.

With Burniston, the training focused on jumping and side-to-side movements, Fleury said.

"I got leaner and faster and more explosive," Fleury said. "Just trying to be more athletic."

During training camp, Fleury often has had van Riemsdyk as his defensive partner. That should be the third defensive pairing heading into the opener unless Peters decides to go with the more veteran Dahlbeck instead of a rookie.

"He makes a real good first pass and he's 6-3 and skates well," Peters said of Fleury. "There's a lot of things to like about him."

Fleury had some rough patches in preseason, including a memorable one-on-one confrontation with Connor McDavid

of the Edmonton Oilers that ended with McDavid scoring. But he also made his mark – and was marked.

In the Canes' first home preseason game, Fleury dropped the gloves to trade punches with Tampa Bay's Anthony Cirelli after Cirelli boarded center Derek Ryan. Fleury was left with a red welt over his left eye after his first fight in two years – "Line brawl in Red Deer when I was 19," he said.

"That's a guy who looks like he's hungry and wants to be in the National Hockey League and probably trying to tell us he's done with the American Hockey League," Peters said after the game.

That's pretty much it, Fleury would agree.

"When you're a kid you don't dream of playing in the American Hockey League," he said. "You dream of playing in the NHL. That was always my dream and I really feel like I'm ready to play this year."

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1076172 Carolina Hurricanes

Young enough for you? Two rookie forwards, D-man on Canes' opening-night roster

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Some of the guesswork during Carolina Hurricanes training camp has centered on whether rookies Martin Necas or Janne Kuokkanen could make the opening-night roster for the season opener.

Turns out, both will.

Canes general manager Ron Francis said Tuesday the two forwards were on the 23-man roster the team formally submitted to the NHL. Necas, from the Czech Republic, was Carolina's first-round pick in the 2017 NHL Draft and the youngest player in training camp at 18.

Another rookie on the roster is defenseman Haydn Fleury, 21, a former first-round pick who played last season for the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

Francis said veteran forward Lee Stempniak has been placed on injured reserve because of upper-body issues, creating the opportunity for Necas and Kuokkanen to make the roster. Defenseman Jake Bean, one of the Canes' two first-round picks in 2016, was returned Tuesday to his junior team, the Calgary Hitmen of the Western Hockey League.



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Kuokkanen, 19, was taken in the second round of the 2016 draft and left his native Finland to play junior hockey last season for the London Knights of the Ontario Hockey League, finishing with 26 goals and 62 points in 60 games. After the season, he appeared in one Calder Cup playoff game for the Checkers.

Necas is allowed to play nine NHL games before triggering the first year of his three-year, entry-level contract. If he does not remain with the Canes, he could be assigned to Charlotte or return to the Czech Republic for another season with HC Kometa Brno in the Czech Extraliga, the country's top professional league.

"Every game would be great and if it would be nine games, it would be great," Necas said Sunday. "Every game here is my dream."

Necas said again Sunday that if he doesn't stick with the Canes his preference would be to go back home and compete for Brno. Francis has said he would let the player and his agent make that decision.

The Canes open the season Saturday, hosting the Minnesota Wild at PNC Arena.

Francis said the team would take it game by game with Necas, saying, "The biggest thing for us is making sure we do the right thing for him in his development, long term. We think his upside is tremendous. We think he is potentially a guy who can a (No.) one or two center man for our organization for a lot of years."

Necas, drafted as a center, was used at wing in the Canes' final two preseason games. He alternated at center with Jordan Staal in Tuesday's practice on a line with Sebastian Aho and Elias Lindholm.

"It's been really exciting," Necas said of camp. "It's been great to be here with these guys and be part of this team."

Asked if he surprised himself with how well he has handled his first NHL training camp, Necas said, "Maybe a little bit. I didn't know if I would be here for a long time, so maybe a little bit."

"Everyone is so strong and fast. It's the best hockey, best league in the world. ... I just had to play my game and not be scared about some moves or scared on the ice. Just play with the puck and play my game."

Kuokkanen also has played with confidence, first in the Traverse City (Mich.) prospects tournament before training camp and in preseason games. On Tuesday he was on a line with center Victor Rask and winger Teuvo Teravainen.

News Observer LOADED: 10.04.2017

1076173 Carolina Hurricanes

Do the Hurricanes have a weak link on defense? Is this former top pick the answer?

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Canes coach Bill Peters sizes up team

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

Fleury had some rough patches in preseason, including a memorable one-on-one confrontation with Connor McDavid of the Edmonton Oilers that ended with McDavid scoring. But he also made his mark – and was marked.

In the Canes' first home preseason game, Fleury dropped the gloves to trade punches with Tampa Bay's Anthony Cirelli after Cirelli boarded center Derek Ryan. Fleury was left with a red welt over his left eye after his first fight in two years – "Line brawl in Red Deer when I was 19," he said.

"That's a guy who looks like he's hungry and wants to be in the National Hockey League and probably trying to tell us he's done with the American Hockey League," Peters said after the game.

That's pretty much it, Fleury would agree.

"When you're a kid you don't dream of playing in the American Hockey League," he said. "You dream of playing in the NHL. That was always my dream and I really feel like I'm ready to play this year."

News Observer LOADED: 10.04.2017

1076227 Minnesota Wild

NHL '17: What to watch for as season begins

By The Associated Press Associated Press OCTOBER 4, 2017 — 12:40AM

The 101st NHL season opens Wednesday night and there are endless story lines to follow. The Associated Press asked a handful of its writers to suggest some of the top things to watch as play gets underway:

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS. Adding Patrick Marleau gives a much-needed veteran presence to a youth-laden team that has designs on not simply making the playoffs, but winning several rounds.

JACK EICHEL. Having put contract talks behind him after agreeing to an eight-year, \$80 million contract extension on Tuesday, it's now on the Buffalo Sabres' franchise player to begin performing to expectations — the team's and his own. Eichel acknowledged his first two NHL seasons were "mediocre."

MONTREAL CANADIENS. While much of the NHL is trending toward youth and speed, can the Habs continue winning with an aging, plodding lineup that relies on size and the performance of goalie Carey Price?

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS. After hoisting the Stanley Cup in 2015 for the third time in a six-year stretch of success, was last year's first-round exit an aberration? How will Jonathan Toews respond after an off year?

CONNOR McDAVID. Will the 20-year-old reigning MVP put together a second straight 100-point season and help the Edmonton Oilers qualify for the playoffs in consecutive years for the first time since 1997-2001? Or will he cool off?

HOT SEATS. Florida was the first of many NHL teams to fire coaches during last season, letting Gerard Gallant go after just 21 games. Will Detroit stick with Jeff Blashill behind the bench all season if the team's new arena loses its luster with too many losses?

WASHINGTON CAPITALS. Will Alex Ovechkin and the big guns score enough and Braden Holtby stop enough to keep them a solid playoff team and a Stanley Cup contender?

STEVEN STAMKOS. The Tampa Bay Lightning captain was a point-a-game player before his horrific knee injury last season. If he returns to form they'll be scary.

NEW GOALIES. Carolina has Scott Darling, Dallas has Ben Bishop, Calgary has Mike Smith and all should be better for it, while it remains to be seen with Antti Raanta in Arizona.

GOLDEN ERA. The expansion Vegas Golden Knights open their inaugural season and it will be interesting to see how Las Vegas embraces its first major professional sports franchise.

BY THE BOOK. No timeouts after icing and no line changes for teams that commit the infraction. Closer attention from the officials on slashing. But the biggest rule change might be the crackdown on face-off violations, which has already led to some preseason grumbling.

MIGHTY PENGUINS. The elephant in the room, of course: Can Pittsburgh become the first team to win three championships in a row since the Islanders dynasty of the early 1980s? Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang are back for a try.

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1076228 Minnesota Wild

As Mauer's contract nears an end, Minnesota fans shift ire to Parise's deal

By Michael Rand OCTOBER 3, 2017 — 1:31PM

Joe Mauer and Zach Parise have enough personal and professional similarities that sometimes it seems as though they are living the same life.

Both are Minnesota natives who ended up starring for their home state professional teams. Both have led Minnesota teams to multiple playoff appearances during generally successful eras for their teams. Both are even fathers of twins.

And then there's this: Both of them were in prime position to cash in on monster contracts with their hometown teams at just the right time.

Mauer agreed to his eight-year, \$184 million contract with the Twins in March of 2010. He was coming off an MVP season, and the Twins were about to get an injection of cash from moving into Target Field. The deal, which took effect in the 2011 season, was a no-brainer from the Twins' standpoint. They would do it 100 times out of 100 given the circumstances leading up to it.

Parise agreed to his 13-year, \$98 million contract in tandem with defenseman Ryan Suter in July of 2012. The Wild had missed the playoffs four years in a row. Fan enthusiasm was dwindling. The length of the contracts for both established players was always going to be problematic, but the Wild absolutely would do it again given where the franchise was positioned that summer.

Mauer delivered a very solid 2010 season before the new deal kicked in. Then came the infamous "bilateral leg weakness" diagnosis of 2011 and an injury-marred season. If fans didn't like his contract before 2011, they were screaming "eight more years of this!?" afterward.

Mauer delivered better years in 2012 and 2013 before a variety of factors — concussion woes chief among them — diminished his productivity from 2014-16. Mauer, though, had his best season since 2013 this year. He hit .305 and was fifth in the American League with a .384 on-base percentage. He will turn 35 early next season — the last year of that eight-year deal.

Minnesota fans might never truly move on from opinions that Mauer was overpaid and underdelivered, but I'm already sensing a shift. If the casual gripe for several years has been Mauer's contract, a lot of that ire and concern is now heading Parise's way.



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Parise was pretty much as advertised during the first four years of his deal, bringing the Wild relentless effort and plenty of production. Last season a back injury sapped him of productivity. In all five seasons, the Wild made the postseason and restored faith (and crowds) at Xcel Energy Center.

That back injury, though, is still present. Parise will miss the Wild's opener Thursday at Detroit and the game after that. The hope is to have him healthy soon.

A back injury is massively different from a concussion in many ways, but in two key ways it's similar: Its effects can linger — and their full impact are only fully known by the sufferer.

The same fans who accused Mauer of being soft and overpaid or worse are now turning on Parise. As Mauer's contract winds down, Parise's still has eight years (counting this one) remaining, with a \$7.5 million cap hit each year. He's 33 now and will be 40 when that final year of the deal arrives.

Parise can only hope to prove those fans wrong — and to have a smoother next eight years than Mauer has experienced.

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1076229 Minnesota Wild

Ryan Suter and Jared Spurgeon: back together again as top Wild defensive pair

By Rachel Blount OCTOBER 3, 2017 — 12:54PM

During a workmanlike practice at Xcel Energy Center on Tuesday, the Wild reverted to an old, familiar look. Coach Bruce Boudreau went back to his tried-and-true defensive pairings—Ryan Suter with Jared Spurgeon, and Matt Dumba with Jonas Brodin—after flip-flopping the combos for much of training camp.

Boudreau said before camp began that he wanted to experiment with a new look. He hoped the pairing of Suter (above) and Dumba would put Suter in "more of an offensive role" and allow Dumba to excel. He also left himself the option of going back to the usual duos if he wasn't thrilled with what he saw, and that's what Boudreau has chosen to do.

"We'll probably put (Spurgeon) back with Suter, because it worked so well in the past," he said. "We tried something else, and I just didn't think it was as good as what we could have gotten.

"Spurgeon and Suter were arguably the best in the league last year. Both were plus-34. They seem to be on the ice all the time. And I thought especially in October, when the schedule is not that tough, that they can use the minutes. And we may as well have them together than apart."

Though Boudreau noted he is still moving parts around to try to find winning combinations, it appears the third defensive pair will feature veteran Kyle Quincey alongside young Mike Reilly. Quincey said Reilly is "a hell of a skater" whose skills complement Quincey's stay-at-home defensive style, a point echoed by Boudreau. The coach hopes the two find chemistry, and he complimented Quincey on his physical play in the past two games.

"He's done well," Boudreau said. "I'm pleasantly surprised."

Of Reilly, Quincey said, "We're going to put him in every situation. He can bring the puck up the ice and use his strengths. Then I'm there to do the heavy lifting in front of the net. I think it's a good tandem. It will be interesting to see how we do in the first couple weeks. I'm definitely excited."

The Wild's line combinations appear to be solidifying as well, though Boudreau still views his forwards as "interchangeable." Zach Parise (back) won't play the first two games.

The current combos:

Nino Niederreiter-Eric Staal-Charlie Coyle

Jason Zucker-Mikko Koivu-Mikael Granlund

Marcus Foligno-Joel Eriksson Ek-Chris Stewart

Tyler Ennis-Matt Cullen-Daniel Winnik

Winnik is still unsigned, and was not listed on the Wild's roster today. The team has until 4 p.m. to finalize its roster with the NHL. Here is the roster:

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1076230 Minnesota Wild

Wild's Mikael Granlund has breakthrough season, new contract

By Joe Christensen Star Tribune OCTOBER 3, 2017 — 11:42PM

When Wild forward Mikael Granlund was rising through Finland's youth hockey ranks, his idols were older countrymen Teemu Selanne and Saku Koivu.

It wasn't only their Olympic prowess and NHL stardom. Granlund loved their hardworking, understated personalities.

"That's who we are," Granlund said of Finnish hockey players. "It's always about the team, and no one is bigger than the team. When you play on the national team for Finland, that's the feeling you get."

This helps explain the relatively muted answers Granlund gives on any subject that might draw more attention to himself.

His breakout performance for the Wild last season?

"I feel like you want to get better every single year," he said.

The fact he played through a broken hand in the playoffs?

"I don't think it's that big of a deal," he said.

His celebrity in Finland, where a postage stamp and an emoji bear his likeness?

"It really hasn't changed my life," he said. "I'm still the same person."

But there is no mistaking Granlund's singular importance to the Wild, as it prepares to open a new season Thursday at Detroit. He led the team in points last season, with 69, and doubled his goal total from the previous season, with 26.

He managed only two points (both assists) in the playoffs, as the Blues outscored the Wild 11-8 over five games. But it didn't help that Granlund played with a broken right hand, suffered when he blocked a shot in Game 1.

"I don't think anyone is completely 100 percent healthy in the playoffs," Granlund said. "That's just part of hockey, little bumps and bruises. I'm never going to make an excuse about that."

Granlund was a finalist for the Lady Byng Trophy, given to the NHL player who combines outstanding play with sportsmanship.



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The Wild rewarded him with a three-year, \$17.25 million contract. At age 25, he still has big upside, and the deal would allow him to cash in again when he can become an unrestricted free agent in 2020.

"He doesn't have to change any part of his game," coach Bruce Boudreau said. "He's a great player."

After years of unfulfilled promise, the 5-10, 185-pound Granlund found his comfort zone last season playing on the same line as his longtime mentor, Mikko Koivu. That's Saku's brother, of course, and these Finnish players all seem to be hard-wired the same way — serious, hardworking and humble.

Mikko Koivu, 34, welcomes a conversation about Granlund more than he would one about himself.

"I think [Granlund's] game has been kind of the same ever since he got here," Koivu said. "I knew what he was capable of, but I think just the confidence — that's the key.

"When you work hard and you do that on a daily basis for a lot of years — I think with his skill set and talent — it was only a matter of time."

By the time the Wild made Granlund a first-round draft pick (No. 9 overall) in the 2010 draft, he had paparazzi following him in hockey-mad Finland. His lacrosse-style goal in the 2011 world championships was such a lasting image, the Finns turned it into a postage stamp and eventually the emoji, which is available on the app Lätkäemojit in the App Store and Google Play.

"That one goal became such a big goal in Finland, and it was never that big of a thing for me," Granlund said. "But hopefully it gets some more Finnish people to follow hockey and play hockey, and young kids maybe get some inspiration for that."

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1076231 Minnesota Wild

NHL stars who grew up with Olympics face season without it

By STEPHEN WHYNO Associated Press OCTOBER 3, 2017 — 10:51AM

The NHL became entwined with the Olympics before young stars like Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel or Auston Matthews even pulled on a pair of skates.

Nagano in 1998 started a string of five consecutive Olympics featuring NHL players, a tradition that became so routine that young players around the world added dreams of winning a gold medal to their hopes of someday lifting the Stanley Cup.

"I've always been alive in the days where the NHL teams allow their players to go to the Olympics," Eichel said. "I've had a lot of good memories watching the Olympics and seeing a lot of great players play, so it's something you've always looked up to."

There's nothing to look forward to this time: Instead of going to South Korea this winter to play for their home countries, NHL players face an 82-game season that will keep right on going on during the Olympics. The Games will instead include a mix of players from the minors, colleges and Europe.

"It's going to be weird for everybody," said Colorado Avalanche forward Nathan MacKinnon, who was hoping to make Canada's Olympic team. "It won't feel right watching other guys wear that maple leaf and they're good players, but they're not the best players in the world at that tournament. Whoever wins it, hopefully Canada wins it. That'd be

awesome. But it just won't feel the same. They're not world champions, technically, because they're not the best players."

Almost six months since the league announced it would skip the Pyeongchang Olympics, most of the NHL's best players are resigned to their missed opportunity. That Canada won't have Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews to go for the three-peat, that McDavid, Matthews and Eichel won't make their Olympic debuts quite yet.

Russian superstar Alex Ovechkin, who was vocal about saying he'd go no matter what, said last month that he and other players have never had to choose between their NHL teams and the Olympics, and "should not have to be in position to make this choice." Washington Capitals teammate Evgeny Kuznetsov said after not making the team for Sochi that he thought about signing in the Kontinental Hockey League so he could play in Korea, while countryman Vladimir Tarasenko simply expressed frustration that a lifelong dream and a chance at Russia's first Olympic gold with NHL players was snatched away.

"It's very disappointing you're not going to have the chance to be there when we have as short of careers as we do," Swedish defenseman and Ottawa Senators captain Erik Karlsson said. "It's going to be some guys' only opportunity to go and they're not going to be able to since it's not our decision to not attend."

That decision belonged to NHL owners, who saw no tangible benefit from stopping the season for over two weeks to let players take part in the Olympics.

"The fact of the matter is, we find the Olympics incredibly disruptive with no positive benefit, no opportunity to promote our presence or anything else of the Olympic experience," Commissioner Gary Bettman said. "We have enough experience to understand what the Olympics represents. The people who suggest that somehow this is an opportunity to grow the game, it didn't grow the game in Japan, it didn't grow the game in Italy."

The league believes playing exhibition games in China and regular-season games in Sweden does more to grow the game than the Olympics. But NBC Sports, which has the league's national television rights, will instead be showing the Olympics this February with no NHL games scheduled on its networks between Feb. 8 and Feb. 25, the day of the gold-medal game, and the trade deadline set for Feb. 26.

During that time, New York Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh expects teammates to root for their countries. Considering the 13-hour difference from the Eastern time zone (noon ET is 1 a.m. the following day in Pyeongchang), it may be difficult for players to watch, but many will try.

"Like any fan of sport I like to watch the Olympics, so I'll definitely be paying attention to it," McDavid said.

Two-time U.S. Olympian Patrick Kane said he will be interested to see which players are chosen.

A lot of players have friends or former teammates in the running to make a national team, which adds a silver lining to the bitter disappointment.

"There's going to be a couple guys that I know who are going who maybe would not have had an opportunity to play in the Olympics ever," Rangers defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk said. "I'll be pulling for them, but it's almost going to be like a world juniors situation where you're rooting for your team and you're rooting for your country, but you wish you were there to participate. It's going to be cool to see them in that light, but I wish I was there with them."

The possibility certainly exists that the NHL returns to Olympic competition in 2022 in Beijing and goes again in 2026, especially if the Games are in North America. That's a concern for another year, and McDonagh expects the importance of this season and playoff races will be ample distraction come February.

"It might be a little bit of a unique situation," McDonagh said. "As soon as you get into that game-day routine and stuff, your focus will kind of take over and take care of itself and you'll understand the importance of what's in front of you here and not wishful thinking of what could be."



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1076232 Minnesota Wild

Why were the 2002-03 Wild able to go where no team has been since?

By DANE MIZUTANI | PUBLISHED: October 3, 2017 at 6:24 pm |
UPDATED: October 3, 2017 at 11:09 PM

There's a moment that sticks out when former Minnesota Wild fan favorite Wes Walz thinks about the magical 2002-03 season.

And, no, it's not Andrew Brunette's overtime game-winner in Game 7 of the first-round series against the Colorado Avalanche.

Walz remembers something else because, as he puts it, if he and his teammates had their way back then, they wouldn't have played the Avalanche at all.

After wrapping up the regular season with a win over the Columbus Blue Jackets at home, Walz and a few of his teammates took a stroll over to the St. Paul Grill. A nice dinner was in order, as the Wild had secured the first playoff berth in franchise history, as a No. 6 seed.

"I remember we played an afternoon game and when the games started that night we still weren't sure who we were going to play," Walz said. "A bunch of us went out to dinner with our wives and we talked and the only team we didn't want to play was Colorado. Then, of course, we hooked them in the first round."

"Yeah, that was definitely the team" we didn't want to play, added Brad Bombardir, now as the Wild's director of player development. "Just looking up and down their lineup we were like, 'Oh, jeez. I don't know if we match up well against this team.'"

While the Wild were an expansion team in their third year of existence, the Avalanche had hall of famers aplenty: Peter Forsberg and Joe Sakic on the front line, Rob Blake on the back end and Patrick Roy between the pipes.

As Wild fans knows, none of that mattered. Trailing 3-1 in the first-round series, the Wild rattled off three straight wins to stun the Avalanche before overcoming another 3-1 deficit to shock the Vancouver Canucks a seven-game second-round series.

The clock finally struck midnight on the Wild in the Western Conference Finals when they were swept by the Anaheim Mighty Ducks and ace goaltender Jean-Sébastien Giguère.

There have been more-talented Wild teams since then — last year's group comes to mind, and maybe this season's team, which opens the season at Detroit on Thursday night — yet none has come close to similar success.

So, what was so special about that 2002-03 team?

"I don't know if there's a clear-cut answer to that question," said Richard Park, a right winger on that team who is now a Wild development coach. "It was just a group of guys that felt like they had something to prove. We were players who had to be resilient throughout our careers to even get to that point, and I think that was what fueled us whenever we were down."

A FAST START

After finishing with losing records in its first two seasons in the NHL, the Wild were easy to dismiss as the 2002-03 got underway. As most former players remember, that happened a lot back then.

"I think early in the season, for sure, teams thought it was going to be an easy game against us," Bombardir said.

And yet, Wild started the season 6-1-1.

"Everyone started to gain confidence, and it kind of took off from there," Brunette said. "We would play tight when teams were expecting easy games against us and then we were able to counterpunch them because of that."

That frustrating style of play drummed up by mastermind coach Jacques Lemaire meant there was no such thing as an easy game.

"There were some teams that probably took us lightly and thought, 'Oh, this is still an expansion team so it's going to be a big night offensively,'" Brunette said. "Then we would frustrate them with the way we played. The season really solidified our identity as a team."

That identity came from Lemaire, who Brunette described as "a brilliant mind" who always seemed to know what buttons to push.

"He would do different things throughout the season that brought the team closer and closer together," Brunette said. "We all knew we were all going to get it at some point from Jacques so we all rallied around each other. He did some things that we might not have agreed with and probably in his crazy mind he knew we would rally around it."

"You had to prove your worth to stay in the lineup with Jacques," added Darby Hendrickson, now an assistant coach with the Wild. "I remember he pulled Antti Laaksonen out after he had one of the longest (games started) streaks going, for three years or something like that. That was Jacques. That definitely made us closer."

And better.

As the season progressed and the Wild continued to hang around the top teams, they still struggled to gain the respect from the rest of the league. As a No. 6 seed entering the playoffs, not many pundits gave the Wild a chance to win even a game against the Northwest Division champion Avalanche, let alone with the series.

"I don't think we felt like we got much respect from the league from different teams," Brunette said. "That was the driving force for us, and that's kind of what propelled that team. There were a lot of guys that played with that chip on their shoulder."

While there were some budding stars on that team — 20-year-old Marian Gaborik had 30 goals and 35 assists that season — most players on the roster had been given a second chance of because of league expansion.

That also helped shape the identity of the team.

"We had a lot of players in our locker room that believed they were better players than anyone gave us credit for," Walz said. "And expansion gave us a chance to say, 'You made a mistake on letting me go.' That was a common thread that held us together. We were all kind of minor-league guys until the league expanded, and that belief turned into confidence, and it snowballed from there."

A LASTING LEGACY

When the playoffs finally rolled around, the Wild had to find a way to balance simply being happy to be there with being ready to take down the Avalanche.

"I think once the season was over there was a sense of, 'We made the playoffs. What an accomplishment,'" Walz said. "Not only did we make the playoffs, we were a No. 6 seed. It's not like we scraped our way in, so we were really excited about that."

After a slow start in the opening-round series, the Wild soon realized they could play with the Avalanche.

"It took a few games, actually, for us to feel comfortable," Bombardir added. "We had some opportunities early in that series, so I think we started to regain the mind-set that we had played with all season long."



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Trailing three games to one, the Wild found a way to win Game 5 on the road. They followed that up by winning Game 6 at home — on an overtime goal by Park. Then Brunette's overtime game-winner finished off the series in Game 7.

"If we're talking about an individual moment, then yeah, that was for sure the highlight," Brunette said. "It doesn't get any better than that. You grow up in the backyard dreaming of that stuff."

After another dramatic comeback against the Canucks in the next round, though, the Wild were swept by the Mighty Ducks, unable to solve Giguère, who only allowed one goal in the entire series.

"We wish we had another crack at Game 1 of that series," Hendrickson said. "Who knows what happens if we would've won Game 1. If we win that game maybe we get through Anaheim and we go on and win the whole thing. You always look back on that. We wish we could've gotten out of the gate a little better."

Nonetheless, the Wild will always have the memories of that season, despite the way it ended.

"I don't know if we could've forecasted something like that with an organization being so young and not having established itself throughout the league," Park said. "I don't think anyone, including ourselves, really expected us to have that kind of success. It was a really special bunch."

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the run that bonded the community to the franchise was that it took many players awhile to realize the impact of what they had done.

On game nights, "we would go to the rink at 4 o'clock and the building isn't crazy outside quite yet ... and then after the games when we went home and got ready for the next game it was kind of quiet outside because it was a couple of hours after the game," Walz said. "We really had no clue how big it was until after it was over. It didn't matter where I went for three or four months after the playoffs were over, I had people coming up to me giving me hugs. That was the best time of our lives."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 10.04.2017

1076191 Columbus Blue Jackets

Puck-rakers | Jackets claim no hard feelings from Anderson's 'shenanigans'

By Adam Jardy

The situation between the Blue Jackets and Josh Anderson was described as business-only after today's practice at the OhioHealth Ice Haus. First general manager Jarmo Kekalainen and then coach John Tortorella met with reporters to discuss the three-year deal the formerly restricted free agent had agreed to late Monday night.

Both stressed that there were no hard feelings on the part of the organization. But Tortorella had a few interesting thoughts about the situation the 23-year-old right winger had just experienced.

"From a coach's point of view, I want the guys here," Tortorella said. "I've never understood why young guys just don't understand that I've got some things to do before you start going down this road. That's me. That's the way I think. Some of the entourages around these guys think differently. From that point of view, there's nothing held against Josh. Whether I understand it or not, if he's a Columbus Blue Jacket and he's going to help us win, he's going to play. We just go about our business that way."

According to multiple reports, the deal is the same one the Jackets offered Anderson weeks ago. Neither side budged until the week of the

regular season, and now Anderson has missed an entire preseason. And although Anderson is coming off a breakout year with 17 goals and 12 assists in 78 games, Tortorella said he wants to see more.

"Maybe I'm just old school," he said. "I just think young guys need to understand the hierarchy of their career and what they have to do and not pull these types of shenanigans because you have a good 60-70 games. I think you've got to do it again, and then you start saying, 'You know what? I want this, I want that.' I think you need to wait your turn, but today's NHL there's a lot of different things going on and that's one of them."

Kekalainen said the team wasn't specifically trying to draw any sort of hard line in its negotiations with Anderson but did say he was wary of the impact on future negotiations with other players.

"We're not trying to send a message to anybody," he said. "That's the way we do business here. It's the only way we can do business. We want to keep this team together, we want to keep a winning team together and we have some hard decisions that are coming up here very soon with guys that have different kinds of leverage on us that are going to be unrestricted free agents and if we don't hold the line on guys when we have that leverage and still thinking that we've offered a fair contract all along, then I don't think we have any chance with our UFAs to keep them on our team in the future."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 10.04.2017

1076192 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets | Among final roster moves, Tyler Motte sent to Cleveland

By Andrew Erickson

The 11th-hour signing of right wing Josh Anderson to a three-year contract meant the Blue Jackets had some decisions to make, and they did just that in the final hours before sending the league their season-opening roster.

"Healthy stuff," coach John Tortorella said of the decision-making process Tuesday. "As I always say, it's really good stuff for this organization."

Tortorella expressed concern with Anderson's conditioning after the 23-year-old missed the camp during a contract holdout, but his inclusion as one of 13 forwards on the season-opening roster means forward Tyler Motte will start the season with minor-league Cleveland.

The Blue Jackets' 23-player roster also features eight defensemen and goaltenders Sergei Bobrovsky and Joonas Korpi. Forward Kole Sherwood, a New Albany native, and defenseman John Ramage will join Motte in Cleveland.

Forward Jordan Schroeder, who made just one preseason appearance and has been day-to-day because of an upper-body injury, has been placed on injured reserve. Centers Sam Vigneault, who is out four to six weeks because of a broken finger, and Boone Jenner, who remains day-to-day because of an undisclosed middle-body injury, have been placed on the injured/nonroster list.

Jenner, who scored 18 goals and added 16 assists in 82 games with the Blue Jackets last season, has not participated in team workouts during the preseason.

"He's a work in progress," general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said. "He's working hard trying to get back to 100 percent. He's not quite there yet, so it's day-to-day still."

Anderson availability



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Tortorella confirmed Anderson will not be in the lineup Friday for the season opener.

"He just hasn't even been with the team," Tortorella said.

Asked when Anderson might be available to play, Tortorella said, "No idea."

Sending a message?

Kekalainen said he and the Blue Jackets front office were not trying to send a message by taking a hard line in negotiating with Anderson, a restricted free agent.

"It's the only way we can do business," Kekalainen said. "If we don't hold the line on guys when we have that leverage and still thinking that we've offered a fair contract all along, then I don't think we have any chance with our (unrestricted free agent) to keep them on our team in the future."

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1076193 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets | After holdout, Josh Anderson will sit out opener

By Andrew Erickson

Competition takes place on the ice, Blue Jackets general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said Tuesday, and that's where right wing Josh Anderson will finally be with his team before too long.

The Blue Jackets announced Tuesday that they signed the 23-year-old forward to a three-year deal, ending Anderson's contract holdout three days before the Jackets open the season against the New York Islanders.

The three-year, \$5.55 million deal brings Anderson back into the fold. When he will be ready to play is another question.

There were no hard feelings with respect to Anderson from Kekalainen and coach John Tortorella on Tuesday. There was, however, some mild surprise that it took this long from Kekalainen, who said on Sept. 13 that he expected Anderson to be with the team that week.

From Tortorella, there was a sense of concern for Anderson's fitness given how long he has been absent from a grueling camp.

Anderson, who scored 17 goals and added 12 assists in his first full season with the Jackets in 2016-17, was not with the team on Tuesday as he works through the immigration process. He will not play in the season opener, Tortorella said.

"It's worrisome to me," Tortorella said regarding Anderson's conditioning. "But we'll see. I'm not sure what type of work he's been doing, so we'll see when he gets here."

Good or bad, Anderson's game readiness will be evident early in his return to Blue Jackets practice.

"Hopefully the first thing that we see is that he's really put himself through practices that are as hard as what our guys have done during training camp," Kekalainen said. "He hasn't played any games yet, so that's going to be another hard test to step right into the regular season."

Tortorella has seen "half a dozen" players go through contract holdouts in his NHL coaching career. His default stance, as it has always been, is wanting players with the team in practice.

"I never understood why young guys just don't understand that 'I've got some things to do' before you start going down this road," Tortorella said.

"Some of the entourages around these guys think differently, so from that point of view, there's nothing held against Josh. Whether I understand it or not, if he's a Columbus Blue Jacket and he's going to help us win, we just go about our business that way."

If there's a positive from Anderson's holdout, it's that it allowed a few young wings an opportunity to impress the coaching staff. Tortorella singled out Sonny Milano, who had three preseason assists and likely will be on the second forward line on opening night.

Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno said he is happy to see the deal done, as it allows the team and Anderson an opportunity to move on and get ready for the season.

He grinned when asked about the conditioning Anderson will soon endure before adding, "He's gonna feel it."

"The biggest thing is we put a lot of work in and so we want to see him do the same," Foligno said. "That's not a knock on him, it's just we just know how hard we've worked and I just want to see him come in here and work just as hard. We're excited to get going with him and really excited about Friday."

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1076194 Columbus Blue Jackets

Michael Arace | Fans win in deals for Blue Jackets' Anderson, Crew's Higuain

It's a business. Professional athletes say it every 20 minutes. They will forgive a teammate just about anything in the name of the phrase. They can explain away anything, including disrupted training camps or veteran grandstanding.

Fans pay the freight and somehow play little or no part in the business decisions. Columbus fans needed a day like Monday, when Blue Jackets right wing Josh Anderson and Crew midfielder Federico Higuain agreed to contract extensions.

Their business came to an end and now it's time to get down to business.

Anderson signed his new contract as Stephen Colbert came on the air Monday night. Higuain signed before Colbert went to his first commercial break. There's a joke in there, somewhere.

These deals come at a critical time for their respective franchises.

Anderson missed 20 days of training camp, eight exhibition games and at least one charity golf tournament. For what?

Anderson made a base salary of \$700,000 last season, the final year of his entry-level contract. He was extended a qualifying offer: one year at \$735,000, or 105 percent of his base salary. Generally speaking, the qualifying offer is a formality for restricted free agents, put on the table so that their teams can retain negotiating rights. Those are the rules.

Anderson had until July 15 to accept the qualifying offer. He could have signed it, played a season and opted for arbitration next year. He and his agent demurred and continued to negotiate.

Near the start of training camp, the Jackets offered a three-year deal worth \$1.85 million per year. Anderson's side was looking for something in the range \$2 million per, which is to say that the sides were arguing over \$150,000 a year. They were stuck that way for three weeks.

According to one report, Anderson would've accepted his one-year qualifying offer — but it was off the table. Ultimately, Anderson agreed to the three-year deal that had been sitting in front of him. It was that or miss a paycheck.



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Anderson, 23, becomes the eighth-highest-paid forward on the Jackets roster, which is about right. It is going to take him time to get up to game speed, which is frustrating for everyone involved. The important thing, though, is the Jackets' last bit of summer business is done. Pending a trade — which is possible — fans can now meet their 2017-18 Jackets, one of the youngest teams in the league and a franchise on the come.

Higuain is more important to the Crew than Anderson is to the Jackets. He is what you might call a bona-fide No. 1 center. He will celebrate his 33rd birthday this month and, at that age, a body wants its business done, ASAP.

The way Crew coach, sporting director and chief message-control officer Gregg Berhalter tells it, he, Berhalter, was going to get around to serious negotiations sooner or later. Higuain, a proud man who railed against being labeled injury-prone and who feels strongly about the six good years he has given to Columbus, goosed the proceedings. In August, he suggested he would try free agency at the end of the season. He told The Dispatch, "I think it's the finish of the cycle."

On one hand, the thought of parting with an aging midfielder was not exactly untoward or surprising. On the other hand, Higuain has proved he is still one of the best playmakers in the league — and he has upped his game since the arrival of Portuguese national Pablo Santos.

Just as the Jackets are ready to take off, the Crew is rocketing into another orbit. The team hasn't lost a game in two months and, with two games remaining in the regular season, has already clinched a playoff spot.

It almost makes a fan forget about the ridiculous price of arena beer.

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1076195 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets fans will find new restaurants, and one big empty one, in Arena District

By JD Malone

The Columbus Blue Jackets' regular season starts Friday night, and fans heading to the Arena District will find a few new haunts and one empty one.

There is more to look forward to than the Blue Jackets' new left wing, Artemi Panarin.

The Half Pint, an offshoot of Dublin's popular Pint Room, opened last month at 415 N. Front St. near the longtime hockey standby R Bar. Half Pint features a big outdoor patio, 60 taps of beer and lots of burgers, including a peanut butter bacon and strawberry jam burger. The location was a big draw, said general manager Scott McDowell.

"These type of locations are really hard to come by," he said. "The traffic speaks for itself; you don't pass up an opportunity like this."

The Half Pint also has a location in Marysville, and the Pint Room has expanded to the Denver suburb of Littleton and the Indianapolis suburb of Carmel.

Half Pint's Arena District location has no special items but offers a killer happy hour every day until 6 p.m.

"That's half off all beers, all 60 draft beers, everything I got," McDowell said.

Another addition is Veranico Kitchen and Provisions at 401 N. Front St. Veranico is a spinoff of Market 65 and serves salad bowls, scratch-made soups and a bar with Ohio craft beers.

However, there is nothing new at one of the Arena District's most-visible spots, 343 N. Front St., the former home of Dick's Last Resort. The spot has been something of a revolving door. It housed the 343 Front Street Tavern before that, and Frog Bear & Wild Boar before that.

Dick's, which was known as much for its intentionally rude servers as its food, exited Columbus and a few other markets in November, and its Arena District digs have not yet been filled.

The building is owned by Nationwide Realty Investors, which said in a statement that it has received "significant interest" in the space, but has yet to sign a tenant.

"We are working to find the ideal user to add to the vibrancy and energy of the district, which is unmatched in Columbus during hockey season," said the company's marketing director, Carli Lanfersiek.

The space is one the best spots in the Arena District, given its location near the entrance to Nationwide Arena, but it has issues. It is rather large at more than 7,000 square feet and probably is very expensive.

Other restaurants and bars have survived in the Arena District, such as Buca Di Beppo and Ted's Montana Grill, but those businesses have found a non-hockey crowd to sell to, said Bob Welcher, president of Restaurant Consultants Inc.

"It's seasonal. It's driven by activities, and there just isn't enough going on down there to support it," he said of the former Dick's space. "It is really dependent upon games, and people don't tend to stick around afterwards."

Welcher thinks the best use for that space would be to break it up into a couple of smaller units or convert it into offices.

"It's just too big," he said. "There isn't a consistent enough flow of business."

Coming to the district in the next few weeks is Fuzzy's Taco Shop. This Texas-based chain is opening in the former Japanese Steak House location at 479 N. High St., beside Novak's.

Fuzzy's is a fast-casual-style restaurant featuring familiar Mexican dishes such as queso, guacamole, burritos and lots of tacos, including versions with brisket and fish. Fuzzy's also serves beer and margaritas. The store, the first in Columbus and second in Ohio, is expected to open Oct. 16, according to its Facebook page.

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Blue Jackets: With Anderson on roster, Motte sent to Cleveland

By Andrew Erickson

The 11th-hour signing of right wing Josh Anderson to a three-year deal meant the Blue Jackets had some decisions to make, and they did just that in the final hours before sending the league their season-opening roster.

"Healthy stuff," coach John Tortorella said of the decision-making process Tuesday. "As I always say, it's really good stuff for this organization."

Tortorella expressed concern with Anderson's conditioning after the 23-year-old missed the Blue Jackets' camp during a contract holdout, but his



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inclusion as one of 13 forwards on the season-opening roster means forward Tyler Motte will start the season with the Cleveland Monsters, the Blue Jackets' American Hockey League affiliate.

Forward Kole Sherwood, a New Albany native, and defenseman John Ramage will join Motte in Cleveland, the Blue Jackets announced Tuesday.

Centers Sam Vigneault, who is out four to six weeks with a broken finger, and Boone Jenner, who remains day-to-day with an undisclosed middle-body injury, have been placed on the injured/non-roster list to begin the season. Forward Jordan Schroeder, who made just one preseason appearance and has been day-to-day with an upper-body injury, has been placed on injured reserve.

The Blue Jackets will begin the season with 13 forwards, including Anderson, Artemi Panarin, Alexander Wennberg, Matt Calvert, Cam Atkinson, Brandon Dubinsky, Pierre-Luc Dubois, Sonny Milano, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Zac Dalpe, Markus Hannikainen, Lukas Sedlak and captain Nick Foligno.

The team's eight defensemen to start the season are Seth Jones, Zach Werenski, David Savard, Jack Johnson, Markus Nutivaara, Gabriel Carlsson, Ryan Murray and Scott Harrington.

Sergei Bobrovsky and Joonas Korpihalo are the two goaltenders.

The Blue Jackets open their 2017-18 season Friday night at Nationwide Arena against the New York Islanders.

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NHL | Blue Jackets confirm Josh Anderson signing

By Adam Jardy

The Blue Jackets have confirmed the signing of restricted free agent Josh Anderson, who has missed the entire preseason while aiming for a new contract.

The deal, which was reported by multiple outlets including The Dispatch late Monday night, is a three-year deal worth \$1.85 million per year.

"Josh was an important contributor on our team a year ago and we believe he will continue to be an important part of our team in the years to come," general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said in a statement. "He brings size, speed and grit to our lineup and as a young player is still growing and developing with his best years still to come."

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The 23-year-old Anderson had 17 goals and 12 assists and a plus-12 rating in 78 games last year, his first full NHL season. He was second on the team in shooting percentage at 14.3 percent and third in even-strength goals. Anderson was taken in the fourth round of the 2012 NHL Draft.

The Blue Jackets have to submit their regular-season roster to the league by today at 5 p.m. They had been carrying a full roster of 13 forwards, eight defensemen and two goalies, meaning they will have to make a move in order to clear a spot for Anderson. It is not immediately clear how quickly he will be able to report to the Blue Jackets, who open the season at home Friday against the New York Islanders.

Dispatch reporter Michael Arace contributed to this report.

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Anderson, Blue Jackets reach deal for upcoming season

By Adam Jardy

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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Blue Jackets | Nick Foligno moves to center to bolster thin position

By Adam Jardy

The offseason might be a time to rest the body, but the mind never completely shuts off. Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella was looking over his depth chart at center over the summer when he made a phone call to his captain, Nick Foligno.

The ensuing conversation planted the seeds that have come to harvest. With the season opener arriving Friday, Tortorella has shifted the left wing to center to help stabilize a position thinned by injuries and youth for most of the preseason. Foligno, entering his 11th season in the NHL, said he welcomes the move.

"With everything that's shaken out with what's gone on with our team, I don't think it's any surprise that we're looking for a centerman," Foligno said. "But nothing came to fruition, so he said, 'I want you to be ready in case it doesn't, and I think you can handle it.' I've kind of mentally prepared myself for that situation to happen, and I'm looking forward to doing the job."

Several factors prompted the move. Boone Jenner has missed the entire preseason due to injury. Brandon Dubinsky missed all but the final preseason game while recovering from offseason wrist surgery. A trade for Colorado's Matt Duchene has yet to materialize. And perhaps as impactful as any other factor has been the growth of Pierre-Luc Dubois, the No. 3 overall pick in the 2016 draft.



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Last year, Tortorella said, Dubois looked unsure of himself and tentative in his first training camp. To boost Dubois' confidence and keep him in the lineup, the Blue Jackets have moved him from center to left wing, where he has played with poise.

Foligno moving to center helps speed that process along as well.

"They just said to do my thing and play with my instincts," Dubois said of being on the wing. "I use my body in the corners and stuff like that, and feel like I'm doing a better job with that."

In addition to considering himself a student of the game, Foligno has experience at center. When Mark Letestu and Dubinsky were limited by injuries during the 2014-15 season, Foligno spent about three months playing center, he said.

He finished that season with 31 goals and 42 assists for 73 points — all career highs.

"He's just a great pro," Tortorella said. "He wants to help the team. I think that helps us in the middle, where it's well-documented we have a little bit of a problem up the gut of the ice. Adding him there helps us."

The biggest adjustments resulting from the position change involve defensive responsibilities. During last Saturday's preseason finale in Pittsburgh, Tortorella said, he heard Foligno asking assistant coach Brad Larsen questions about coverages.

It's a switch that has energized the 29-year-old Foligno, in part because he's sharing a line with Sonny Milano (age 21) on the left and Oliver Bjorkstrand (22) on the right.

"They trust me with this role right now, and that makes me feel really proud and excited," Foligno said.

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1076321 Winnipeg Jets

Five keys to get Winnipeg Jets to the next level

Mike McIntyre By: Mike McIntyre

They've been talking the talk, saying all the right things throughout the pre-season about what they need to do in order to turn potential into progress and take the next step.

So, can the Winnipeg Jets walk the walk?

There is no shortage of optimism around these parts, but there's also a healthy dose of skepticism mixed in from a fan base that's been burned a few times before.

Sure, there's plenty that could go wrong again. But with a brand-new season set to begin tonight — and the Jets currently tied for first-place overall in the National Hockey League — we present to you a glass-half-full look at how this team can not only make its second playoff appearance since relocating to Winnipeg from Atlanta in 2011, but actually take a legitimate run at Lord Stanley's cup.

The masked men seem to have quickly developed some off-ice chemistry during camp, with Mason taking on the role of veteran mentor to the talented but inconsistent Hellebuyck. Will it pay off with improved play in the crease? The Jets are certainly banking on it, and if Mason can revert to something close to his rookie-of-the-year form (in 2008 with the Columbus Blue Jackets) while allowing Hellebuyck to flourish in a backup role with far less pressure than was the case last season, there will be much to celebrate. The Jets don't need exceptional goaltending to

succeed. Just something in the range of league-average should be enough most nights with the type of offensive firepower they possess.

"I'm really excited to get going here. I think everybody is. It's Game 1 of 82. We just have to handle it one game at a time. But I think we're all ready to put last season and the summer behind us and get going," Mason said after practice Tuesday.

Sure, scoring goals is a lot of fun. The Jets likely won't have much problem doing that this season, coming off a campaign in which they put up 249, which was tied for sixth-most in the league. But everybody seems to recognize a change in approach is necessary, even if it means some personal statistics may suffer. Keeping the puck out of your net is just as important as lighting the lamp, and the club's top offensive players have been preaching the need to be more defensively responsible to avoid a situation like last year, where they gave up 256 goals, fourth-worst in the NHL. If they truly buy in, success will follow.

"I've never really liked playing defensively, but at this level you gotta be able to do it," fleet forward Nikolaj Ehlers said Tuesday. "It's not that I was horrible at it, but I wasn't the best at it and it's something I wanted to get better at and it's something we as a team needed to get better at."

THE BAD BOYS TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

They just can't seem to help themselves. But if the Jets finally do get the message and cut down on their all-too-frequent trips to the sin bin, that alone should result in a few more wins. Coach Paul Maurice's decision to have retired referee Paul Devorski advise his young players during the pre-season was certainly a novel approach and one that shows the bench boss recognizes the status quo is no longer acceptable. But the proof, as they say, will be in the pudding.

A HEALTHY DOSE OF GOOD FORTUNE

Winnipeg Jets' Patrik Laine talks to media on opening day of the Jets' training camp, in Winnipeg on Thursday, September 14, 2017.

JOHN WOODS / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

Winnipeg Jets' Patrik Laine talks to media on opening day of the Jets' training camp, in Winnipeg on Thursday, September 14, 2017.

It can't possibly get any worse than last season, when the Jets had 364 man-games lost to injury. That was second-most in the NHL and the constant lineup rotation made it difficult to develop any consistency. There will always be players going down over the rigours of an 82-game schedule, but if they can manage to limit the damage it should pave the way — especially on the blue line, where the health of players such as Tyler Myers, Toby Enstrom and Dmitry Kulikov will be key. Depth in the form of Tucker Poolman and Ben Chiarot may also help weather any storms that might come their way.

THE KIDS TAKE ANOTHER STEP

Winnipeg Jets' Tyler Myers, of the United States, skates during speed trials on the second day of the Jets' training camp in Winnipeg on Friday, September 15, 2017.

JOHN WOODS / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

Winnipeg Jets' Tyler Myers, of the United States, skates during speed trials on the second day of the Jets' training camp in Winnipeg on Friday, September 15, 2017.

If Patrik Laine can avoid a so-called sophomore slump — and judging by his fantastic pre-season that shouldn't be a concern — the Jets will reap the rewards. Ehlers is entering his third full season, and Maurice has praised him recently for taking the biggest strides of any player on the roster. Mark Scheifele is emerging as one of the league's top centres, and continued growth should come on the blue-line from Jacob Trouba and Josh Morrissey. These five first-round draft picks give the team a huge boost simply by gaining another year of experience.

"I have a couple new tricks on the ice," Laine said when asked how he can build on his incredible 36-goal rookie campaign. "I think they



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(opponents) now know what I can do and what our team can do on the ice and they'll be a little more careful... I'll just try to figure out something new."

We'll give the final word to the captain, who is certainly not shying away from a playoffs-or-bust approach.

"You've got one shot at having a career in this league," said Blake Wheeler. "At a certain point in time you want to win. I've been trying to win for six years here. I think we're at the point now where you see some young guys blossoming into impact players. Some of our veteran guys, some of our young guys have kinda come together to create a pretty good nucleus."

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1076322 Winnipeg Jets

Jets squad prepared for takeoff

Jason Bell By: Jason Bell

Andrew Copp's lucky break — or lack of one, in this case — had a painful side effect for Kyle Connor.

The 23-year-old forward who hails from Ann Arbor, Mich., was sidelined for a couple of days with an ailing knee after blocking a cannon off the stick of veteran Flames defenceman Mark Giordano on Saturday night in Calgary.

The pain was so intense, Copp couldn't bear weight on the leg and did his best crab impersonation to crawl off the ice at the Saddledome.

But he declared himself fit for battle Tuesday morning following a 70-minute practice at the downtown rink. He took several line rushes with centre Adam Lowry and right-winger Joel Armia and also worked with the penalty-killing unit.

The club's medical staff and head coach Paul Maurice clearly agreed, giving him the green light to join the battle against Auston Matthews and the Leafs.

By mid-afternoon, the Jets announced Connor had been dispatched to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

"I took a couple of days off just to rest it and the swelling's gone down a lot, and just feel comfortable, obviously, out there in practice and should be ready to go for the game," Copp said.

"I was nervous that something wasn't right. I'm just thankful that everything is structurally sound."

Winnipeg needed to trim only one body from its roster prior to a league-imposed 4 p.m. CT deadline on Tuesday.

The Jets are down to 23 players, although just 20 can dress tonight. Rookie blue-liner Tucker Poolman, who left college to sign with the Jets in the spring, cracked the roster, although he and Ben Chiarot will watch from the press box. One forward, likely either Marko Dano or Brandon Tanev, will need to be scratched as well.

Poolman had off-season surgery on both shoulders, but showed no ill effects during training camp and his pro readiness — heady, physical play in his own end and quick puck movement — was apparent during his pre-season tests.

The East Grand Forks, Minn., product said he was pleased with his adjustment to the quick pace.

"I thought I proved a lot to myself, I think," Poolman said. "It's a big transition from college to pro, so overall I was happy with things. It doesn't mean I'm going to stop now. You gotta keep working every day.

"Initially, that rookie game, just hopping into it and a couple of practices, it was fast for me. I don't know if I was still out of shape or just the whole summer of not playing hockey, but after that initial surge, the game has slowed down for me."

Connor, meanwhile, earned a spot with the Jets out of training camp last season, but was demoted to the Moose in December and went on to score 25 goals on the farm. After an unspectacular camp with the big club, he'll continue his progression with the AHL team, likely rejoining centre Jack Roslovic on the farm club's top line.

The defensive pairings against Toronto will be Dustin Byfuglien and Toby Enstrom, Jacob Trouba and Josh Morrissey, and Dmitry Kulikov and Tyler Myers.

Up front, the projected lines include Mark Scheifele centring right-winger Blake Wheeler and left-winger Mathieu Perreault, centre Bryan Little joined by right-winger Patrik Laine and left-winger Nikolaj Ehlers, the Lowry line and Shawn Matthias between right-winger Nic Petan and either Tanev or Dano.

Fourth-line grinder Matt Hendricks (lower body) was placed on the club's injured reserve list.

Steve Mason is expected to get the start in net for Winnipeg, with Connor Hellebuyck backing him up.

Copp said the blistering shot hit a small area of his knee that wasn't protected.

"I think it missed the pad. That's why I was in so much pain," he said. "I thought the whistle would get blown down since the puck went outside the zone, but the rule is we have to get possession. So it was a five-on-two coming back with five of their best players.

"I was trying to get to my feet at some point to get my stick on a pass, but it was a pretty helpless feeling. I'm glad it happened in the pre-season."

Blocking shots, he said, is definitely a hazard of the workplace on the PK.

"It's part of the job. Paul asked if I'll be able to block a shot (tonight) and I said, 'Yeah.' Hopefully, it doesn't hit me in the same spot."

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1076323 Winnipeg Jets

NHL preview, Canadian teams: Winnipeg Jets

ken-wiebe BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN

On the first day of training camp, Paul Maurice made it clear that he's looking for a return on investment this season.

After being swept in four games by the Anaheim Ducks in April of 2015, the Jets made an organizational decision to get younger and add skill to the lineup in order to try and compete in the Western Conference.

That commitment brought consecutive seasons without the playoffs and plenty of growing pains.

But with a deeper roster than he's had at his disposal since his arrival in January of 2014, Maurice believes he has a group that could make some noise this season.



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After finishing seventh in goals scored in the NHL last season, the Jets understand they'll need to clean things up defensively if they want to realize their collective goal.

"There's a clear indication that we can score goals, that we have that kind of offensive talent," said Maurice. "But the weaknesses in our game are almost all defensive in nature.

"Three years ago, we set a franchise record for (fewest) goals against with 204. The systems haven't changed, the personnel changed and we got quite a bit younger. I know we can get back to that number (204) or close to that number. That's what we're shooting for."

The Jets have only received league-average goaltending or better in one of the six seasons since the franchise relocated from Atlanta, so it was no surprise a veteran such as Steve Mason was signed as a free agent.

The Central Division will likely be as tight as ever, so grabbing one of the available playoff spots won't be easy.

FORWARDS

This group boasts a nice combination of depth and front-line talent. Mark Scheifele (32 goals, 82 points) could challenge for the Art Ross Trophy, Patrik Laine has one of the best shots in the NHL and should be in the mix for the Rocket Richard Trophy, while Wheeler is looking for a third consecutive season of 70-plus points. And don't forget about Nikolaj Ehlers and a healthy Bryan Little.

DEFENCE

This group should be an area of strength, with Jacob Trouba, Dustin Byfuglien, Tyler Myers (who got hurt on Nov. 11 and didn't return), Josh Morrissey, Toby Enstrom, free-agent addition Dmitry Kulikov. Rookie Tucker Poolman and Ben Chiarot are the extras to start the season. The Jets played only one full period with their top-six defencemen last season, so keeping an eye on the health of the blueliners is a storyline worth monitoring.

GOALTENDING

Mason inked a two-year deal worth \$8.2 million on July 1 and he's here to provide some stability between the pipes and serve as a mentor for Connor Hellebuyck, who made 54 starts and played 56 games in his first full NHL season. Mason is coming off a down season, but posted a .918 save percentage and 2.47 goals-against average in four-plus seasons in Philly. The Jets would be happy with that.

COACHING

Paul Maurice is back for his fourth full season behind the Jets' bench and received a multi-year contract extension in September. Expectations for this group are on the rise and it will be considered a disappointment if the organization doesn't make the playoffs. It's up to the coaching staff to help provide the framework so both special teams units improve and to decrease the number of undisciplined penalties the Jets take.

BOTTOM LINE

Provided Mason rebounds and the Jets clean up their discipline issues, the Jets will return to the playoffs for the first time since 2015 and continue the search for their first post-season victory.

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1076324 Winnipeg Jets

Mason will be key to Jets success

BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN

Steve Mason can recall the exact moment he knew he wanted to be the guy standing between the pipes.

"I switched full-time when I was nine after playing four years of forward and defence, but goaltending was always the position I had a passion for," said Mason, who signed a two-year deal worth \$8.2 million on July 1 to be the Winnipeg Jets No. 1 netminder. "After school, we'd come home and I was always the goaltender. When I first started playing, everybody had to play net and I would willingly go in when most people dreaded that day.

"It was always a position I was drawn to."

Growing up in Ontario, Hall of Famer Marty Brodeur was Mason's favourite puckstopper.

"I had my room painted (New Jersey) Devils red and I had posters all over my wall," said Mason. "He was one of the best (players) and ever since the Devils won the 1995 Stanley Cup, I jumped on that bandwagon."

As the Jets get set to open the 2017-18 campaign on Wednesday at Bell MTS Place against the Toronto Maple Leafs, Mason is embracing all that comes with being a goalie in a Canadian market.

That means knowing both the big saves and the soft goals will often get blown out of proportion.

It comes with the territory when you play what can be one of the loneliest positions in hockey.

The road to get to this point has included both extreme highs (10 shutouts for the Columbus Blue Jackets and capturing the Calder Trophy in 2008-09) and crushing lows (like when he felt he was ready to quit hockey before a trade to the Philadelphia Flyers, but Mason believes that's all part of what has made him a better goalie.

"It makes you appreciate things," said Mason. "Going through some difficult times earlier in my career and finding a way to work out of it, that put myself in a position to handle things better as my career has gone on.

"I'm well aware the seasons are long and there are going to be ebbs and flows in it. I'm better built now to handle those."

One experience Mason won't ever forget was helping Team Canada capture a gold medal at the world junior hockey championship in 2008 in the Czech Republic on a club that included the likes of Drew Doughty, P.K. Subban, Karl Alzner, John Tavares, Steven Stamkos, Brad Marchand, Wayne Simmonds, Claude Giroux, Brandon Sutter and Jets forward Shawn Matthias.

"I look back on that tournament and it brings a smile to my face – it was cool to be part of a group like that and to see how everybody's careers have gone," said Mason. "Anytime Canada is in a hockey tournament, there's an expectation they'll win, so being a young player, you learn to deal with high expectations and a lot of pressure.

"It was definitely a tournament where you grow as a player and it's something I'll always look back on and have good memories of."

Matthias remembers Mason standing tall throughout the tournament and has remained close with him, skating and working out together in Ontario during the off-seasons.

"He's a friendly, soft-spoken guy but he's got a good sense of humour and he's going to be great for our locker room," said Matthias. "Playing with him at the world junior, you could see the passion he had to win that tournament. He competes every night and he wants to win. You can see that fire in his eyes."

Jets goalie coach Wade Flaherty has been impressed by what he's seen from Mason since his arrival for training camp.

"I really like the way he uses his size in the net. The way he plays big and tracks the puck," said Flaherty. "He's got a good work ethic and is very detailed in his preparation. He's a very mature goaltender."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

Last fall, the Jets rolled the dice by placing Ondrej Pavelec on waivers and starting the season with Connor Hellebuyck and Michael Hutchinson – both of whom had shown flashes of brilliance but neither of which had much experience when it comes to carrying the load at the NHL level.

That's not the case this season, where Mason was brought in to both carry the mail and serve as a mentor to Hellebuyck.

"He's a bona fide No. 1 goalie," said Jets captain Blake Wheeler. "You can tell by the way he carries himself. There's a certain amount of preparation that goes into that job and you can tell he's 10 years into it now, so he knows what he needs to do to be ready for every practice and every game and to be feeling the way he wants to feel.

"That's a learning experience. It just doesn't come overnight and you can tell that he's gone down that road."

Mason has been to the Stanley Cup playoffs three times in his previous nine NHL seasons and he's motivated to both get back and go deeper than he's been before.

"It's been well documented that everybody sees a lot of potential in this group," said Mason. "It's one thing to talk about it, it's another thing to actually go out and do it.

"We have 82 games ahead of us before we get to that position. But there's no reason why we shouldn't have high expectations."

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1076325 Winnipeg Jets

Byfuglien can 'make or break' Jets

Paul Friesen BY PAUL FRIESEN, WINNIPEG SUN

Heard a long-time hockey guy say something the other day that boils the Winnipeg Jets season down to something pretty simple – yet immensely complex.

His conclusion: as Dustin Byfuglien goes, so goes the team.

As the Jets embark upon their seventh and most critical season, yet, that's probably more true than it's ever been.

"In a lot of ways, he can make or break us," captain Blake Wheeler said, Tuesday.

Job 1 for head coach Paul Maurice this season is to squeeze better defensive play, better positional play and better decision-making from his offensively-gifted roster.

Who better positioned to lead that charge than Byfuglien, who can singlehandedly set the tone of games – good and bad?

Anyone who's watched No. 33 over the years has seen he can be interested some nights, not so interested others.

Intense one game, lackadaisical the next.

A player you wouldn't want to mess with on Friday, but making a mess of his own zone on Sunday.

"With his skill set," Wheeler continued. "And the amount of responsibility he has on the back end, the way our back end is set up, if he's playing, how do I put this – if he's playing responsibly and playing within himself and being a dominant player, we're a different team.

"Sometimes he gets a little bit impatient and wants to push things a little too much, and all good players do that sometimes. When he's going in the right direction, he's as dominant a player as there is."

It's those other directions that can bog his team down.

When Byfuglien leads, others follow. So if he doesn't buy into the new, more responsible approach of waiting patiently for offence while playing good defence, it stands to reason others won't, either.

"It definitely includes him," Wheeler said. "There has to be an awareness when you're on the ice with him, because he's such a dynamic player and does such a great job of creating offence and prolonging our offense. We can't just make him stand on the blue line. We need him to keep our forecheck alive. We need him to keep pucks in for us.

"So with that our forwards need to help him out and get back for him."

Byfuglien wasn't doing anything to cover for his teammates as far as doing media, Tuesday. The man has rules of his own when it comes to interviews, and he wouldn't do one.

He'll have to better follow the ones Maurice sets out if he wants to lead his team into the playoffs this season.

"You saw it in the exhibition -- he really picked the right spots, the right times, to go," Maurice said. "What's true of Byfuglien would be no different than any of the skilled players we have up front. There's just an awful lot of times there's nothing there, and we don't need to try to make something happen.

"And they've been wired into that. They've been showing it on the ice in games for me."

The coach probably doesn't want to put any added onus on the big man. But he knows better than any of us how big a part of the room Byfuglien is.

The players know it, too, even the new ones. When No. 33 is on, chances are the team is on.

"I'm sure that's the way it is," goaltender Steve Mason said. "I've only been here a short time, but from what I've seen he has that ability to carry a hockey club, be a presence on the ice that's hard to replace."

Fellow defenceman Josh Morrissey is glad he doesn't face Byfuglien as an opponent. He's seen how that can end up.

"He's one of the few guys in the league that can really change the pace of a game by himself," Morrissey said.

We've seen that go both ways over the years, as the Jets have so far failed to become the defensively sound outfit they've vowed to become.

It comes down to this: if Byfuglien can do it for an entire season, anyone, and everyone, can.

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No more waiting

They are six words that'll hang in the air around Blake Wheeler for the next six months.

"It's got to be this year," Wheeler said going into training camp. "It just has to be."

The Jets captain was referring to his team becoming a playoff team and Stanley Cup contender.

A month later, on the eve of the season-opener, Wheeler isn't backing down, but rather embracing his expectations.

"You've got one shot at having a career in this league," he said, Tuesday. "At a certain point in time, you want to win. So to shy away from it -- I've been trying to win for six years here."

In that time the Jets have tweaked, retooled and, finally, rebuilt the roster that came from Atlanta, making the playoffs just once.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

Wheeler is one of just four remaining players from that move to Winnipeg.

"We're at the point now where we see some of the young guys blossoming into impact players," he said. "Some of our veteran guys and young guys have come together to create a pretty good nucleus. That's why now is as good a time as any."

Wheeler, 31, is going into his 10th NHL season, and hasn't been past the first round of the playoffs since 2010, when he was with Boston.

Other key members of the Jets include 32-year-old Dustin Byfuglien, Toby Enstrom, who's nearly 33, and Bryan Little, who's pushing 30.

"You wait too long, and the veteran guys are gone," Wheeler said. "And then our young guys are going to be veteran guys, and then you're going to be waiting on the next crop of young guys to come in. That's how the cycle works in a salary cap."

Jets brass has all but repeated Wheeler's words, saying it's time the organization starts winning.

-Paul Friesen

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1076326 Winnipeg Jets

What will Laine do for an encore?

ken-wiebe BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN

Since his arrival on the scene, Patrik Laine made it clear team goals – and winning games – are the only things that really matter to him.

But that hasn't stopped many from wondering what the Winnipeg Jets sniper might do for an encore this season.

After putting up 36 goals and 64 points in 73 games as a rookie, there's a sense Laine could do some serious damage as a sophomore.

He's got one of the best shots in the NHL, which was readily apparent during the pre-season, when he racked up five goals (including four on the power play) and eight points in four games.

It's not out of the question to suggest Laine might score somewhere between 45 and 50 goals in his second season.

He's back on the first power play unit and will get plenty of ice time on a line with Bryan Little and Nikolaj Ehlers at even strength.

Laine already received plenty of attention from top checking lines and defence pairings last season, so he's ready for that.

"We'll see. I have a couple of new tricks on the ice, but I don't know," said Laine. "I think they now know what I can do and what our team can do on the ice and they'll be a little more careful on the ice. I'll just try to figure out something new."

What Laine would allow was that a lot has changed for him since last October, when his only goal was to make the Jets after being chosen second overall in the 2016 NHL Draft.

"At this moment, if I compare this moment to last season, last season I was just trying to make it onto the team and show the coaches and the team what I can do," said Laine. "But now I think I'm going to have a big role on this team again and just try to improve my game every day and just try to be a better player than the last season home opener."

What does Jets head coach Paul Maurice expect from Laine this season?

"Other than that he seems to be shooting the puck harder, his game was really in a kind of a linear progression last year," said Maurice. "He just got better and better five on five, (with) the reads of the game. And he came back to camp right on that path and he continues to get better. I don't spend a whole lot of time trying to figure out how many he's going to score, nobody knows.

"We know he's going to score a bunch but we just expect him to get better daily, game by game, on his experience. Smart players, these guys that are gifted, they pick up a lot really quickly and you don't have to tell them more than once but they still have to experience it to get it right. And each game he gets a little more experience."

COPP IN THE CLEAR

The status of Jets forward Andrew Copp for the season opener took a positive turn on Tuesday when he joined his teammates for a full practice.

Copp was considered a longshot to be in the lineup after taking a slapper from Calgary Flames captain Mark Giordano off the right knee in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss in the pre-season finale.

"I didn't have any setbacks at all. I was just thankful that nothing was broken," said Copp. "I just took a couple days off just to rest it and the swelling has gone down a lot."

Copp was on the ice writhing in pain and did his best to get up, but simply couldn't get back in the play and the Flames capitalized, getting a power-play goal from Kris Versteeg.

"I think it missed the (shin) pad. That's why I was in so much pain. I thought the whistle would get blown down since the puck went outside the zone, but the rule is we have to get possession," said Copp. "So it was a five-on-two coming back with five of their best players. I was trying to get to my feet at some point to get my stick on a pass but it was a pretty helpless feeling. I'm glad it happened in the pre-season, not during the regular season."

CONNOR DEMOTED

With Copp clearing a final medical hurdle, the Jets made one final move to get down to the 23-man roster, assigning left-winger Kyle Connor to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

Connor came into training camp with plenty of confidence after dominating down in the minors during the stretch drive last season, scoring 17 goals in his final 20 games with the Moose.

But during the pre-season, Connor was held without a point in six games and unable to grab one of the available jobs in the top-six.

So instead of being used on the fourth line or spending time in the press box, Connor was demoted on Tuesday.

But don't be surprised to see him return to the Jets before long.

Getting a little extra seasoning should only serve the 17th overall pick of the 2015 NHL Draft well in terms of his development.

The Jets also officially placed forward Matt Hendricks on injured reserve with a suspected foot injury, retroactive to Sept. 27 – when he blocked a shot in a game against the Ottawa Senators.

That leaves the Jets with two goalies, eight defencemen and 13 forwards on the active roster to start the 2017-18 season.

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1076327 Winnipeg Jets

Winnipeg Jets vs Toronto Maple Leafs



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

ken-wiebe BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN

THE BIG MATCHUP

Patrik Laine vs Auston Matthews

While it's true neither player is as interested in this supposed rivalry as the fans and media, the two prior meetings between the top two picks in the 2016 NHL Draft created plenty of highlight-reel moments, including a hat trick for Laine. Look for more of the same from the young stars on Wednesday.

Keys to the game

Play away from puck

Buckling down defensively is at the top of the priority list for the Jets this season. Showing that commitment regularly is the only way they'll get back to the post-season.

D is for discipline

The Jets need to be a more disciplined team this season and this is the first chance to see if they can succeed on that front. Eliminating the tripping and holding minors is at the top of the to-do list.

Mason stands tall

The Jets brought in Steve Mason via free agency to help solve their goaltending woes and he'll be looking to get off to a good start with his new club. In 13 meetings against the Maple Leafs, Mason is 4-6-2 with a 3.43 goals-against average and .876 save %.

Keep offence rolling

The Jets finished seventh in the NHL in goals scored last season and feature plenty of dynamic players in the top-six. Putting the puck in the net shouldn't be an issue, but the Jets did most of their scoring in the pre-season on the power play, with 13 of 17 markers coming with the man-advantage.

Setting the tone

Last season, the Jets were 22-18-1 at Bell MTS Place but home ice wasn't an advantage until a late-season surge.

GAME DAY LINEUPS

Toronto Maple Leafs

FORWARDS

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

Defence

Jake Gardiner Nikita Zaitsev

Morgan Rielly Ron Hainsey

Andreas Borgman Connor Carrick

Goal

Frederik Andersen

Curtis McElhinney

Winnipeg Jets

Game Day Lineup

FORWARDS

Mathieu Perreault Mark Scheifele Blake Wheeler

Nikolaj Ehlers Bryan Little Patrik Laine

Andrew Copp Adam Lowry Joel Armia

Brandon Tanev Shawn Matthias Nic Petan

Defence

Josh Morrissey Jacob Trouba

Toby Enstrom Dustin Byfuglien

Dmitry Kulikov Tyler Myers

Goalies

Steve Mason

Connor Hellebuyck

Special Teams

POWER PLAY

(2016-17)

Toronto: 23.8% (2nd)

Winnipeg: 18.2% (18th)

PENALTY KILLING

(2016-17)

Toronto: 82.5% (9th)

Winnipeg: 77.5% (26th)

SICK BAY

Maple Leafs: None

Jets: Matt Hendricks (foot, IR)

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1076328 Winnipeg Jets

Jets might as well win now: Wheeler

ken-wiebe BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN

The dress rehearsals are complete and the games are about to start counting.

With the Winnipeg Jets set to welcome the Toronto Maple Leafs to town for what should be a high-profile showdown to open the 2017-18 season, captain Blake Wheeler wasn't about to shy away from the expectations on his club to return to the playoffs for the first time since 2015.

"You've got one shot at having a career in this league and at a certain point and time, you want to win," said Wheeler. "So, shy away from it? I've been trying to win for six years here. We're at the point now where we see some of the young guys blossoming into impact players. Some of our veteran guys and some of our young guys have come together to form a pretty good nucleus. That's why now is as good a time as any (to win).

"You wait too long and the veteran guys and our young guys are going to be veteran guys and the next crop of young guys will come in. That's how the cycle works in a salary cap (world)."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

The Jets added goalie Steve Mason and defenceman Dmitry Kulikov in free agency and spent the bulk of training camp working on a commitment to team defence.

Facing a high-octane offensive attack like the Maple Leafs in their opener will be a good test for the Jets.

"They're a good team, no doubt. They've got a young team as well, lots of talent, lots of skill, lots of speed," said Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers. "So this game is going to be a fast one, it's going to be the first one so everybody is pumped up and excited for it. It's going to be a pretty good game."

Fans will be watching the third showdown between the top two picks in the 2016 NHL Draft, Patrik Laine of the Jets and Auston Matthews of the Maple Leafs.

With the two teams only facing one another twice a season, this supposed rivalry isn't going to blossom the way it has between Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin, but the two prior meetings featured plenty of excitement.

"Two great young talents," said Mason. "It's amazing how these young players can come into the league in their first years and not just be a player on a roster but an important piece. It's a credit to both of them. I can understand that they don't like talking about it but for everyone else it's just fun to watch them."

What does Jets head coach Paul Maurice expect from Laine this season?

"Other than that he seems to be shooting the puck harder, his game was really in a kind of a linear progression last year," said Maurice. "He just got better and better five on five, (with) the reads of the game. And he came back to camp right on that path and he continues to get better. I don't spend a whole lot of time trying to figure out how many he's going to score, nobody knows."

"We know he's going to score a bunch but we just expect him to get better daily, game by game, on his experience. Smart players, these guys that are gifted, they pick up a lot really quickly and you don't have to tell them more than once but they still have to experience it to get it right. And each game he gets a little more experience."

Jets forward Andrew Copp, who blocked a shot from Calgary Flames captain Mark Giordano with his right knee in Saturday's pre-season finale, made it through practice and said he expected to be ready to play.

"I think I should be ready to go tomorrow. I felt good out there today, didn't have any setbacks at all," said Copp. "I was just thankful that nothing was broken. I just took a couple days off just to rest it and the swelling has gone down a lot. I feel comfortable, obviously out there practising, and I should be good to go tomorrow."

Although Jets head coach Paul Maurice would only allow that it was "possible" Copp would be in the lineup, he will be skating on the third unit with Adam Lowry and Joel Armia barring any setbacks

The Jets made their final move to get down to the 23-player limit on Tuesday afternoon when they assigned left-winger Kyle Connor to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

Connor had no points in six games during the pre-season and this move will allow him to continue to work on his all-around game and playing big minutes in the minors instead of being used on the fourth line or being held out as a healthy scratch.

It's unknown if Brandon Tanev would move down to the fourth line with Shawn Matthias and Nic Petan or if Marko Dano would stay in the lineup.

Mason will get the call in goal for the Jets, while Frederik Andersen starts for the Maple Leafs.

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1076329 Winnipeg Jets

Crosby or McDavid at No. 1? Postmedia's annual top-50 NHL players list

Ted Wyman_op BY TED WYMAN, WINNIPEG SUN

For the first time in many years, there's actually a debate over which player is No. 1 in the NHL.

Sidney Crosby of the Pittsburgh Penguins has been the undisputed top player for a long time, but Edmonton's Connor McDavid has changed all that by winning a scoring title and Hart Trophy at age 20 in 2016-17.

Crosby is now 30 and will surely relinquish his No. 1 status soon.

Has it happened yet?

The answer lies in this year's edition of our annual Postmedia top-50 NHL players:

1. Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh (1)

McDavid is right there, but back-to-back Conn Smythe Trophies, league high in goals allow Crosby to keep top ranking.

2. Connor McDavid, Edmonton (21)

Hart Trophy winner and scoring champ may be at top for next 15 years, but doesn't quite edge Crosby ... yet.

3. Erik Karlsson, Ottawa (9)

Has ability to control games from the back end, put up points and make passes no one else sees coming.

4. Patrick Kane, Chicago (2)

Tied Crosby in points with 89 after winning scoring title in 2015-16, consistent scoring talent.

5. Carey Price, Montreal (5)

Elite goalie gives Habs chance to win every night. 2.23 GAA and .923 SV% are among the league's best.

6. Evgeni Malkin, Pittsburgh (19)

Behind only McDavid and Crosby in points per game during regular season, led all players in scoring in playoffs.

7. Braden Holtby, Washington (12)

Elevated his game again in 2016-17, had better numbers than even Price (2.07 GAA, .925 SV%).

8. Brent Burns, San Jose (11)

Former forward led all defencemen in scoring and won his first Norris Trophy.

9. Drew Doughty, Los Angeles (3)

Drops off a bit a year after winning Norris Trophy, but still has game-changing ability.

10. Victor Hedman, Tampa Bay (11)

Outscored Karlsson last season and has outstanding all-around game.

11. Nikita Kucherov, Tampa Bay (43)

Elevated his game again in 2016-17, scoring 40 goals and finishing sixth in league in points.

12. Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg (NR)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

Goal and point totals have increased in each of his four seasons, finished seventh in league scoring.

13. Jonathan Toews, Chicago (8)

His offensive numbers have really dropped, but still has elite two-way game.

14. Auston Matthews, Toronto (NR)

Calder Trophy winner did remarkable things at a young age, was one of only three players in league to score 40 goals.

15. Alexander Ovechkin, Washington (4)

Didn't have a great offensive year, but is always a candidate for a big-time bounce back

16. Sergei Bobrovsky, Columbus (NR)

Vezina Trophy winner won 41 games and had incredible 2.06 GAA and .931 save percentage.

17. Patrice Bergeron, Boston (10)

Won his fourth Selke Trophy as league's best defensive forward, though point totals dipped considerably.

18. Nicklas Backstrom, Washington (40)

Second in the league in assists, behind only McDavid.

19. Brad Marchand, Boston (48)

Has emerged as a big-time goal-scorer and point producer. Not just a pest anymore.

20. Leon Draisaitl, Edmonton (NR)

Finished eighth in scoring in his third NHL season, great complement for McDavid.

21. Vladimir Tarasenko, St. Louis (22)

Has scored 79 goals the past two seasons, can dazzle with his skill.

22. Jamie Benn, Dallas (6)

Scoring dropped by 20 points after two stellar seasons.

23. John Tavares, New York Islanders (13)

Finished 27th in league scoring last year, but that's likely just an anomaly.

24. Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay (20)

Injuries have taken toll, though he still managed 20 points in just 17 games last year.

25. Patrik Laine, Winnipeg (NR)

At 19, already has one of the best — if not the best — shots in the league.

26. Duncan Keith, Chicago (16)

A few D-men have passed him by, but two-time Norris Trophy winner still gets job done.

27. Devan Dubnyk, Minnesota (NR)

Had almost the exact same numbers as Price, recorded more wins.

28. Tyler Seguin, Dallas (15)

Has had good seasons in Dallas, but it always seems like there should be more.

29. Blake Wheeler, Winnipeg (26)

Has finished sixth and 12th in league scoring the past two seasons.

30. Ryan Getzlaf, Anaheim (29)

Only scored 15 goals, but was third in the league in assists with 58.

31. Anze Kopitar, Los Angeles (7)

Had a disappointing year with only 12 goals, but he's better than that and plays great defensively.

32. Artemi Panarin, Columbus (42)

The Bread Man was 11th in league scoring and has 151 points in his two NHL seasons.

33. Phil Kessel, Pittsburgh (NR)

Has scored 45 points in 49 playoff games over the past two seasons.

34. P.K. Subban, Nashville (34)

Part of a great defence that carried Nashville all the way to Stanley Cup final.

35. Roman Josi, Nashville (31)

See Subban, above. Josi is as steady as they come at both ends of the ice.

36. Joe Pavelski, San Jose (14)

Scoring dropped off after long playoff run. Still finished 24th in the league with 68 points.

37. Kris Letang, Pittsburgh (24)

Amazing that the Penguins won the Stanley Cup without him.

38. Shea Weber, Montreal (36)

Hard hitter with a boomer of a shot, Weber solidified Habs defence last season.

39. Johnny Gaudreau, Calgary (27)

Won the Lady Byng Trophy with only four penalty minutes and 61 points.

40. Jack Eichel, Buffalo (NR)

Had 57 points in 61 games after suffering an early-season knee injury.

41. David Pastrnak, Boston (NR)

Had a breakout season with 34 goals and 70 points.

42. Ryan Suter, Minnesota (38)

Physical, durable defenceman who chips in plenty of points.

43. Matt Murray, Pittsburgh (NR)

All the goaltender has done is win two Stanley Cups in his first two years in the league.

44. Max Pacioretty, Montreal (47)

Scored 35 goals last year, his fourth straight season with at least 30.

45. Jeff Skinner, Carolina (NR)

Finished sixth in the league with 37 goals, a career high.

46. Mikael Granlund, Minnesota (NR)

Finished 20th in league scoring with 69 points, plays clean two-way game.

47. Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Arizona (37)

Didn't have his best year on a very poor team, but has the ability to be difference-maker from the back end.

48. Filip Forsberg, Nashville (NR)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Led the Predators in playoff scoring after putting up 31 goals in regular season.

49. Alex Pietrangelo, St. Louis (46)

A solid, all-around blue-liner who perennially anchors the Blues, scored 48 points.

50. Zach Werenski, Columbus (NR)

Eleven goals and 47 points earned him third place in the Calder Trophy voting.

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1076335 Websites

The Athletic / Custance: Montreal's Carey Price tops the 2017-18 Goalie Tiers survey

Craig Custance 13 hours ago

In some ways, goaltending in the NHL has never been better than it is right now. Goalies are huge. They're well-trained. Most employ a modern style that relies less on athleticism and more on technique, making it increasingly hard to score.

Still, there's one goalie who has been able to distance himself from the rest. Talk to enough people in hockey, and it's clear that it's Carey Price and then everybody else in the conversation about the best goalies in the game.

"He's at a whole different level," said one goalie coach of Price, echoing the thoughts of nearly everyone. "The guy is unreal."

And so he sits, once again, at the top of the annual Goalie Tiers rankings. A project started at ESPN Insider in 2014, the Goalie Tiers averages out ratings on every starting goalie in the league on a 1-5 scale (one is best) compiled in a survey of NHL executives and coaches.

Panelists are given anonymity to encourage honesty and this year's 10-person panel consisted of the following: five NHL head coaches, two NHL general managers, one assistant GM and two goalie coaches. The results were averaged and then divided into tiers.

The 2017-18 results:

TIER 1

1. Carey Price, Montreal Canadiens

2017: 1.05

2016: 1.00

2015: 1.00

2014: 1.07

Price remains in a class by himself, with only one panelist not giving him a perfect one, opting instead to give him 1.5.

"I don't think anyone is a sure one," said the goalie coach who slightly downgraded Price. "It's a combination of the goalie and the team. He didn't look great to me in the preseason; he was sliding around a bit much. I'm sure he'll be smart enough to figure that out. It's really hard to be a pure one these days; the game is fast and guys shoot too hard."

That said, one panelist joked that he wanted to give Price a score off the scale.

"Is there less than one?" one NHL head coach asked.

Said another head coach: "He's the best of them all... You score on him with traffic, deflections and rolling pucks – that's how you score. If it's clean he has no issue."

While the gap remains between Price and everybody else, one GM suggested it's closing.

"The gap is starting to close," said the GM. "Durability still has to be the factor. We still have to question the durability, especially on that contract. But as of right now, no one is close."

TIER 2

2. Sergei Bobrovsky, Columbus Blue Jackets

2017: 1.45

2016: 2.53

2015: 1.68

2014: 1.86

One executive said the more interesting debate is about the No. 2 goalie in the league since Price is so dominant. Last season, New Jersey's Cory Schneider was in that spot but a rough season dropped him down a tier. This year, following his Vezina Trophy season, Bobrovsky seized the No. 2 spot.

"Who is the next guy?" asked the executive, when debating Price. Pittsburgh goalie "Matt Murray is in the next wave. If Bob could play in the playoffs, he could push it. If he can't, he's almost useless."

That's the big question surrounding Bobrovsky. He led the NHL with a .931 save percentage in winning his second Vezina. Then he couldn't make a big save for the Blue Jackets in the playoffs against the Penguins, finishing that series with a .882 save percentage in five games. His career playoff save percentage is now .887 in 18 games.

"His playoffs were terrible but he's really good," concluded one GM.

3. (tied) Braden Holtby, Washington Capitals

2017: 1.65

2016: 1.65

2015: 2.11

2014: 3.07

Holtby has become the picture of consistency, cementing himself in that tier slightly below Price. Not only did he earn the same rating from panelists as last year (1.65), he consistently churns out regular seasons in the .925 save percentage range, giving the Capitals a nice advantage in goal nearly every game.

"He's close to a one, I just don't know if he's Carey Price," said one GM in debating Holtby's rating. "He's a two, but he's a really good two."

This season might be the biggest challenge for Holtby in recent years. The team in front of him isn't as rock solid as it has been in the past. The Capitals are working in younger players at forward and lost defencemen Karl Alzner, Kevin Shattenkirk and Nate Schmidt from last year's team.

"I love (Holtby) but we'll see what this year brings," said one goalie coach. "The Caps won't be nearly as good at either end of the ice and the division is getting better. We'll see if he's able to make more of a difference."

3. (tied) Matt Murray, Pittsburgh Penguins

2017: 1.65

2016: 2.28

2015: N/A

2014: N/A



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It's been a quick climb up these rankings for Murray – from the AHL into a spot ahead of veterans like Corey Crawford, Jonathan Quick and Henrik Lundqvist.

But how do you argue against it?

"He's a one," said one head coach, in giving Murray the same rating as Price. "He's won two Stanley Cups in a row. If that's not a one, I don't know what is."

Last year, when Murray was No. 8 on this list, panelists wanted to see another year of work before anointing him one of the league's best. All he did was post a .923 save percentage in the regular season and then help the Penguins win a second Stanley Cup in what was technically his rookie season.

"It's not like Pittsburgh is a shutdown defensive team," said another coach in praising Murray. "He has two Cups at that age, with the way that team plays and the stops he makes. He also plays under pressure and wins Game 7s."

5. (tied) Corey Crawford, Chicago Blackhawks

2017: 1.85

2016: 1.90

2015: 1.92

2014: 2.50

There used to be a time when panelists were hesitant to include Crawford among the game's best goalies even as he won Stanley Cups. Those days are gone.

"I've seen him too many times in the playoffs be the difference," said a Western Conference head coach. "I'm a big Crawford fan."

Still, last season was his lowest regular season save percentage (.918) since 2013-14 and he posted a .902 save percentage in the playoffs. He also doesn't have Scott Darling backing him up to provide a breather, with Darling now starting in Carolina.

This year will be an opportunity to put to rest the last of the doubters who still seem to hanging on.

"He's good," said one executive. "But to me, he doesn't win them games. Maybe I'm missing something. That's OK."

5. (tied) Jonathan Quick, Los Angeles Kings

2017: 1.85

2016: 1.95

2015: 1.21

2014: 1.00

Quick played in only 17 games last season and hasn't posted a regular season save percentage over .920 since 2011-12 but, man, he continues to get a lot of love from those in the game.

"I still think he's unbelievable," said a Western Conference head coach. "He's one of the best even though last year you wouldn't have noticed it."

And maybe not the year before either.

"I'm a little bit worried about his health," said a GM. "His hips, his back. It's going to slow him down and if that happens, he's not as quick."

TIER 3

7. (tied) Cory Schneider, New Jersey Devils

2017: 2.05

2016: 1.48

2015: 1.61

2014: 2.00

After finishing in the slot behind Price last season, Schneider dropped considerably and his 2.05 average rating is his lowest since these tiers started.

That's what happens when a goalie's save percentage drops from .924 to .908. Voters were inclined to blame it on the Devils' poor play.

"Man, he's done a lot of losing in the last couple years," said a head coach.

"I didn't like his year last year. He struggled a bit when I saw him," said a GM. "The whole team got so disillusioned down the stretch. I think it looked worse than it really is."

Said another coach: "He's better than he played last year. It's a hard position to play when you don't get run support. He doesn't get run support."

Still, even as most panelists were quick to defend Schneider, there was some doubt cast on his game for the first time.

"There's a little bit of rigidity and non-modern (aspects) of his game," said a goalie coach. "He's not as fluid as some guys are."

7. (tied) Cam Talbot, Edmonton Oilers

2017: 2.05

2016: 2.93

2015: 2.75

2014: N/A

Talbot won over doubters with the season he turned in with the Oilers last year, posting a .919 save percentage while winning an NHL-best 42 games to go with an NHL-high 73 starts. At a time in which most teams are going with multiple goalies to get through the grind of a regular season, the Oilers leaned heavily on Talbot and he responded.

"He's the real deal. The real deal," said an Eastern Conference coach. "He's bigger than you think, taller than you think. Great guy, too."

One panelist said he would have put Talbot No. 3 in a Vezina vote last season.

"He played so many games for them and was so good," said a Western Conference head coach.

9. Pekka Rinne, Nashville Predators

2017: 2.15

2016: 2.53

2015: 1.11

2014: 1.50

Rinne has emerged as one of the more polarizing goalies on the list. As he enters the twilight of his career, there's a wide range of opinions on his place in the game. Nobody had more range in his ratings than Rinne, who received as high as a 1.5 and as low as a 4.5.

"He's not a good goalie," said the panelist who gave him the 4.5. "I don't know how else to say it. He hasn't stopped the puck enough for me. He's playing in front of the best defensive group in the NHL and he's still very mediocre. If it were me, I'd be looking at" backup Juuse Saros.

Rinne's .918 save percentage last season was right about his career average and he followed it up with a .930 save percentage in the playoffs, helping lead the Predators to the Stanley Cup final.

"The first half of the year, he wasn't good at all," said a head coach. "Then he stepped it up in the playoffs."



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"He's sliding, he's aging," said a goalie coach. "His playoff could have been his swan song. That could have been the peak before there are some valleys."

10. Henrik Lundqvist, New York Rangers

2017: 2.20

2016: 1.85

2015: 1.04

2014: 1.00

Lundqvist is one of the only goalies on this list to ever receive a perfect one across the board, something he accomplished in 2014. This is also the third consecutive year his score is lower than the previous year. It's not a great trend for the Rangers.

"He's slipped a little, eh?" said one coach.

His .910 save percentage last season was the lowest of his career.

"He's had so many ups and down the last couple years," said another head coach. "He can still be great but it's overemphasized in New York when he is great."

While most panelists recognized his slippage, one pointed more to the team in front of him than to Lundqvist's abilities.

"You see the defense he played behind last year?" said one GM. "He faced a lot of high-quality shots. I know he's aging and last year was not his best year but his body of work still has to be part of it."

11. Ben Bishop, Dallas Stars

2017: 2.25

2016: 1.75

2015: 2.00

2014: 2.07

It was a rough go last season for Bishop, who played in only 39 games with the Lightning and Kings but landed in just about the perfect spot. Goalies in Ken Hitchcock's system tend to perform above the league average and, if he can stay healthy, Bishop should do the same.

"I think he's going to do really well," said a goalie coach. "Anybody can be a good goalie in a defensively structured team and he has the ability to do that. I think he has the ability to be really good playing for Hitch. And you've got Kari (Lehtonen) as the backup, so if it's not going well you can yank him right away and it doesn't damage the stats too much."

12. (tied) Devan Dubnyk, Minnesota Wild

2017: 2.30

2016: 2.98

2015: 2.71

2014: N/A

This is the best rating Dubnyk has earned in his career, with very little volatility in his ratings – most came in at a two or 2.5.

There's a legitimate question as to why he isn't ranked higher considering his .924 save percentage in 171 games with the Wild. If Quick were doing that, they might have already put him in the Hall.

One reason the panelists hesitate to move him up is that the Wild play well in front of him on a team with both a deep forward group and defense.

"I still believe he's a product of the system," said one goalie coach.

12. (tied) Tuukka Rask, Boston Bruins

2017: 2.30

2016: 2.52

2015: 1.57

2014: 1.29

After knocking on the door among the league's elite when these tiers were first being compiled, Rask is settling in closer to the league average. That's just about right for a goalie who has put up a .915 save percentage the last two seasons.

"He's erratic," said a goalie coach. "He's hard to figure out what he's going to be."

12. (tied) Martin Jones, San Jose Sharks

2017: 2.30

2016: 2.60

2015: 3.04

2014: N/A

Jones is another goalie whose numbers seem to be working themselves right around the league average. After helping lead the Sharks to the Stanley Cup final two seasons ago, Jones posted a .912 save percentage last season.

In two seasons as the Sharks' starting goalie, Jones has a save percentage of .915.

"I just haven't seen enough good games from him," said one head coach.

15. Frederik Andersen, Toronto Maple Leafs

2017: 2.35

2016: 2.85

2015: 2.54

2014: N/A

Andersen came on strong last season after a rough start to post a .918 save percentage in his first season with the Maple Leafs. Panning out, Andersen is the picture of consistency, earning a .918 save percentage with both the Maple Leafs and Ducks in his career.

"I like Freddy Andersen but he gave up a lot of goals, though," said one GM. "Not all his fault."

"With Freddy, if you take the Leafs' last 60 games and you blow out the first 15 that he played, he was as good as anybody," said a head coach. "He's a big-game goalie. I think he is. You put a little defense in front of him and I think he's going to be a stud."

One goalie coach pointed to a philosophy difference in Toronto as the reason for Andersen's slow start.

Mike Babcock "likes his goalies really aggressive and playing outside the paint," the coach said. "He did that in the beginning and got exposed."

"He had a good year," said another coach still in a wait-and-see mode for Andersen. "If he does it again, his rating goes up."

TIER 4

16. Jake Allen, St. Louis Blues

2017: 2.50

2016: 3.10

2015: 2.93

2014: N/A



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Allen is the rare goalie who performed better once Hitchcock was out of the equation. Allen was great down the stretch and in the playoffs for the Blues last season under Mike Yeo but not good enough to erase doubt around the league.

"I'm not sure of him yet," said an Eastern Conference coach.

"He's been great at times in St. Louis but so was (Brian) Elliott," said another coach. "But they've both been the other way. When they're great at the right time, it's great."

17. Andrei Vasilevskiy, Tampa Bay Lightning

2017: 2.55

2016: N/A

2015: N/A

2014: N/A

This is Vasilevskiy's debut in the Goalie Tiers following the departure of Bishop from Tampa. Responses were similar: Panelists expect him to be really good for the Lightning, they just want to see it first before moving him up the list.

"He's going to be great, but right now I'm giving him a 2.5," said one GM.

Not every panelist needs a larger sample size.

"He's the real deal," said an Eastern Conference coach, who has already seen enough.

18. Craig Anderson, Ottawa Senators

2017: 2.60

2016: 3.30

2015: 2.61

2014: 2.71

Anderson quietly had a really, really good season in goal last year, finishing with a .926 save percentage in 40 games during the regular season and then a .922 save percentage in the playoffs.

In seven years with the Senators, Anderson has a .920 save percentage. Still, his reputation seems to lag behind his stats.

"If he can endear himself to teammates, he's a good goalie," said one goalie coach. "I think he's pretty good."

That seems to be the consensus, although another goalie coach thought he deserved more credit than that.

"When you think about Pittsburgh last year in the playoffs – Pittsburgh made mincemeat out of the two Vezina finalists. Rinne was up and down," said the coach. "I thought Anderson played the best against Pittsburgh compared to any of the other guys. But he's getting in his upper 30s and I don't really know what to make of him."

19. Scott Darling, Carolina Hurricanes

2017: 2.70

2016: N/A

2015: N/A

2014: N/A

The consensus on Darling is about what you'd expect. He's probably going to be pretty good but he needs to show it first as a starter.

Sample size was a popular phrase when assessing Darling, who has started 64 career games at the age of 28.

"You don't know until you're a starter," said one executive.

"He's been very good against us but his body of work hasn't been large," said a coach.

20. John Gibson, Anaheim Ducks

2017: 2.75

2016: 3.33

2015: N/A

2014: 2.85

Gibson posted a .924 save percentage during the regular season, yet there seemed to be some frustration among panelists who want to see more from a goalie who entered the league with a lot of fanfare.

"I still like (Frederik) Andersen better than Gibson," said one head coach. "Things look chaotic at times with Gibson."

"He's good but he gets hurt," said another coach. "He's got the ability to be higher."

21. Mike Smith, Calgary Flames

2017: 2.85

2016: 3.08

2015: 2.93

2014: 2.21

After trying Brian Elliott last season, the Flames are turning to another veteran goalie who has also been inconsistent in his career.

"He's a wild card for me," said a head coach who has seen Smith often in his career.

"He's either unbelievable or unbelievably bad," said another coach. "I've seen him stop 50 and you couldn't put a pea by him."

The advantage Smith has is playing behind a defense in Calgary that may be as good as any in the league. That's one reason why another panelist has high expectations for Smith this season.

"Smitty will be good in front of that D," said the coach. "He's freakishly athletic. He'll have some stretches this year where he's dominant. I guarantee you he will, he'll do it a couple times."

22. Marc-Andre Fleury, Las Vegas Golden Knights

2017: 2.90

2016: N/A

2015: 2.07

2014: 2.40

Fleury was a bit polarizing. Panelists tended to be in one of two corners – he'll be great in Vegas or it has the potential to be a disaster.

Playing for an expansion team that may give up a lot of shots could be a good thing for a goalie who likes to get in a rhythm.

"It almost suits his game a little bit more," said a coach. "I find he's better when he's getting more action."

"I think he's going to be outstanding," said another coach. "He'll face more shots, he'll get in a rhythm, he'll be athletic and make big saves. He'll be the face of the franchise. He'll run with it and he'll get traded when it's time."

Then, there's the counterpoint.

"He's really beatable," said another coach. "I don't think he's going to be great in Vegas. It's going to be a completely different thing for him."

23. Roberto Luongo, Florida Panthers



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2017: 2.95

2016: 2.60

2015: 2.36

2014: 2.07

It's been a slow, steady slide down these rankings for Luongo, who still has the respect of everyone around the league as he winds down his career with the Panthers.

"I think they're going to be a good team and they say his hip is healthy," said a goalie coach. "Louie is such a big body and gets in the way. They're going to be way better than they were in front of him."

TIER 5

24. Semyon Varlamov, Colorado Avalanche

2017: 3.05

2016: 2.73

2015: 1.96

2014: 1.93

Varlamov was awful last season on a bad team. He finished the season with an .898 save percentage, the third consecutive year his save percentage has dropped since he finished second in the Vezina voting.

Still, one panelist predicted big things for him this season.

"He's my off the board guy," said a goalie coach. "He's healthy. He got his way with getting the Finnish goalie coach over there. He seemed to have a pretty good preseason. He's going to have a good year. I think he's going to shine."

25. (tied) Robin Lehner, Buffalo Sabres

2017: 3.20

2016: 3.36

2015: 3.11

2014: N/A

Lehner signed a one-year contract worth \$4 million, so there's plenty of motivation for him to realize the potential former GM Tim Murray saw when he sent a first-round pick to the Senators for him. Ottawa used that pick to select forward Colin White.

Lehner tends to post a good save percentage but one panelist had an explanation.

"The shot-clock guy in Buffalo is trigger happy," he said.

"I think he's got more ability but he hasn't put it together," said one GM.

There were plenty of questions about Lehner's mental makeup from panelists who tended to like him but very cautiously.

"He's an interesting guy," said a goalie coach. "This is the final taste test. They brought Chad Johnson back and they may go back to him. He's not as flashy but he gives you an air of calm. He doesn't move a lot, kind of waits for the puck. Whereas you have Lehner all over the place and you don't necessarily know what you're going to get."

25. (tied) Antti Raanta, Arizona Coyotes

2017: 3.20

2016: N/A

2015: N/A

2014: N/A

This is the big test for Raanta, who is the starter in Arizona after backing up Lundqvist in New York the previous two seasons. He's never started more than 26 games in his career but posted a .921 save percentage in his two seasons with the Rangers.

"If Lundqvist wasn't Lundqvist, Raanta would have played a lot more games," said one head coach.

There are still doubts his success is going to transfer to the desert, partly because of his lack of experience and partly because he's not the prototypical size for a goalie. If there's a market inefficiency in goal right now, it might be among smaller goalies. They tend to make coaches and GMs nervous in a league full of giants in net.

"I like him but he's a little undersized," a head coach said of the 6-foot Raanta. "When you really dig in and have traffic, you can get to him."

27. Brian Elliott, Philadelphia Flyers

2017: 3.25

2016: 2.85

2015: N/A

2014: 2.86

It appeared to take Elliott awhile to settle in with the Flames last year and now he has to do it again with his third team in three seasons. Philadelphia is notoriously tough for starting goaltenders and Flyers fans may not have the patience for a goalie who tends to be streaky.

"A lot of volatility," said one GM in explaining his below-average score for Elliott. "I just want quality starts."

Elliott has never posted a save percentage north of .910 playing outside Hitchcock's system.

"He's always been streaky," said a goalie coach. "But I'll tell you, the kid works his ass off. He's the most serious guy of all time. Is he a capable guy? He's exactly what we've seen – a strong goaltender when he has a good partner."

28. Jimmy Howard, Detroit Red Wings

2017: 3.30

2016: N/A * Detroit's Petr Mrazek earned a 3.10 in this spot last year.

2015: 2.86

2014: 2.33

Howard enjoyed a bounce-back season last year in posting the highest save percentage of his career (.927) at age 32. But as they often do, injuries slowed Howard, whose durability and physique is a major issue for panelists.

"He had a hell of a year when he was healthy but he doesn't stay healthy," said a head coach.

Even with his durability issues, a goalie coach predicted he'll still see more time than Mrazek in goal for the Red Wings: "Howard will get the lion's share of games. In the two games I saw this preseason, Mrazek was horrendous. There are some character issues and flaws. Howard, if he stays healthy, he'll end up carrying the mail. He's the best guy they have I just don't know whether it'll be good enough with what they have because they don't have enough."

29. (tied) Thomas Greiss, New York Islanders

2017: 3.50

2016: N/A (Halak: 2.93)

2015: N/A (Halak: 2.79)

2014: N/A (Halak: 3.21)



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Greiss will share starts with Jaroslav Halak, who may end up getting the majority of the starts.

"They fucked their team up by playing [Jean-Francois] Berube last year," said one Eastern Conference coach. "If they didn't do that, they would have been in the playoffs. Berube was awful."

Said another coach on Greiss: "He's going to get wins if he plays ahead of Halak but I still think, at the end of the day, Halak will be the guy."

29. (tied) Jacob Markstrom, Vancouver Canucks

2017: 3.50

2016: N/A

2015: N/A

2014: N/A

This is another goalie making his rankings debut, projected to get a majority of the starts in Vancouver with Ryan Miller out of the picture. At least that's the plan.

"I'm not a big, huge fan," one coach said.

"I think [Anders] Nilsson will end up taking over there. I think he's good," said a goalie coach. "I think he's on the verge of figuring it out. Markstrom is good, but he's still missing something."

"That would not surprise me," said another goalie coach of Nilsson taking over. "They said Nilsson is cut really well, is a hard, hard worker. Still, it comes down to the team in front of them."

31. Steve Mason, Winnipeg Jets

2017: 3.55

2016: 3.13

2015: 2.54

2014: 2.64

Goaltending is one of the reasons the Jets haven't reached expectations in recent years and panelists didn't seem overly optimistic that Winnipeg found its answer in Mason. Mason got a two-year deal with the Jets worth \$4.1 million annually and there's definitely some doubts about whether it was a great investment.

"Too many holes and too inconsistent," said an Eastern Conference head coach. "His whole career, he's been streaky. At some point, you've got to level off."

"Every time he played us, he just fell apart," said another panelist.

Mason does have his defenders in the group.

"I think any chance you get to get out of Philadelphia, it gives you a chance. Over the years, that's been a hard place for a guy to play," said a goalie coach. "You have to figure that at some point it's all going to click back in for him. He was pretty good last year at 5-on-5."

Last season, Mason had a .920 save percentage at even strength. Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck was at .917.

One head coach might have summed Mason up best: "I don't think he's an above-average NHL goalie. He's a goaltender who can play."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.04.2017

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The Athletic / Daniel Winnik on not being signed this offseason: "It's nuts"

Michael Russo

Daniel Winnik still doesn't get how the heck he went an entire offseason without being signed.

"I don't think I've shown any decline at all," the veteran winger told The Athletic after practicing with the Wild on Tuesday. "At my age, I'm not slow. It's not like my numbers have dipped. They actually got better last year."

Winnik, 32, who scored a career-high 12 goals last season with a 50.35 percent Corsi For with 1.24 points per 60 minutes the past two seasons, is still technically on a pro tryout with the Wild, but it's at least his plan to sign a contract with the Wild and be in their opening night lineup Thursday night in Detroit.

The Wild currently have 11 healthy forwards on the roster.

So unless the Wild plan on dressing seven defensemen against the Red Wings, they'll need to sign a free agent, trade for a forward or recall a forward from Iowa in advance of Thursday.

"I'd imagine it's going to get done," Winnik said. "That's how I'm planning it. I'm still here. I'm probably one of the few guys still on a PTO. So, I think that's the plan."

Unless another roster move is coming, Winnik would have to sign a contract with a cap hit less than \$866,000 for the Wild to squeeze him under the \$75 million ceiling.

He hopes to sign with the Wild on Tuesday in advance of rosters having to be submitted to the NHL by 4 p.m. CT. The Wild did, for now, announce their opening-night roster without Winnik listed. The Wild would be allowed to submit the same roster to the NHL because Zach Parise, who will miss at least the first two games with a back injury, isn't officially on injured reserve and could count as the Wild's 12th forward.

Winnik has scored 76 goals and 228 points in 717 games over 10 years for seven franchises.

He played in Toronto in 2014-15 but was ultimately traded to the Penguins. He returned to Toronto on a two-year deal, but he got hurt early in the year and was ultimately dealt to the Washington Capitals.

Winnik wonders if team executives and scouts remember that Daniel Winnik rather than the solid fourth-liner and penalty killer that played for the Capitals the past 92 regular-season games.

Winnik acknowledges that Caps' playoff failures the past two years probably didn't help his cause, but "it's almost like people thought my [tough] first year back in Toronto was the norm for me or something. But I played almost all year with a high ankle sprain and I was not close to the same player.

"It's just nuts [I wasn't signed this summer]. Realistically, I've been extremely consistent over the last six years and pretty much my whole career."

Wild coach Bruce Boudreau, a big fan of Winnik, coached him in Anaheim and felt Winnik, Jay Beagle and Tom Wilson made up the NHL's best fourth line.

That's why Winnik, who earlier in camp said he feels he's one of the league's best penalty killers, hopes to play for Boudreau again.

"It's kinda been awhile since I've had a coach that's kind of been on my side," Winnik said. "I know that might sound stupid. But you always want a coach that believes in you. I'm not saying that Barry [Trotz] or Mike [Babcock] didn't. But I know how Bruce has played me, and he really likes me as a player. That for sure helps. And, just my fit on this team is very good for me. It's similar to last year, where here maybe I have more flexibility of maybe moving up a line or two every now and then."

Suter, Spurgeon reunited



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After experimenting all training camp with Ryan Suter and Matt Dumba as a pair, Boudreau plans to start the season by reuniting last season's top pair of Suter-Jared Spurgeon.

"It worked so well in the past and I thought it was just, we tried something else and I didn't think it was as good as we could have got," Boudreau said. "Spurgeon and Suter were arguably the best in the league last year [at] plus-34 [and plus-33, respectively]. They seem to be on the ice all the time, and I thought especially in October, when the schedule is not that tough, they can use the minutes and might as well have them together than apart."

Dumba will start the season with Jonas Brodin, while Mike Reilly will likely start the season on the third pair with Kyle Quincey with Gustav Olofsson acting as the extra.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.04.2017

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The Athletic / Which teams do fans like most going into 2017-18?

Dom Luszczyzyn

Here we go. There's just one more day until the season starts and soon all these predictions and projections from the last month will start turning into realities.

Over the past month I've been previewing every team while trying to look at a realistic range of outcomes for the 2017-18 season, but before that I wanted to get a glimpse into what most hockey fans thought to see where my model might differ and why. Now that the previews are over I wanted to give people one last chance to make collective projections a bit closer to the season. Maybe opinions have been swayed with the influx of pre-season content over the past month including prognostications from the many places that cover hockey.

What I also wanted was to have a broader reach and that meant making this process a whole lot easier for the rest of you. The last standings survey used a Google form that had users pick a point total for each team. That's a lot trickier to do and nobody has time for it, making it an exercise reserved for the dedicated, limited mostly to whoever follows me on Twitter (which skews towards numbers-obsessed folks like me).

That's the moment I remembered an old piece over at 538 by Walt Hickey about which Avengers were the strongest and which side was the favourite in Captain America: Civil War. Using math to figure out the strongest comic book movie character to estimate win probabilities for a fictional battle is an incredible cross-section of peak nerdiness that spoke directly to my core sensibilities. That piece stuck with me for its terrific and original analysis, along with its methodology that had very intriguing applications.

Naturally, I had to steal it.

The idea was a simple one. Create a page that shows two teams, have users pick the better team and then math takes care of the rest. Two big issues arose. One, I did not know how to make such a thing. Two, I didn't really understand how the math worked either (the basic gist is that it's a system called maximum likelihood and it figures out how comparatively strong a team is based on how often it's picked against other teams and how often those teams are picked against other teams... I think). I was foiled by my own incompetence, but luckily I was resourceful enough to find the code that could make the math magic happen (thank you Walt and James!) and a friend (thank you Scott!) who could put it all together.

The site went live last Wednesday and the matchup data poured in quickly. So quickly that the site eventually crashed (I blame Reddit) and

we ended up with over 200,000 matchups generated in a single day. That's a pretty good sample size, but not one we expected or were adequately prepared for as there was too much data for the server to send to be ranked. We randomly sampled 100,000 of the responses to work around that and the differences should be minuscule at most.

The algorithm was also a bit too aggressive in its certainty of each team, which is to be expected with a binary classification, so I regressed the results to the mean until the team distribution mirrored what you'd see with typical betting lines (standard deviation was roughly 10.5 for both).

Here are the results, which I hope to update on a monthly basis throughout the season. I've put them through my season simulator in order to derive some playoff chances as well as Stanley Cup expectations. There's also a matrix that shows how often a team was picked when matched up with another team (where you can see why there needed to be some regression in the overall rankings).

I don't think there should be much hesitation that the final results were influenced by following me considering how big the difference in opinion is with some teams and my projections from the last month (seriously guys, Boston, Montreal and Winnipeg are actually good OK). I'm guessing Reddit helped a lot with this too.

The big difference between my projections and what the average fan sees are similar to what they were during the pre-season: lots of love for Edmonton and Anaheim and not as much for the bottom feeders. Still there are some notable changes. Without being able to specify points, the bottom teams come out looking a bit better than before, especially Colorado and Vegas, who are still the worst, but not under-70 points bad. They had the biggest jumps and after them was Nashville, who is now the second-largest discrepancy behind Edmonton between my model and fan consensus. I guess people weren't factoring the big injury to Ryan Ellis. Pittsburgh, Chicago, Washington and St. Louis (this was completed before Robby Fabbri's injury) were the other teams that jumped up by two or more points since the last survey and I suspect that has a lot to do with them being popular teams that have also been near the top of the league for the better part of the last decade.

Fan consensus was much harsher on Florida and the Islanders this time around making them the two teams after Colorado with the biggest model disagreement. The steepest drop since the last survey goes to Carolina who dropped five points and are slated for 88 points here. That's how you know that there weren't as many fancy-stat nerds voting this time around. Philadelphia, Montreal, Buffalo, Calgary (this was before Jaromir Jagr signed and I do wonder how big of an effect that would've had) and Los Angeles were the other teams to drop by two or more points.

Here's how big the discrepancies between the projected totals from the season previews (keep an eye on an update to them tomorrow) and fan consensus was for each team.

Generally speaking the differences mostly come from my model being especially conservative, where the standard deviation is under six points. Time will tell whether that conservatism was the smart choice, but I do think this season bears much more uncertainty than usual with a lot of teams that look to be competitive.

By rank things look a bit different.

I prefer not to use rank for my model because its obscures how minimal the differences are between teams, but it's illuminating here as it shows the teams where there are actual disagreements with regards to their position in the league.

There are 11 teams with a difference of more than five spots in the rankings.

Model is higher: Boston, Montreal, Winnipeg, Islanders, Carolina, Florida

Fans are higher: Edmonton, Anaheim, Rangers, St. Louis, Ottawa

Differences are always good and it makes for a great learning experience on both sides of the ledger depending on who was right or wrong. It's more than likely that the best answer is one that lies somewhere in



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between, but it'll still be really interesting to see who fares better at the end of the season: the average fan or a statistical model. Time to play 1271 games and find out.

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The Athletic / Why Josh Leivo could be in for another year of Corrado-like limbo

Jonas Siegel

What's the thing, Leafs coach Mike Babcock was asked over the weekend, that will make Josh Leivo a full-time NHLer?

"I think he is a full-time NHLer," Babcock responded. "Didn't he play in the NHL last year?"

Technically, yes.

Only Leivo didn't actually play that much and while he will again be among the 23 players to crack the Maple Leafs final roster, the 24-year-old is facing an uncertain and potentially bleak future in Toronto.

Another year of Frankie Corrado-like limbo isn't out of the question.

"Josh, once again, is involved in a question of numbers," said Leafs general manager Lou Lamoriello. "He's a National Hockey League player. He just has to wait his time and go from there."

Leivo has been waiting for some time now though, a man without any apparent island.

The product of Innisfil, Ont. wasn't picked by this regime or even the one before it. In fact, Brian Burke was still the president and GM of the Leafs when Leivo was called with the 86th overall selection at the 2011 draft in Minnesota. Only one other Toronto pick from that year (the club made nine) is still left with the club: goaltender Garret Sparks.

The other seven have all been ejected from the organization in one way or another and it wouldn't be a surprise to see Leivo soon join them.

While he's put together a fairly sturdy AHL track record — 51 goals and 124 points in 171 games — Leivo has been continually overlooked as an NHLer in the Brendan Shanahan era, with wingers drafted or otherwise acquired by the club always a step or two ahead in the pecking order.

Two years ago, the last-place Leafs found room for veterans like P.A. Parenteau, Brad Boyes and Michael Grabner, but not much for Leivo, who hummed at nearly a point per-game (48 in 51) pace with the Toronto Marlies.

He did suit up in 12 games with the Leafs and scored five times, including one in four straight games.

Last season, the club looked predictably past him again for familiar and productive types like James van Riemsdyk and Leo Komarov as well as enticing rookies like William Nylander and Mitch Marner, and blue collar Babcock favourites beyond that like Zach Hyman, Matt Martin and Nikita Soshnikov. Leivo mostly sat and watched as the Leafs, with almost no injuries, made the playoffs for the first time in four years.

He did shine with his one real opportunity — a 10-game stretch in February during which he mustered nine points — but not enough, evidently, to stick around when reinforcements were ready and available to Babcock. That included Kasperii Kapanen, who snatched the final forward spot at playoff time.

A lot will need to go right for Leivo to earn an opportunity with the Leafs this season.

"Well, he's got to take someone else's job. It's just simple," Babcock said, when pressed on how Leivo might earn a regular spot in the lineup.

"Twenty-three guys make the team, 20 guys get to play. You've got to find a way to take someone's job. In his situation, he's got to be ahead of somebody in a role and opportunity. [Leivo] played fine, but I guess we could go around the room and ask which guy wants to give him their job, but I'd bet you there's not many."

Babcock said repeatedly at training camp that contract status would play a part in assembling the opening day roster so it was no surprise that Leivo — who requires waivers for assignment to the Marlies — was kept. And while he may have grinned ear to ear over the summer when his agent told him the Leafs would protect him from Vegas in the expansion draft, the move looked to be more about protecting an asset with some perceived value than a hint of rising stock within the organization.

Just a few days after the Golden Knights snatched Brendan Leipsic in lieu of Leivo, the Leafs signed Patrick Marleau, a left winger with hall of fame credentials and another roadblock to Leivo playing regularly in the NHL.

Despite the club's continued, and often justified, preference for others, Leivo has offered signs that he's ready to play in the NHL — regularly.

Over 25 appearances in the past two seasons, he's scored seven goals and totaled 15 points with strong possession numbers. That three-week stretch beside Nazem Kadri in February showed what he might be able to offer if paired with a skilled NHL centre as opposed to the likes of Byron Froese and Frederik Gauthier — with whom he played most a year earlier.

Seven of his 10 points last season came at even-strength and all but one of his six even-strength assists was primary.

"Personally, it proved that I could play in this league," Leivo said.

That success followed months and months of empty days. First were the two-plus months he missed to start the season with a long-lingering hip injury and then the nearly seven weeks after that when he played twice. His hockey life was consumed by practices without the promise of playing time; lonely skates on game-day mornings; and spells watching that action in the press box.

Leivo tried to be positive. It's what kept him going, he says. That and support from his parents and teammates. Leivo said his mom, Lee, and dad, Kari, were helpful in keeping hockey talk to a minimum, even if they probably stewed about it in frustration.

"I just remember, he had such a positive attitude," said Hyman, with whom Leivo trained over the summer in Toronto. "And that's tough to do when you don't play and you want to be in the lineup and you want to be playing."

Eric Fehr, another forward with an uncertain Leafs future but one who also nailed down a roster spot, said every young player has to learn to handle uncertainty at some point.

"You can sit at home and worry all you want, but you're just wasting energy and you're causing yourself more stress than you need," said Fehr.

"For myself, I just like to focus on the next day. What can I do the next day to be better?"

Optimism eventually clashes with reality though and Leivo's path to playing time looks no better now than a year ago. It might even be worse with the acquisition of Marleau and the apparent readiness of Marlie-bound prospects like Kapanen and Soshnikov.

Injury doesn't offer the certain promise of opportunity either.



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Babcock might be more inclined to test one of the youngsters in that case or shuffle around his other puzzle pieces. Move Komarov from right wing to left wing, for instance.

Leivo looks to be simply stuck again — trapped by the threat of waivers and the Leafs reluctance to lose him for nothing.

He looks too good for the AHL right now. That much was evident in the Leafs final exhibition game against a mostly Grand Rapids Griffins lineup at Ricoh Coliseum. Leivo had seven shots and frequently flashed his quick hands and puck-controlling skills in the offensive zone.

How might his NHL opportunity come?

A trade, for one.

Though as the Corrado case proved, the Leafs won't rush to make a move for a move's sake; Corrado waited almost two full seasons before being finally dealt to Pittsburgh. And what value might Leivo fetch in a trade? Enough for the Leafs to deem it worthy over the added depth he offers?

Options otherwise look familiar. Wait patiently with a positive attitude and hope a chance somehow emerges.

"Whenever you get down usually your game starts to go down," Leivo said. "I learned from last year, staying positive and eventually everything — well, when I got the chance it showed. I took it from last year and I know that there's a tough task ahead. I'm just staying positive."

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The Athletic / Mirtle: This Maple Leafs team has cap space, depth and a real possibility of doing something big

James Mirtle 22 hours ago

One of the veteran Maple Leafs had a question the other day, and it's not one I get often in the dressing room, I'll confess.

But it happens to be the question everyone around this group is anxious to know.

"So what do you think of our team this year?" he asked. "How's it look?"

Well... here goes.

The Leafs made their big cuts on Monday, leaving only one decision — Andreas Borgman or Calle Rosen on the third D pair — prior to their season opener in Winnipeg. There were no huge surprises; this was more or less the roster we expected, save for Travis Dermott or Roman Polak potentially making the blueline and Eric Fehr possibly hitting waivers.

Toronto is expected to be able to place Joffrey Lupul on long-term injured reserve after a ruling from the league, something that could be announced as early as Tuesday.

With that in mind, here's what the Leafs opening-day roster will look like and their resulting cap situation (via our friends at capfriendly.com):

That 23-man roster puts the Leafs at a roughly \$70.2-million cap hit with \$4.8-million to spend thanks to the Lupul LTIR allowance. That space will not increase over the duration of the season, so what you see is what you get.

There are also \$5.4-million in potential bonuses for the kids, bonuses that will be carried over in their entirety to the 2018-19 cap, if attained.

There is a not a ton that's different from last year on this roster. There are only four new players, and several of the line combinations and D pairs are intact. It's an unusual level of continuity in the NHL's cap era.

It's also unlikely to ever happen again for this group of players, given all the pending free agents and big contracts yet to be signed.

What's changed, of note:

What's also changed is something vital beyond the 23-man roster. Adding Borgman and Rosen on D, Miro Aaltonen at centre and giving the Marlies kids another year of development time has earned this organization considerable depth over a year ago.

You look at some of the players that played for the Leafs last season, filling in around the cracks, and that's not going to happen again. Ben Smith isn't getting 416 minutes. There'll be no waiver claims, no Marchenko or Griffiths getting a test drive.

If this team runs into injuries — and chances are they will, far more than a year ago — they have options. Up front, that could be Aaltonen or Kapanen or Andreas Johnsson etc. On D, the supporting cast is far better — not just from No. 4 through 6 but seven to 10, too.

The franchise will be far better equipped to handle adversity, either health-wise or in terms of poor play. If players go down or don't perform, they'll be pushed by others, from the press box and the Marlies.

This is easily the deepest the Leafs have been in the decade I've covered the team.

So when pundits talk about how they'll face more adversity on the injury front than last season, they have a point. But it also won't hurt them nearly as much as it would have in the past.

The other thing I see in this roster is even more offence. How many other teams have a 20-goal winger from last season on their fourth line?

My guess is zero.

In Dom Luszczyszyn's season preview, he had the Leafs with the fourth best cast of forwards in the NHL (debatably trailing Pittsburgh, Boston and Dallas), the 24th best blueline and the 12th best goaltending tandem.

He also had them finishing 12th overall.

That's all reasonable, and it won't surprise me if that's where they finish. My prediction, however, is they'll jump up to about 100 points — into the NHL's top 10 — and threaten the Atlantic Division title.

If you look around the East, it's awfully hard to pick out a favourite beyond maybe the Penguins, who took some real hits in the depth department and have played a ton of hockey the last two years.

I've read a lot of season previews picking a team like Tampa Bay as a Cup favourite, and they've got a couple kids set to play big minutes on their blueline.

There are few sure things in the Atlantic, the East and even the league right now. Every team has holes. To be a contender, you simply need to be among the contenders, and there's a very strong argument these Leafs are. Especially if we can read into what's gone on in training camp and pre-season the past two weeks.

What you see being around the Leafs these days is a focused, driven team. Auston Matthews, without a doubt, is about to take another step. William Nylander is going to, too.

If they can get the good version of Frederik Andersen behind them, the one who was the sixth best starter from Nov. 1 on last season (.922 save percentage), that'll be another huge driver of their success.

And if just one of the newcomers on defence exceeds expectations — or if Morgan Rielly or Carrick progress — the blueline will be better.

There are wild cards on this roster. Nazem Kadri probably won't score 32 goals again. Marleau may show his age and fail to hit the 40-point mark.



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The JVR-Bozak-Marner line could cost them defensively. And the penalty kill is a mystery box given Polak, Hunwick, Smith, Martin Marincin and Nikita Soshnikov all ate key minutes on it last season.

I have a hard time adding that up to a regression, however, especially when this Leafs team was tied for the sixth best record in the NHL last year after Jan. 1. That was why they were able to push the Capitals in the first round; they were only a wild-card team due to their poor start.

What we sometimes undersell is how much better the Leafs got as the year wore on, especially if you factor in all the shootout coin flips they lost along the way (there were six in a 44-game span at one point):

Did the Leafs have the perfect off-season? No, obviously not. They spent big where they didn't need to. They weren't able to close the deal on a top-four D that could handle hard minutes. They didn't get better on the fringes, i.e. fourth line centre, Matt Martin or backup goalie.

But this is a still the makings of a very good team. All the hype and expectations in the market are deserved — for once — and I can just as easily see them exceed our projections as fall short.

There's a long way to go, but that Cup window?

It's open.

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Sportsnet.ca / Real work begins now for Victor Mete and Canadiens

Eric Engels

BROSSARD, Que. — Victor Mete told Sportsnet on Tuesday that he first started to believe in his ability to compete at the NHL level during his first pre-season game.

The five-foot-10 defenceman didn't spit out the typical, "I'm here to make the NHL," mantra most freshly drafted players do upon their arrival at training camp. He simply just put his head down and got to work, and as a result, nearly two weeks after lacing up his skates for the team's first exhibition game at the Bell Centre, the kid who spent his summer training with athletes from other sports—and didn't spend a second of it on the ice with any NHL veterans—can now officially say he's a Montreal Canadien.

Mete is the youngest player on the roster and he figures to be one of its most important ones, too. On a team that doesn't feature a single other defenceman who can skate as fluidly as he does, he's a natural fit as a partner for Shea Weber.

That's the role Mete's been in since training camp got underway, and it's the role he's expected to keep—at least until he plays his way out of it or another player on the team emerges as a better candidate.

There will be efforts made to shelter him but he wouldn't still be in Montreal if members of management and the coaching staff had any reservations about whether or not he could handle all that comes with playing with Weber. Canadiens coach Claude Julien can control the matchups on home ice and will take care to ensure the team's fourth-round pick in 2016 won't have to face the top players on the opposition on every shift.

"Throughout my experience, you can try to [protect a young player like Mete], and you do," Julien said Tuesday. "But at the end of the day, when you're on the road, you don't always get the last [line] change. So it's one of those things where you also have to feel confident that the player can handle that. Whether you want him to handle these situations all night

long, or if you say, 'You may end up against certain players two, three times tonight and you have to make sure you do the job.'"

Canadiens goaltender Carey Price is a believer. Standing across from Mete's stall in the dressing room after the team's practice on Tuesday, he said, "It takes a special player to be able to come into the NHL and play with that amount of poise."

He added: "He sees the ice well, and I think that's why he's so poised with the puck. He's always got his head up and he's got very good situational awareness."

Now it's time to see how Mete handles everything else that comes with being a professional hockey player. He hasn't yet devoted a single thought to how the grind of NHL travel might affect him, nor has he had much time to consider the general tendencies of his competition.

Mete even mentioned that he's still somewhat in awe of playing next to Weber, who was a player he'd often use as part of his regular roster in the video game NHL '09 for PlayStation.

That type of naiveté could serve him well out of the gate.

"I was able to just go out and play freely without thinking much about anything other than what I was trying to do," said 22-year-old Artturi Lehkonen, who scored 18 goals and 28 points in 73 games with the Canadiens before notching two goals and two assists in six Stanley Cup playoff games against the New York Rangers in his rookie campaign last season. "There's something good about having nothing to lose."

It's not the same luxury that will be afforded to Charles Hudon, who played three full seasons in the AHL before cracking this season's Canadiens roster. He's had two short auditions at this level and been sent packing in a hurry on both occasions. You know he won't take for granted the job he earned next to Lehkonen and veteran centreman Tomas Plekanec.

Jacob de la Rose knows the stakes, too. The former second-round pick is piercing through to start the season after playing 33 games with the Canadiens in 2014-15, 22 in 2015-16, and just nine in 2016-17.

"I didn't become a different player overnight," said de la Rose. "I keep working on things and try to play with more confidence."

Success on that front will give him the edge in a battle with veteran Torrey Mitchell for a spot on the fourth line, currently between Paul Byron and Ales Hemsky.

Jonathan Drouin will centre Max Pacioretty and Brendan Gallagher, and Alex Galchenyuk will start on the left side of Phillip Danault and Andrew Shaw to round things out at forward.

On the back end, Karl Alzner, who signed a five-year, \$23.1 million contract with the Canadiens on July 1, will play with Jeff Petry, and Jordie Benn will partner with Mark Streit. Joe Morrow and Brandon Davidson are still in the mix, and David Schlemko, who has missed the majority of the pre-season with a deep bone-bruise in his hand, has been placed on the injured reserve list.

The Canadiens' roster has taken shape rather predictably, but no one could've foreseen Mete's arrival on the scene at this stage—not even him.

"Obviously, the work isn't done here," Mete said.

It's just getting started, as the Canadiens prepare to open to the 2017-18 regular season in Buffalo, against the Sabres on Thursday night.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens assign forwards Martinsen, Froese to AHL



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Daniel Goffenberg

The Montreal Canadiens have assigned forwards Andreas Martinsen and Byron Froese to the AHL's Laval Rocket.

The move comes on Tuesday after the players passed through waivers unclaimed.

Martinsen was acquired by the Canadiens from Colorado at last season's trade deadline.

Canadiens assigned forwards Andreas Martinsen and Byron Froese to the AHL Laval Rocket earlier today.

— Canadiens Montréal (@CanadiensMTL) October 3, 2017

The Norwegian winger had no points in nine games with Montreal and was signed to a \$675,000 contract in June.

Froese signed a two-year contract with the Canadiens worth \$1.3 million on July 1 after a season spent with both the Toronto Maple Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning organizations.

The 26-year-old centre has two goals and three assists in 62 career NHL contests.

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Sportsnet.ca / Andreas Borgman muscles his way to Maple Leafs opening-night roster spot

Chris Johnston

WINNIPEG – They may be the most memorable four minutes of ice time Andreas Borgman has ever received.

When the defenceman made his Swedish Hockey League debut with Timra IK at age 17, he sat on the bench for more than half a period before getting his first shift. As he recalls it now with a chuckle, he only fleetingly touched the ice beyond that.

It was not an ideal way to shake out the butterflies that came with competing against men for the first time in his life.

"It was the first game so I guess they just wanted to give me a few shifts and see how I handled it," said Borgman. "I guess I wasn't that ready yet."

He can expect a little different treatment while trying to take the next step with the Toronto Maple Leafs. They believe he's ready for a turn in the regular rotation and will start Wednesday's season opener against the Jets on the third pairing with Connor Carrick.

The 22-year-old beat out compatriot Calle Rosén for the job – calling it a "dream come true" to start the season as a NHLer. What set Borgman apart was his sturdiness; he's built like a truck and was more than willing to throw around his six-foot, 212-pound frame during pre-season play.

"My buddy is a fireman," said head coach Mike Babcock, conjuring an analogy for what he likes about Borgman. "He always tells me: You drive a big vehicle, no matter how many airbags are in the little vehicle, the big vehicle wins every time. Well, when you're 230 and you're bumping into 190, the bigger guy wins."

The Leafs weren't entirely sure how NHL-ready Borgman and Rosén would be after putting on a full-court press to sign them in the spring. In the words of general manager Lou Lamoriello, that was still an "unknown" even after director of player evaluation Jim Paliafito spent months following their progress.

"We obviously have not been disappointed," Lamoriello added.

They have significantly boosted the organization's depth at its most vulnerable position. By design or not, Toronto appears to have hit on a market inefficiency by plucking Nikita Zaitsev from the KHL in 2016 and signing Borgman, Rosén and forward Miro Aaltonen as European free agents this year.

Not only did each of those players arrive more developed than a typical (non-Auston Matthews) draft pick, they also came over on affordable entry-level contracts – giving management the ability to move them freely between the NHL and American Hockey League without having to clear waivers.

Rosén was sent to the Marlies as the last cut in camp on Tuesday afternoon, but will almost certainly be back with the big team at some point this season.

Amazingly, neither he nor Borgman was even selected in the NHL Draft just a few years ago. Borgman recalls hearing whispers about some interest at that time and says he's carried a little chip on his shoulder ever since.

"I don't know how they find seven rounds of players better than those two guys," said Carrick. "I like the way they move. I like the way they play the game. Both of them are strong talents. ... That's why it's imperfect, right?"

"That's the jobs of organizations to kind of beat the game; draft well and then sign the guys that nobody else did that even you missed."

Borgman's big breakthrough really only came last season. He won a championship with HV71, earned individual recognition as the SHL's rookie of the year and was called on to play games with the national team.

There have already been some nervous moments since he arrived in North America and pulled on a Leafs sweater in pre-season. He still finds himself thinking more than reacting. He figures it'll take more time to adjust to a new system, new teammates and the smaller rink.

On Wednesday night at Bell MTS Centre, there'll also be quite a bit going through his mind – and belly – in the minutes leading up to puck drop. Fortunately, Babcock will probably give him more than four minutes of ice time to get comfortable.

"I'm happy that I made it this far and now I just want to keep going," said Borgman. "Work hard, and hopefully be on the roster all (season)."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks hope to unleash Derrick Pouliot's untapped potential

Iain MacIntyre

Talking about Vancouver Canucks who were great offensive defencemen is like listing jockeys who were great basketball players. It's a short conversation.

In the case of the Canucks, the first stop down memory lane is probably Christian Ehrhoff, who left Vancouver in 2011 and, four National Hockey



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League teams later, is now lighting it up in the German League. At least, Ehrhoff is at home.

Then you'll probably wistfully mention Jyrki Lumme in the 1990s, and maybe Paul Reinhart at the end of his career in the 1980s. And then you're talking about guys remembered in black and white, who never wore helmets when they played and never went without hats when they didn't. And some of those guys were effective because the goalies back then wore pads like baseball catchers do, minus the mask.

The Canucks have had some defencemen who can hammer the puck: Sami Salo, Ed Jovanovski, Adrian Aucoin, Jeff Brown. But in terms of a green-light defenceman, a guy who could skate the puck up ice on a one-man breakout, make plays and generate offence on the rush, and quarterback a power play, the Canucks have had nearly as few of those as they've had Stanley Cups. Bobby Orr and Paul Coffey never played here.

And no one remotely resembling in style Erik Karlsson or Brent Burns plays for the Canucks now. Which is why Jim Benning leaped at the chance to relieve the Pittsburgh Penguins of Derrick Pouliot in Tuesday's trade that saw Vancouver acquire the disappointing defencemen in exchange for minor-leaguer Andrey Pedan, a fourth-round pick, and some stick tape and gum to be named later.

Now, let's fully understand – because Benning and Canuck coach Travis Green were insisting we understand it – that no one expects Pouliot to be dashing end-to-end and quarterbacking the power play Saturday when Vancouver opens its regular season against the Edmonton Oilers at Rogers Arena.

Pouliot, 23, may never do those things in the NHL, and you'd probably get a lot of money betting that he never will if you are a bookie in Pittsburgh.

But the mobile defenceman from Weyburn, Sask., amassed 134 points in 102 games in his final two Western Hockey League seasons with the Portland Winterhawks, and still possesses the tantalizing offensive upside that led the Penguins, under previous management, to invest the eighth pick of the 2012 entry draft on Pouliot.

In a sense, every NHL team operates with the belief system of the Salvation Army — that it can save a wayward player who has struggled elsewhere. Usually, they can't. But emboldened by recent success stories like Sven Baertschi and Markus Granlund and Jacob Markstrom, the Canucks feel they can resurrect Pouliot's NHL career, too.

He will be coached in Vancouver by Travis Green, who helped shape Pouliot in Portland.

"That's not why we made the decision," Benning told reporters. "It could be beneficial. But we made the decision because we believe in Derrick's talent level, his skill level. We think the way he skates, the way he can carry the puck up ice and jump up in the play, he's an offensive defencemen. We believe his style of game is going to fit the way Travis wants to coach.

"It's hard to find now defencemen who can quarterback a power play because not only do they have to be great skaters who can handle the puck, but they have to have a good shot from the point to score, too. We didn't acquire Derrick to fill that need (now). We think with development that could be a big part of his game. But I don't want to put so much pressure on him that he has to be the saviour back there. He's a guy we want to work with, we want to keep developing. We want him to regain his confidence in the things he's really good at. And if he does that, he can help us."

Confidence will be one of the issues with Pouliot, who made several return trips from the minors to the NHL during his first three seasons in professional hockey.

"It's been a bit of an up-and-down ride," Pouliot conceded. "My first three years in Pittsburgh haven't gone exactly as I'd hoped or planned. But I

think I've made strides along the way. I'm starting to get back to the player I know I can be.

"Confidence has been a bit of a battle sometimes. You go through lots of ups and downs in a season. Getting sent down and getting called back up, sometimes you're not even sure where you are or where you're going to be the next day. It has been a little bit of a challenge."

The Canucks will give Pouliot a hug and encourage him to play to his strengths.

"Sometimes a trade is what a player needs," Green said. "Sometimes a player is too confident and gets knocked down with the team he is at, and a trade wakes him up. Sometimes a player isn't confident enough, and needs to find that confidence and a trade is what does it."

Green acknowledged the Canucks' need for a dynamic power-play quarterback but, like Benning, wasn't predicting greatness or even a Norris Trophy for Pouliot.

"I think it's early for us to start putting those kind of expectations on a player," he said. "I know that's what he was tagged with at 19, 18, 17. I just want to see him ... play in the NHL, make the NHL. Whether it's as a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh defenceman, play in the NHL. Hopefully he'll become the best player he can be and if that's a power-play defenceman, so be it. If it's not, there's a lot of good fourth or fifth defencemen that play a long time and are important to winning championships."

The Canucks would love one of those, too.

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Sportsnet.ca / All 23 Maple Leafs dressing room nicknames

Luke Fox

Hockey nicknames do not have a reputation for being the most inventive, but, boy, are they fun to say.

As the Toronto Maple Leafs unveil their 23-man opening-night roster for the 2017-18 season, we asked prototypical "good dressing room guys" Matt Martin and Nazem Kadri to run down the lineup and let us know the hockey moniker for all the boys.

All of the Buds' monikers are kept to one or two syllables max, which makes for a quick way to beg for the puck and adds efficiency to friendly chirps.

Tuesday, the club sent down Rosie (Calle Rosen) to the AHL and released Polie (Roman Polak) from his PTO, though he will continue to practice with the team.

"I will call 'Gards' Jake sometimes. I've called 'JVR' James before. Other than that, I don't think there's one guy here I don't call only by their nickname," says Kadri, surveying the room's nameplates.

Most are easy to guess. Shorten the player's given name or surname, slap an "s" or "ie" on the end, presto. For obvious reasons, Connor Brown is abbreviated to "Brownie," not "Connie."

Despite what the media may have you believe, to his teammates James van Riemsdyk is more often "Reemer" than "JVR."

"Mitchy, we call him 'Mouse' sometimes, short for Mighty Mouse or Mini Mouse," Kadri says of his 6-foot(?) teammate. "I prefer Mini Mouse."



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Because of the confusion of Matt Martin and Martin Marincin both being "Marty," Matt pulled the vet card and Marincin increasingly goes by "Marv."

Kadri himself is affectionately known as "Dreamer," derived from "The Dream," derived from "Nazeem the Dream," an alias teammates popularized years ago upon hearing Torontonians incorrectly pronounce Kadri's Arabic first name "Na-zeem" instead of "Na-zihm."

"It's definitely not self-proclaimed, that's for sure. I don't mind it, whatever," says Kadri, smiling. "Dreamer, Dream, Dreamy—more and more of my teammates started calling me that. It spread like wildfire, then the fans started catching on to it and everybody loved the nickname."

Here's the full rundown. Leafs Nation, feel free to scream these punchier versions of the players' names at your television set or tattoo them on your chest. Get familiar.

FORWARDS

- 11 Zach Hyman — "Hymz"
- 12 Patrick Marleau — "Patty"
- 15 Matt Martin — "Marty"
- 16 Mitchell Marner — "Mitchy" or "Marns"
- 20 Dominic Moore — "Moorey"
- 23 Eric Fehr — "Fehrsy"
- 25 James van Riemsdyk — "Reemer" or "JVR"
- 28 Connor Brown — "Brownie"
- 29 William Nylander — "Willie"
- 32 Josh Leivo — "Leivs"
- 34 Auston Matthews — "Matty"
- 42 Tyler Bozak — "Bozie"
- 43 Nazem Kadri — "Naz" or "Dreamer"
- 47 Leo Komarov — "Uncle Leo" or "Lee"

DEFENCEMEN

- 2 Ron Hainsey — "Hains"
- 8 Connor Carrick — "Cees"
- 22 Nikita Zaitsev — "Zaits"
- 44 Morgan Rielly — "Mo"
- 51 Jake Gardiner — "Gards"
- 52 Martin Marincin — "Marty" or "Marv"
- 55 Andreas Borgman — "Borgy"

GOALTENDERS

- 31 Frederik Andersen — "Freddy" or "Andy"
- 35 Curtis McElhinney — "Mac"

COACH

- Mike Babcock — "Babs"

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Sportsnet.ca / Sportsnet NHL Insider predictions for 2017-18 season

Sportsnet Staff

The NHL season is here.

We've assembled a panel of Sportsnet NHL Insiders to take a shot at predicting the unpredictable.

From the Stanley Cup winner to how many Canadian teams will be playing for the Stanley Cup in April, to how many points Connor McDavid and goals Auston Matthews will put up, the following are our Insiders' predictions for the 2017-18 NHL season.

Stanley Cup winner:

- Chris Johnston: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Iain MacIntyre: Edmonton Oilers
- John Shannon: Pittsburgh Penguins
- Mark Spector: Edmonton Oilers
- Eric Engels: Dallas Stars
- Luke Fox: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Daren Millard: Washington Capitals
- David Amber: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Eric Francis: Minnesota Wild
- Gord Stellick: Washington Capitals
- Nick Kypreos: Columbus Blue Jackets
- Jeff Marek: Nashville Predators
- Kristina Rutherford: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Sean McIndoe: Pittsburgh Penguins
- Doug MacLean: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Rory Boylen: Anaheim Ducks
- East Champion
- Chris Johnston: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Iain MacIntyre: Pittsburgh Penguins
- John Shannon: Pittsburgh Penguins
- Mark Spector: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Eric Engels: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Luke Fox: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Daren Millard: Washington Capitals
- David Amber: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Eric Francis: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Gord Stellick: Washington Capitals
- Nick Kypreos: Columbus Blue Jackets
- Jeff Marek: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Kristina Rutherford: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Sean McIndoe: Pittsburgh Penguins
- Doug MacLean: Tampa Bay Lightning
- Rory Boylen: Tampa Bay Lightning



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West Champion

Chris Johnston: Edmonton Oilers

Iain MacIntyre: Edmonton Oilers

John Shannon: Chicago Blackhawks

Mark Spector: Edmonton Oilers

Eric Engels: Dallas Stars

Luke Fox: Anaheim Ducks

Daren Millard: Edmonton Oilers

David Amber: Edmonton Oilers

Eric Francis: Minnesota Wild

Gord Stellick: Anaheim Ducks

Nick Kypreos: Anaheim Ducks

Jeff Marek: Nashville Predators

Kristina Rutherford: Nashville Predators

Sean McIndoe: Edmonton Oilers

Doug MacLean: Edmonton Oilers

Rory Boylen: Anaheim Ducks

Team likely to exceed expectations

Chris Johnston: Winnipeg Jets

Iain MacIntyre: Dallas Stars

John Shannon: Carolina Hurricanes

Mark Spector: Dallas Stars

Eric Engels: Winnipeg Jets

Luke Fox: Carolina Hurricanes

Daren Millard: Washington Capitals

David Amber: Winnipeg Jets

Eric Francis: Dallas Stars

Gord Stellick: Buffalo Sabres

Nick Kypreos: Carolina Hurricanes

Jeff Marek: Arizona Coyotes

Kristina Rutherford: Ottawa Senators

Sean McIndoe: Carolina Hurricanes

Doug MacLean: Carolina Hurricanes

Rory Boylen: Carolina Hurricanes

Team likely to disappoint

Chris Johnston: Ottawa Senators

Iain MacIntyre: Nashville Predators

John Shannon: St. Louis Blues

Mark Spector: Calgary Flames

Eric Engels: New York Rangers

Luke Fox: Montreal Canadiens

Daren Millard: Nashville Predators

David Amber: Boston Bruins

Eric Francis: Edmonton Oilers

Gord Stellick: Ottawa Senators

Nick Kypreos: Montreal Canadiens

Jeff Marek: Ottawa Senators

Kristina Rutherford: Calgary Flames

Sean McIndoe: Nashville Predators

Doug MacLean: San Jose Sharks

Rory Boylen: NY Rangers

Canadian team with highest point total

Chris Johnston: Calgary Flames

Iain MacIntyre: Edmonton Oilers

John Shannon: Edmonton Oilers

Mark Spector: Edmonton Oilers

Eric Engels: Edmonton Oilers

Luke Fox: Calgary Flames

Daren Millard: Edmonton Oilers

David Amber: Edmonton Oilers

Eric Francis: Calgary Flames

Gord Stellick: Edmonton Oilers

Nick Kypreos: Edmonton Oilers

Jeff Marek: Edmonton Oilers

Kristina Rutherford: Toronto Maple Leafs

Sean McIndoe: Edmonton Oilers

Doug MacLean: Edmonton Oilers

Rory Boylen: Calgary Flames

No. of Canadian teams in the playoffs:

Chris Johnston: 5

Iain MacIntyre: 3

John Shannon: 5

Mark Spector: 3

Eric Engels: 6

Luke Fox: 5

Daren Millard: 5

David Amber: 5

Eric Francis: 5

Gord Stellick: 5

Nick Kypreos: 5

Jeff Marek: 5

Kristina Rutherford: 5

Sean McIndoe: 4

Doug MacLean: 5

Rory Boylen: 4

Hart winner:



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Chris Johnston: Connor McDavid

Iain MacIntyre: Connor McDavid

John Shannon: Connor McDavid

Mark Spector: Connor McDavid

Eric Engels: Sidney Crosby

Luke Fox: Connor McDavid

Daren Millard: Connor McDavid

David Amber: Connor McDavid

Eric Francis: Connor McDavid

Gord Stellick: Connor McDavid

Nick Kypreos: Sergei Bobrovsky

Jeff Marek: Connor McDavid

Kristina Rutherford: Connor McDavid

Sean McIndoe: Connor McDavid

Doug MacLean: Connor McDavid

Rory Boylen: Connor McDavid

Art Ross winner:

Chris Johnston: Connor McDavid

Iain MacIntyre: Connor McDavid

John Shannon: Connor McDavid

Mark Spector: Connor McDavid

Eric Engels: Connor McDavid

Luke Fox: Connor McDavid

Daren Millard: Connor McDavid

David Amber: Connor McDavid

Eric Francis: Connor McDavid

Gord Stellick: Connor McDavid

Nick Kypreos: Connor McDavid

Jeff Marek: Jack Eichel

Kristina Rutherford: Connor McDavid

Sean McIndoe: Connor McDavid

Doug MacLean: Connor McDavid

Rory Boylen: Connor McDavid

Calder winner:

Chris Johnston: Nico Hischier

Iain MacIntyre: Clayton Keller

John Shannon: Tyson Jost

Mark Spector: Mikhail Sergachev

Eric Engels: Alex DeBrincat

Luke Fox: Clayton Keller

David Amber: Josh Ho-Sang

Eric Francis: Brock Boeser

Gord Stellick: Charlie McAvoy

Nick Kypreos: Josh Ho-Sang

Jeff Marek: Nico Hischier

Kristina Rutherford: Charlie McAvoy

Sean McIndoe: Clayton Keller

Doug MacLean: Nico Hischier

Rory Boylen: Clayton Keller

Norris winner:

Chris Johnston: Victor Hedman

Iain MacIntyre: Victor Hedman

John Shannon: Drew Doughty

Mark Spector: Victor Hedman

Eric Engels: Brent Burns

Luke Fox: Erik Karlsson

Daren Millard: Erik Karlsson

David Amber: Victor Hedman

Eric Francis: Brent Burns

Gord Stellick: Victor Hedman

Nick Kypreos: Erik Karlsson

Jeff Marek: Victor Hedman

Kristina Rutherford: Erik Karlsson

Sean McIndoe: Victor Hedman

Doug MacLean: Erik Karlsson

Rory Boylen: Victor Hedman

Vezina winner:

Chris Johnston: Matt Murray

Iain MacIntyre: Carey Price

John Shannon: Carey Price

Mark Spector: Cam Talbot

Eric Engels: Carey Price

Luke Fox: Cam Talbot

Daren Millard: Braden Holtby

David Amber: Ben Bishop

Eric Francis: Matt Murray

Gord Stellick: Braden Holtby

Nick Kypreos: Sergei Bobrovsky

Jeff Marek: Matt Murray

Kristina Rutherford: Braden Holtby

Sean McIndoe: Braden Holtby

Doug MacLean: Matt Murray

Rory Boylen: Devan Dubnyk

Jack Adams winner:

Chris Johnston: Bill Peters

Iain MacIntyre: Ken Hitchcock



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John Shannon: Bill Peters
Mark Spector: Todd McLellan
Eric Engels: Todd McLellan
Luke Fox: Bill Peters
Daren Millard: Paul Maurice
David Amber: Jon Cooper
Eric Francis: Ken Hitchcock
Gord Stellick: Jon Cooper
Nick Kypreos: Bill Peters
Jeff Marek: Mike Babcock
Kristina Rutherford: Mike Babcock
Sean McIndoe: Joel Quenneville
Doug MacLean: Todd MacLellan
Rory Boylen: Bruce Boudreau
Coach in the hottest seat:
Chris Johnston: Joel Quenneville
Iain MacIntyre: Paul Maurice
John Shannon: Barry Trotz
Mark Spector: Paul Maurice
Eric Engels: Paul Maurice
Luke Fox: Paul Maurice
David Amber: Jared Bednar
Eric Francis: Paul Maurice
Gord Stellick: Paul Maurice
Nick Kypreos: Paul Maurice
Jeff Marek: Jeff Blashill
Sean McIndoe: Jared Bednar
Doug MacLean: Paul Maurice
Rory Boylen: Barry Trotz
GM on the hottest seat:
Chris Johnston: Chuck Fletcher
Iain MacIntyre: Ken Holland
John Shannon: Jim Benning
Mark Spector: Jim Benning
Eric Engels: Marc Bergevin
Luke Fox: Garth Snow
Daren Millard: Marc Bergevin
David Amber: Garth Snow
Eric Francis: Marc Bergevin
Gord Stellick: Jim Benning
Nick Kypreos: Kevin Cheveldayoff
Jeff Marek: Chuck Fletcher
Kristina Rutherford: Marc Bergevin

Sean McIndoe: Garth Snow
Doug MacLean: Marc Bergevin
Rory Boylen: Garth Snow
After the trade deadline John Tavares will be a member of the _____:
Chris Johnston: New York Islanders
Iain MacIntyre: New York Islanders
Mark Spector: New York Islanders
Eric Engels: Montreal Canadiens
Luke Fox: Tampa Bay Lightning
Daren Millard: New York Islanders
David Amber: New York Islanders
Eric Francis: Toronto Maple Leafs
Gord Stellick: New York Islanders
Nick Kypreos: New York Islanders
Jeff Marek: New York Islanders
Kristina Rutherford: New York Islanders
Sean McIndoe: New York Islanders
Doug MacLean: New York Islanders
Rory Boylen: New York Islanders
Matt Duchene will finish the season as a member of the _____:
Chris Johnston: Columbus Blue Jackets
Iain MacIntyre: Montreal Canadiens
Mark Spector: Calgary Flames
Eric Engels: Carolina Hurricanes
Luke Fox: Carolina Hurricanes
Daren Millard: New York Islanders
David Amber: Carolina Hurricanes
Eric Francis: Ottawa Senators
Gord Stellick: Carolina Hurricanes
Nick Kypreos: Columbus Blue Jackets
Jeff Marek: Columbus Blue Jackets
Kristina Rutherford: Columbus Blue Jackets
Sean McIndoe: Columbus Blue Jackets
Doug MacLean: Montreal Canadiens
Rory Boylen: Columbus Blue Jackets
Jonathan Drouin will score ___ points for the Canadiens (assuming 75 GP):
Chris Johnston: 62
Iain MacIntyre: 66
Mark Spector: 60
Eric Engels: 66
Luke Fox: 62



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Daren Millard: 70

David Amber: 60

Eric Francis: 65

Gord Stellick: 56

Nick Kypreos: 75

Jeff Marek: 70

Kristina Rutherford: 68

Sean McIndoe: 65

Doug MacLean: 70

Rory Boylen: 61

Auston Matthews will score ___ goals for the Maple Leafs (assuming 75 GP):

Chris Johnston: 44

Iain MacIntyre: 32

Mark Spector: 40

Eric Engels: 38

Luke Fox: 39

Daren Millard: 48

David Amber: 38

Eric Francis: 45

Gord Stellick: 37

Nick Kypreos: 47

Jeff Marek: 35

Kristina Rutherford: 45

Sean McIndoe: 35

Doug MacLean: 42

Rory Boylen: 39

Connor McDavid will score ___ points in 2017-18 (assuming 75 GP):

Chris Johnston: 111

Iain MacIntyre: 108

Mark Spector: 110

Eric Engels: 97

Luke Fox: 97

Daren Millard: 115

David Amber: 110

Eric Francis: 110

Gord Stellick: 103

Nick Kypreos: 124

Jeff Marek: 115

Kristina Rutherford: 105

Sean McIndoe: 115

Doug MacLean: 110

Rory Boylen: 120

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Sportsnet.ca / Leafs' Lupul fails second physical, can be placed on LTIR

Chris Johnston

TORONTO — The NHL will allow the Toronto Maple Leafs to place Joffrey Lupul's contract on long-term injured reserve this season, Sportsnet has learned.

The decision comes after the 33-year-old winger underwent a second medical examination following his failed physical from team doctors before training camp.

Lupul initially appeared to challenge that diagnosis — "Haha failed physical? They cheat, everyone let's them" he wrote on his Instagram account last month — before deleting the comment and issuing an apology.

"I responded earlier this week to some negative comments on Instagram," he wrote. "It was an inappropriate response, and I deleted it, but I take full responsibility. It's been extremely tough not being able to play over the past 1.5 years."

Lupul elected not to seek out his own second opinion — as was his right under the collective bargaining agreement — but the NHL initiated one so that it could independently determine his status.

Tuesday's ruling will be met with a sigh of relief by the Leafs, who now have the ability to spend well above the \$75-million salary cap by placing both Nathan Horton (\$5.3 million) and Lupul (\$5.25 million) on LTIR once the season starts.

They would have been tight to the upper limit and left without much flexibility to add salary in-season had the league deemed Lupul healthy.

He last played for the Leafs in February 2016, when the team announced he would be shut down for the remainder of that season following sports hernia surgery.

Lupul has endured a slew of injuries and ailments during his career, including major back surgery while a member of the Anaheim Ducks. He failed his medical with Leafs doctors before training camp last September and missed the entire season before failing another one last month.

Still, some rival teams have held doubts about Toronto's intentions.

The NHL's ruling comes on the heels of a similar case involving Chicago Blackhawks forward Marian Hossa — he's been deemed eligible for LTIR because of a skin condition — and should essentially close the book on Lupul's tenure in Toronto.

This is the final season of a \$26.25-million, five-year extension he signed in January 2013.

Lupul will be an unrestricted free agent on July 1 and has expressed a desire to continue his career.

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Sportsnet.ca / Toronto Maple Leafs Prospect Report: Bracco highlights RW depth



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

Luke Fox

TORONTO — What Mike Babcock tells a prospect when he cuts him from training camp is short and bitter: "This is your lot in life."

"Lots of times when you send a guy down, he doesn't hear a word you say. He's just mad he's going down," the Toronto Maple Leafs head coach explains.

"A week later when you talk to him, you try to make it clear: 'If you have a good attitude and you work hard, things work out for you. If you don't, things don't go the way you want.' The best players are going to play on the team. We might not always get it right in the short term, but we'll get it right."

The strength of the Leafs' forward core — a collective that should contend for this winter's goals-per-game crown — has resulted in a wealth of intriguing prospects up front that will have more time to develop, whether they need it or not. Sprinkled among the stickhandlers and shooters are a few good defencemen (one even shoots right!) and a teenage goaltender aiming to take another step.

Depth — all hockey types say it's a good problem to have.

Or as Babcock puts it: "The Marlies are going to have a heck of a team this year, to say the least."

1. Kasperii Kapanen, RW

Drafted: 22nd overall, 2014

What more does the 21-year-old Finn need to do to crack an NHL lineup? All the high-flying Kapanen did last spring was score two of the biggest goals in recent franchise history: the tying goal in the playoff-spot clinching game versus the Pittsburgh Penguins and an even more clutch double-OT playoff game winner against the Washington Capitals. Yet the son of 800-game NHLer Sami doesn't need to clear waivers to be sent to the American Hockey League and, thus, will start another season in the minors, where he's already proved to be a point-per-game forward.

"When you have the depth we have, you have to make those decisions," Leafs GM Lou Lamoriello said Monday, after demoting Kapanen and 23-year-old wing Nikita Soshnikov. "They're knocking on the door. They'll be back in the NHL."

Lamoriello's message to the overripe prospect?

"Yes, be disappointed, but don't let up on the gas. You have to continue to force us to get you back."

2. Jeremy Bracco, RW

Drafted: 61st overall, 2015

The 20-year-old playmaker inked his entry-level deal with Toronto in late March, then went out and capped off his spectacular sophomore junior season as first star of the Memorial Cup championship game. Bracco's 83-point tear in 2016-17 featured a record-setting 25-game point streak and world junior gold. The queue for skills-blessed wing prospects waiting their turn with the big club, however, stretches halfway up Bay Street. After two video-game-like OHL campaigns, the prospect named after Jeremy Roenick (his parents' favourite player) hopes to learn Toronto's systems with the Marlies.

3. Calle Rosen or Andreas Borgman, D

Drafted: N/A (Undrafted)

The roster battle for third-pair left defence will come down to the final day of training camp, as both Rosen, 23, and Borgman, 22 — a pair of shrewd, swift-skating Swedish discoveries by director of player evaluation Jim Paliapito — have transitioned to the North American game faster than anticipated.

"We obviously have not been disappointed," Lamoriello said of the duo, who have fast become friends as well as rivals. Alas, until injury strikes, there will only be room for one on the Maple Leafs.

4. Travis Dermott, D

Drafted: 34th overall, 2015

The most promising under-21 defender in the Leafs' system was in contention for a third-pairing spot to the left of Connor Carrick up until Monday, when Rosen and Borgman hopped ahead of him. Though Dermott suffered a high-ankle sprain last October, the 20-year-old Newmarket, Ont., native battled on to put up 24 points and a plus-9 rating in his first year as a pro. Babcock is quick to praise the 6-foot, 208-pounder's game but believes more AHL shifts will prepare him for the rigours of the NHL.

5. Adam Brooks, C

Drafted: 92nd overall, 2016

With the Maple Leafs' centre depth set to thin out in June with the expiring contracts of Tyler Bozak, Dominic Moore and Eric Fehr, the future of the 21-year-old is an intriguing one. A slow but steady developer in junior, the 5-foot-10 Brooks improved his production over the course of his five seasons with the WHL's Regina Pats. Amazingly, the prospect went from 11 points as a WHL sophomore to a gaudy 130 points in 66 games last season as a super senior. Light it up with the Marlies, and Brooks' promotion to Toronto's roster could be expedited.

6. Timothy Liljgren, D

Drafted: 17th overall, 2017

A severe case of mononucleosis lowered Liljgren's draft stock enough that the Leafs felt fortunate to snag him in the 17 hole of this year's draft. With an imbalance of defence talent that tips heavy to the left side, Liljgren is a right-shot defenceman with natural playmaking talents. The hope is the agile Swede will learn the North American game and evolve into a top-four fixture with some grooming in the AHL. Agile and smooth, Liljgren wants the puck on his stick. And when he has it, he makes smart, crisp passes or can let loose with a heavy slapper.

"His progress has just been outstanding," says Lamoriello.

Liljgren will continue to skate with Marlies for as long as possible but may eventually be sent back to develop in the Swedish pro circuit.

7. Miro Aaltonen, C

Drafted: 177th overall, 2013

Aaltonen used a breakout KHL campaign — 19 goals and 44 points in 59 games for Vityaz — to springboard into a training-camp conversation for the Leafs' fourth-line centre. The 24-year-old Finn is fast and sees the ice well. He also can be sent to the AHL sans waivers, which is what the Leafs decided to do Monday.

"What I've learned over time in training camp is you go, 'Isn't that kid great! Isn't that kid great! Isn't that kid great!' Then he's minus. 'Isn't he great!' He's minus. Then 10 games in, you look up and he's minus-10 and you wonder why you have him there," Babcock said of the decision to go with experience.

"If the kid's ready, he's ready. If it's close, why not tie go to the veteran and he can continue to develop. We expect Aalts to play in the National Hockey League — that's isn't a question at all. It's just when."

8. Carl Grundstrom, RW

Drafted: 57th overall, 2016

Yep, another right-winger with NHL potential. The 6-foot, 194-pound Grundstrom made his presence known in camp by battling hard for pucks and going toe-to-toe with Max Pacioretty along the boards. Grundstrom returned to Sweden this week. He'll continue to hone his skills with Frolunda HC, for whom he scored 14 goals in 45 games last season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Oct. 4, 2017

9. Joseph Woll, G

Drafted: 62nd overall, 2016

If a Maple Leafs goaltender goes down with injury, Marlies netminder Garret Sparks should be the first phone call, but when it comes to goaltending prospects in the system, Woll is the one who's ceiling intrigues us most. The 19-year-old is entering his sophomore season with Boston College and has his sights on becoming the starting netminder for Team USA at the world juniors this Christmas.

"To start for the Maple Leafs, that's my goal," the affable and confident Woll said at Leafs development camp. "I want to play here, and I want to be a guy who can lead this team to a Stanley Cup."

10. Yegor Korshkov, RW

Drafted: 31st overall pick, 2016

A somewhat forgotten commodity, the 6-foot-4 Russian winger has already begun his fourth professional campaign, all with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl of the KHL. An off-the-board draft selection last year, the powerful and lanky Korshkov can drive to the net but has yet to flex his offensive flair against grown men in Russia (13 goals total in his first three KHL campaigns). Still, he just turned 21 this summer and is an intriguing prospect worth keeping tabs on.

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1076348 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Frederik Andersen '100 per cent' healthy unlike last year

Mike Johnston

The beginning of Frederik Andersen's tenure with the Toronto Maple Leafs got off to a rough start one year ago. Not only did he have to adjust to a new team in a new country, but he also had to fight through an injury.

Andersen suffered a concussion in an Olympic qualifier roughly 2 1/2 months after being acquired in a trade by the Maple Leafs from the Anaheim Ducks. The Danish netminder was unable to represent Team Europe at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and was still recovering when Toronto opened its training camp. Andersen managed to suit up for the season opener but proceeded to lose four of his first five starts in a Maple Leafs uniform, allowing 22 goals over that stretch.

On the eve of the 2017-18 campaign, the Maple Leafs' starting netminder is in a much better situation than he was at this time last year.

"I feel a lot better. It's been nice to be part of training camp and all the stuff leading up to the season," Andersen told Hockey Central at Noon Tuesday. It's nice to be up to 100 per cent and also feel really comfortable around the rink. Everyone around the team you know by now. Only a few new faces to get to know and I think all that stuff just adds up to feeling really good and comfortable right away."

Andersen, who turned 28 Monday, finished with a respectable 33-16-14 record and .918 save percentage but a 2.67 goals-against average is a number both he and the team would like to see change.

"It's something we definitely want to improve and we know that playing structured and playing fast out of our own zone is something that's going to help bring that down over a long season," Andersen said. "But also we know that's how to win in the playoffs—to limit the opponent's chances and goals obviously."

Andersen spent much of his summer training in California, where he was hoping to improve his conditioning, so he feels energetic in the crease late in the season.

"I got a little bit leaner and I think that was the main goal and just keep up the strength that I do have and that's been the focus from last year, making that jump to play a little bit more and being used to being an almost every-night starter," he added.

Andersen made a career high 66 regular-season appearances in 2016-17 and played his first six post-season games.

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TSN.CA / Gardiner's confidence continues to grow

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Maple Leafs practised at the MasterCard Centre on Tuesday.

- It was during an early preseason game against Ottawa that Jake Gardiner took the puck behind the Leafs net and started skating backwards toward the blueline. It was a four-on-four shift and there was plenty of open ice. Gardiner built speed and shifted forward in the neutral zone before easily gaining the offensive zone.

"I figure it's a good way to be deceptive," Gardiner explained, "the guy doesn't really know what you're going to do and that's a big part of the game. Anything you can do to screw up the opponent gives you an edge."

Jake Gardiner plays just about every position in this 4v4 shift and does so well pic.twitter.com/YACwdm8n6B

— Jeff Veillette (@JeffVeillette) September 20, 2017

It was another example of Gardiner's growing confidence.

"There's been no bigger change in any player on the team than him," coach Mike Babcock said early in training camp. "He's gone from a guy who didn't have confidence to maybe our best D with and without the puck. I know people don't like to think of him like that, but he's that good ... he's got elite hockey sense."

On Tuesday, Babcock explained specifically where he's seen improvement.

"What I like about him is he's gotten way better defensively so he has the puck way more and plays way more offence," Babcock noted. "He can play against anybody. He's really smart. He's confident."

A whipping boy in the Randy Carlyle era, Gardiner is among the players who have benefitted the most from Toronto's change behind the bench.

"I mean, a lot of it was confidence, but the systems we play make it pretty easy, everyone's on the same page all the time," Gardiner said of his evolution.

Gardiner, Leafs defence has swagger ahead of season

Maple Leafs defenceman Jake Gardiner's confidence is growing. The team's longest serving defenceman heads into the season with a healthy amount of swagger and is looking to help Toronto build on its first-round playoff exit last year.



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Morgan Rielly, Gardiner's friend and one-time roommate, believes the 27-year-old became stronger thanks to the bumps early in his Leafs career.

"That's just part of the business," Rielly noted. "Jake's one of those guys who had to deal with that [criticism] and he's always taken it well and always used it as a motivating [tool] and you can tell in his play he's more confident and comfortable now."

- While the defensive group is often considered a possible Achilles' heel for Toronto, there is definitely a healthy swagger that has filtered throughout the blueline brigade in training camp.

"Just experience," said Rielly when asked why the D corps will be better this season. "I think we're still a young group, but we have a lot of confidence in ourselves. We can move the puck, we can move our feet and to add [Ron] Hainsey after a big playoff run last year ... we've gained experience and we're more comfortable."

Babcock also highlighted the Hainsey signing when asked why Toronto's blueline may take a step forward.

"Bringing Hainsey in is real good for us," the coach said. "He's a calm, veteran guy, who feels good about the game and his game is at a high level ... just what he's going to be able to pass along to Rielly alone is immense."

Leafs Ice Chips: Borgman appears to win last D spot

The Maple Leafs practiced for the final time ahead of their season-opener in Winnipeg and it appear as if Andreas Borgman has won the job as the sixth defenceman and Eric Fehr will start as the fourth line centre. Mark Masters has more.

- Babcock was also pleased with the competitive battle at the back end at training camp. Andreas Borgman, last year's rookie of the year in the Swedish Hockey League, ultimately won the open job on the third pairing. That was confirmed on Tuesday afternoon when the Leafs assigned fellow Swede Calle Rosen to the AHL.

With Roman Polak no longer in the mix, the 6-foot, 212-pound Borgman brings a physical dimension to the Leafs blueline.

"My buddy's a fireman and always tells me, 'If you drive a big vehicle, no matter how many airbags are in the little vehicle, the big vehicle wins every time.' Well, when you're 230 [pounds] and you're bumping into 190, the bigger guy always wins," Babcock said. "When you run into him, people fall over. His edges are elite as well so he can make the good breakout pass."

- Mitch Marner and Patrick Marleau practised on the penalty kill instead of with their power-play units on Tuesday. In between reps the pair huddled with assistant coach D.J. Smith in an attempt to learn the intricacies of the system.

"We lost a couple PKers over the Summer time so I contacted D.J. since being back here about getting reps and if one of the [forward] penalty killers gets a penalty, we only have three of them right now, so that means we'll be down a guy," Marner explained. "It's playing against the other team's best players while a man down so it's a pretty cool to experience."

Marner often killed penalties in London during his junior career and stressed he's comfortable in that spot.

Marner open to PK role

Maple Leafs forward Mitch Marner took reps on the penalty kill at practice on Tuesday and the second-year forward says he is very open to the challenge.

- Babcock said the Leafs will have the same alternate captains as last season, which means Rielly, Tyler Bozak and Leo Komarov will wear a letter for the team.

* Lines at Leafs practice:

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Marleau-Kadri-Komarov

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Marner

Martin-Fehr-Brown

Leivo, Moore

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Borgman-Carrick

Rosen-Marincin

Andersen

McElhinney

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TSN.CA / Borgman rounds out Leafs' 23-man roster

Kristen Shilton, Maple Leafs Reporter

TORONTO – In the battle between two Swedish rookie defencemen striving to make the Maple Leafs' roster, Andreas Borgman has emerged victorious.

The 22-year-old blueliner will round out the Leafs' 23-man roster ahead of Wednesday's opener against the Winnipeg Jets, while Calle Rosen has been assigned to the AHL's Toronto Marlies. Defenceman Timothy Liljegren, the team's first-round draft pick in June, will also spend the season with the Marlies after the club decided not to return him to Rogle BK of the Swedish Hockey League.

Toronto had until 5 p.m. Tuesday to submit their final roster to the NHL office.

Borgman is projected to skate alongside Connor Carrick on Toronto's third pairing, while Martin Marincin will remain as the team's seventh defenceman.

Signed as free agents in June, both Borgman and Rosen had solid preseasons, but Borgman's physicality ultimately trumped Rosen's speed and skating. Before the decision on Borgman or Rosen was officially revealed on Tuesday, head coach Mike Babcock spoke of how, in the battle of big (Borgman is 6-foot, 212 pounds) versus little on the ice, big almost always wins out.

"When you run into him, people fall over," Babcock said of Borgman. "His edges are elite as well, so he can make that good breakout pass. Now, does he have a lot to learn? Absolutely. But we like a lot of things about him."

Borgman was the Swedish Hockey League's rookie of the year last season after posting five goals and 10 assists in 45 games with HV71 Jonkoping.

The Leafs also announced Tuesday that defenceman Roman Polak has been released from his professional tryout contract, but will continue to practice with the team as he works his way back from a fibula break in Game 2 of the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs last April.

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TSN.CA / Hyman remains a fixture on Leafs' top line

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Mike Babcock isn't known to be extravagant with his praise of individual players, so when the Maple Leafs head coach called winger Zach Hyman "the best forechecker in hockey," on Monday, it didn't go unnoticed.

"It's a big honour, a huge compliment," Hyman said after practice on Tuesday. "It's nice when a coach appreciates what you do."

Perhaps more than any player on the Leafs' roster, Hyman has experienced the best and worst of what hockey in Toronto has to offer.

On one hand, he's a fixture on the Maple Leafs' top line, attached at the hip to emerging star Auston Matthews. But given that his game is centred on hard work more than flash, Hyman is also regularly maligned by fans and media for being the wrong choice to skate with the offensively explosive Matthews and William Nylander.

It's a circumstance exacerbated by Toronto's off-season acquisition of left winger Patrick Marleau, a 14-time 20-goal scorer.

Marleau has a career 13.4 per cent shooting percentage, more than twice as high as Hyman's 6.4 per cent shooting percentage last season, which was well below the league average of 9.2 per cent. Hyman scored just six even-strength goals despite the talent around him. But as he prepares for his second year in the NHL, lighting the lamp isn't really Hyman's thing. Not anymore, anyway.

In his final season with the Hamilton Red Wings of the Ontario Jr. Hockey League in 2010-11, Hyman scored 102 points in 43 games to earn Canadian Junior Hockey League player of the year honours. That same year he was selected in the fifth round, 123rd overall, by the Florida Panthers in the NHL Entry Draft, right before he started at the University of Michigan on a hockey scholarship.

It was there that everything changed. The "best forechecker in hockey" was born in Ann Arbor.

"My first couple years in college I wasn't scoring goals or anything," Hyman said of posting just six goals in his first 79 games. "So I had to do something to be hard to play against. That became being hard on the puck and being on the forecheck, killing penalties. I had to find out what I was good at, and that was it."

Hyman's final year at Michigan was his best; he was a first-team All-American and Hobey Baker finalist who led the Big Ten with 54 points (22 goals, 32 assists) in 37 games. The Leafs noticed Hyman's emergence, and in June 2015 sent Greg McKeeg to Florida in exchange for him and a seventh-round draft choice.

After the Leafs drafted Matthews first overall in 2016, Babcock saw the potential for Hyman to step back into the role he played alongside Dylan Larkin at Michigan. From the coach's perspective, Hyman's task is to put pucks on the stick of Matthews and Nylander and let them go.

"It's fine, they share it. I'm the guy in front of the net trying to make space for them," Hyman said. "It's tougher when you're sharing the puck between three. And if I'm in front of the net, the puck is going to come to me when one of those guys shoots it, and then I'll go get it back for them. When Auston and Willy have the puck, I mean, it's Auston and Willy, right? So you know that's good."

Thus far, Matthews has never experienced more than the occasional post-penalty kill shift without Hyman at 5-on-5. Having one scorer with

him and another linemate focused on puck retrieval was an adjustment at first, but the results have been hard to argue.

"I think Babs likes that dynamic and we've been pretty successful," Matthews said. "I'm going to play with whoever coach puts with me and so far I think it's been able to work pretty well. [Zach's] mastered the job of getting in there on the forecheck and getting the puck back. He's really good at it."

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TSN.CA / 31 bold predictions for the NHL season

By Frank Seravalli

Fortune favours the bold — except on the Internet, where predictions live forever as a public reminder of your stupidity.

But that's never stopped us before.

Hockey is back. So are we with one bold (or boneheaded) prediction for each of the NHL's 31 teams ahead of the 2017-18 season:

1. ANAHEIM - Move over Calgary and Nashville. The Ducks will be recognized as the NHL's top defence corps. Cam Fowler, Hampus Lindholm, Josh Manson and Sami Vatanen are the Ducks' engine now — not Corey Perry and Ryan Getzlaf. It's still hard to believe Anaheim was deep enough to willingly part with Shea Theodore last summer. And Jacob Larsson is still coming.

2. ARIZONA - It was Tom Petty who said the waiting is the hardest part, but that's what the Coyotes will do this season. Wait one year, improve, and then make the jump back into the playoffs. It will happen, with a revival led by Clayton Keller and the Arizona's rebuilt blueline. It just won't happen overnight.

3. BOSTON - Charlie McAvoy will be this season's Zach Werenski. Their paths are so similar. Werenski, then 19, stepped into the Blue Jackets' lineup last season after two years at Michigan and ripped off 47 points while playing 21 minutes a night. McAvoy, now 19, was unfazed by six playoff games last spring as his welcome-to-the-NHL moment last spring after two years at nearby Boston University.

4. BUFFALO - Jack Eichel will finish in the Top 5 in NHL scoring. Eichel, who turns 21 this month, was tied for eighth in scoring from Nov. 29 (when he made his season debut) through the remainder of the season. The Sabres will be equally impressed by the leadership jump Eichel makes off the ice, displaying a sincere maturity while maintaining his can't-stand-losing attitude.

Button: Jagr is 'an excellent fit' in Calgary

After reporting that Jaromir Jagr has agreed to a one-year deal with Calgary, TSN's Pierre LeBrun has heard that the 45-year old is excited to play for a Canadian team for the first time in his storied career. Meanwhile, Craig Button breaks down how Jagr will fit in with the Flames.

5. CALGARY - Jaromir Jagr will bank 20 goals and best his age in points, shrinking the pool of naysayers who say he can't play until age 50. The mulleted wonder will help Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan grow, maybe even as linemates, as he passes Gordie Howe to become the NHL's all-time games played leader.

6. CAROLINA - Scott Darling will prove to be the best off-season pickup, as the Hurricanes snap the NHL's longest playoff drought (2008-09) with the help of their young and mobile defence. You can practically taste the



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Carolina BBQ at warm April parking lot tailgates at PNC Arena as hockey is reborn in Raleigh.

7. CHICAGO - Joel Quenneville will be teetering on the hot seat after the Blackhawks bow out in the first round of the playoffs for the third year in a row. GM Stan Bowman said that would not be acceptable, but part of it isn't Quenneville's fault, as he's never had this much of a project on defence.

8. COLORADO - With seemingly little identity or direction for the Avalanche, GM Joe Sakic will step down at the end of another abysmal season. Sakic made marginal changes to the NHL's worst team of the salary-cap era last season, leaving many to wonder about his long-term vision for the franchise.

9. COLUMBUS - After 18 years, the Blue Jackets will finally earn their first banner to hang in Nationwide Arena as Metropolitan Division champions. It's no small feat, considering the Metro is the toughest division in the league again, and up until now only the logos of other NHL teams waved in the rafters. It's no guarantee for playoff success, though, which will leave John Tortorella and Jarmo Kekalainen with an empty feeling.

10. DALLAS - Ken Hitchcock will capture his second Jack Adams Award for coach of the year as he leads the Stars to the Western Conference Final. Call him the right person at the right time in Dallas, where Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin will be all ears coming off an incredibly disappointing season. Having two-time Vezina finalist Ben Bishop there to cover the warts of a still-growing defence doesn't hurt, either.

11. DETROIT - The Red Wings will finish last in the Eastern Conference. From 25 consecutive playoff berths to a hard thud. The NHL's youth movement waits for no one. At least Wings fans will have something to marvel at during games at the palatial new Little Caesars Arena.

12. EDMONTON - Lord Stanley is coming home: The Oilers will end Canada's Stanley Cup drought after 25 long years. Connor McDavid matched Sidney Crosby by winning the Hart and Art Ross in his sophomore season. Along with Leon Draisaitl, his version of Evgeni Malkin, McDavid will one-up Crosby by capturing the Cup in his third season – after Crosby fell short in Game 6 against the Red Wings.

13. FLORIDA - A fully healthy Aleksander Barkov and Jonathan Huberdeau will put the Panthers on the prowl for a playoff spot. A 10- or 12-point improvement may be in the cards, but it will leave Florida just short under rookie coach Bob Boughner.

14. LOS ANGELES - No speed, no playoffs for the Kings, no matter how much new coach John Stevens tries to open it up. The problem for GM Rob Blake, if the Kings do miss again, is how to break free from damaging long-term contracts that threaten to keep the window closed for the foreseeable future with no prospect help in sight.

15. MINNESOTA - Bet on it: Bruce Boudreau will push the Wild to another 100-point season. It's all he's ever done as a head coach over a full season, with seven straight 100-point campaigns in Washington, Anaheim and Minnesota. Boudreau has enviable depth at his disposal nightly.

16. MONTREAL - The Canadiens' fatal flaw - lack of scoring - will push GM Marc Bergevin to pull the trigger and trade for Matt Duchene before Christmas. His job will depend on making the necessary adjustments. The Habs have kept tabs on Duchene's asking price – and he makes a lot of sense, given their need at centre and his ability to produce points.

Trade Me! Matt Duchene Edition

Coming this NHL season, it's the new game everyone is playing. Can you navigate the obstacles of trading a franchise centreman? Give it a shot in Trade Me! Matt Duchene Edition.

17. NASHVILLE - Coming off a rousing Stanley Cup Final run, the Predators will miss the playoffs. No Ryan Ellis until 2018, plus no James Neal or Mike Fisher. That's a lot of pressure on players like \$64 million man Ryan Johansen. It's also not unprecedented: Peter Laviolette's

Hurricanes team won the Stanley Cup in 2006 and missed the following year.

18. NEW JERSEY - Devils' dynamo Nico Hischier will win the Calder Trophy. Maybe, just maybe, we've underestimated the gap between Hischier and other NHL players – not just players from his draft year.

19. NEW YORK ISLANDERS - The Islanders will finally eliminate their biggest distraction: their arena. With help from the Oak View Group – the same NHL-friendly development team that was awarded the arena project in Seattle – the Isles will work out a deal to build a new arena, as they proposed, on a vacant 43-acre parcel adjacent to Belmont Park in nearby Elmont. No more soft ice in Brooklyn.

20. NEW YORK RANGERS - Across town, the Rangers' win-dow is closing as they miss the playoffs for just the second time during Henrik Lundqvist's reign. Lundqvist, who turns 36 this season, is coming off a career-worst season with a .910 save percentage. It will be hard to hold ground in the Metro with those numbers again.

21. OTTAWA - Craig Anderson will take home the first Vezina Trophy in Senators history. Anderson, 36, was third in the NHL last year in high-danger save percentage on shots from the inner-slot – a season that would've received a lot more attention for the Vezina if he didn't miss half the season to be with his ailing wife. Fresh off a two-year extension, Anderson seems poised to build on that performance.

22. PHILADELPHIA - With Claude Giroux on the left wing, Sean Couturier will break through with his first career 50-point season for the Flyers. But Couturier's time as Philadelphia's No. 1 centre will be short-lived, as he's just keeping the spot warm for Nolan Patrick, with the Flyers' rookies providing hope in another non-playoff year.

23. PITTSBURGH - Sidney Crosby's bid to three-peat will be broken by a kid who grew up playing road hockey in a No. 87 jersey. A McDavid vs. Crosby Stanley Cup Final would make for appointment television – even for casual hockey fans. The Penguins' 213 games over the last two seasons will ultimately catch up to them as they tried to become the first time since the 1980s Islanders to win three straight.

Button: I don't think McDavid has unseated Crosby

OverDrive hosts Bryan Hayes, Jeff O'Neill & Jamie McLennan are joined in studio by TSN Hockey Analyst Craig Button to get his opinion on the results of TSN's Top 50 players poll and why he thinks Sidney Crosby should still be #1.

24. SAN JOSE - Betrayed by their depth, the Sharks will fall short of making the playoffs. San Jose's lineup card gets awfully thin in a hurry after the big boys at the top. Not having Patrick Marleau for the first time since 1996 only accentuates the problem.

25. ST. LOUIS - Take the under: The Blues will fail to crack 95 points. It was a disastrous training camp for the Blues, losing Robby Fabbri, Alex Steen, Jay Bouwmeester and Patrik Berglund to various injuries. Cracks would show on any roster losing those types of numbers. Even so, St. Louis snapping a six-year playoff run would leave plenty of question marks about GM Doug Armstrong's future as he's in the last year of his contract.

26. TAMPA BAY - While Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov light it up, Victor Hedman will take home his first Norris Trophy. Hedman, 26, is coming off a 72-point, jack-of-all-trades season for the Bolts. He would become the third Swede to win the Norris since 2011, joining Karlsson and Nicklas Lidstrom.

27. TORONTO - What sophomore slump? Auston Matthews will become the NHL's first 50-goal scorer not named Alex Ovechkin in the last six years. Just when you think Matthews will have a tough task ahead topping his rookie 40-goal campaign, he seemed to score so effortlessly in the pre-season.

Will Matthews' assist total increase with a full year of Nylander?



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Maple Leafs sniper Auston Matthews had 40 goals and 29 assists, TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button discusses whether his assist totals will go up this year with William Nylander on his wing for a full season.

28. VANCOUVER - Henrik and Daniel Sedin will salute Vancouver and ride off after prolific 17-year runs. The Sedins, entering the final years of their four-year \$28-million deals, wrote recently they won't be finishing their careers elsewhere. They clearly don't fit the Canucks' rebuild and this year seems as fitting as any to pass the batons to Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser.

29. VEGAS - Golden Knights' winger James Neal will be the NHL's most coveted rental target leading up to the Feb. 26 trade deadline. Neal, 30, is in the final year of his deal with a salary cap hit of \$5 million. Bonus prediction: The Golden Knights won't finish last in Pacific, but the clock is ticking on owner Bill Foley's guarantee of playoffs within three years.

30. WASHINGTON - Coach Barry Trotz and the Capitals will part ways after the season. Trotz, 55, said he was comfortable coaching into the final year of his contract – which NHL coaches almost never do. That means it's time to deliver, and it's hard to feel good about this team's chances given they haven't been able to do it and they aren't nearly as good on paper this year. Trotz has averaged 52 wins in each of his first three seasons in Washington.

31. WINNIPEG - The team won't just win its first playoff game in Jets/Thrashers history. They'll win at least four. The Jets are physical, fast and harness some of the biggest guns in the league, with Mark Scheifele, Blake Wheeler, Patrik Laine and Nik Ehlers. They just need a little boost from Steve Mason and a more disciplined approach to get over the hump.

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TSN.CA / How do the NHL's No. 1 lines stack up?

By Frank Seravalli

The only thing more fickle than a coach's lineup card is the way a chunk of frozen vulcanized rubber bounces during a September preseason game in Arizona.

Thousands of line combinations will whirl 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

Scoop: The back-to-back Stanley Cup champs are hoping Guentzel can push them toward a three-peat after netting 29 goals in 67 regular and postseason contests last spring, including a league-best 13 in the playoffs.

7. Toronto: Zach Hyman - Auston Matthews - William Nylander

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.

8. Nashville: Filip Forsberg - Ryan Johansen - Victor Arvidsson

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.

10. Washington: Andre Burakovsky - Nicklas Backstrom - T.J. Oshie



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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.

13. New York Islanders: Anders Lee - John Tavares - Jordan Eberle

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.

19. Montreal: Max Pacioretty - Jonathan Drouin - Brendan Gallagher

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.

21. Detroit: Tomas Tatar - Henrik Zetterberg - Gustav Nyquist

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.

24. Carolina: Sebastian Aho - Victor Rask - Elias Lindholm

Scoop: Bill Peters' attack may be the most balanced in the NHL, with the luxury to really call any one of his first three 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.

26. New Jersey: Taylor Hall - Pavel Zacha - Kyle Palmieri

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 Sedins, 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.

31. Colorado: Sven Andrighetto - Nathan MacKinnon - Mikko Rantanen

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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TSN.CA / A look at hockey's analytical darlings and duds

By Travis Yost

As an annual exercise just before the start of the NHL regular season, I like to produce a list of 10 NHL players who exist in a space where there is significant disparity between their perceived and actual value.

On one side we have a group of players who I argue are generally underrated by the hockey community. We'll call them our analytical darlings.

Naturally, there has to be an opposing group – players whose value is generally overrated by the hockey community. This group of five is known as our analytical duds.

Before we get into the unveiling of our 2017-18 teams, let's be clear that these lists are subject to change every single year. Everything is based on current perception, and so what the hockey community values in specific players in September 2017 may not be true by the time September of 2018 or 2019 rolls around. It's just something to keep in mind.

With that, let's unveil our team of analytical darlings. Five players who I think are, by and large, tremendously underrated across the league:

The Darlings

F: Brandon Saad (CHI) – Andrew Cogliano (ANA) – Nino Niederreiter (MIN)

D: Jaccob Slavin (CAR) – Hampus Lindholm (ANA)

Brandon Saad is my first pick, and I think an excellent starting point for this team. There were questions about how much Saad benefited from starting his career in Chicago and playing extensive minutes with names like Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, Marian Hossa, and so on. Then he went to Columbus, anchored his own line, and still put together a 24-goal, 53-point season.

Saad has emerged as one of the league's premier 5-on-5 weapons – one of the biggest reasons why Chicago reacquired him this summer. He's ninth in 5-on-5 goal-scoring since the 2014-15 season with 69 markers, sandwiching him between weapons like Nikita Kucherov in Tampa Bay and Tyler Seguin in Dallas.

The other winger on the team, Minnesota's Nino Niederreiter, is a player I wrote about during the summer. His career arc – from potential draft pick bust to perennial 20+ goal scorer – has been remarkable to watch. But one point I harped on (and it's worth revisiting) is just how materially better the Wild are with Niederreiter on the ice. Every single one of his teammates sees a decisive increment in shot advantage when playing with him. These splits from the 2016-17 season are remarkable:

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Niederreiter was near the top of the league in RelativeCorsi% last season – Minnesota was a 47 per cent shot team with him on the bench and 55 per cent with him on the ice. For a point of reference, Patrice Bergeron – consistently regarded as a dominant driving force – gave the Boston Bruins about nine points in shot advantage. Anytime you are in the vicinity of the Boston centre, it's a huge compliment.

My centre is the ironman himself, Andrew Cogliano. Cogliano's best years are probably behind him, but at the age of 30, he's still two things –

incredibly durable and impeccably versatile. He hasn't missed a regular-season game in four years, and in that stretch has averaged about 35 points a season with one of the league's last checking lines – a group created to slow down the opposition's best on every single night.

Not only has Cogliano mastered that skill, he's also remained a fantastic penalty killer. The name Ryan Kesler gets a lot of the pop in Anaheim, but I think there's a good argument to be made that Cogliano's the one who really stirs the drink when the Ducks are down a man.

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These are absolutely crazy numbers. Think about it like this: NHLers will score nearly twice as many goals per-60 minutes against an average penalty killer than he would against Cogliano. Better yet: power-play units get about 91 per cent of the goals when up a man. When they're facing Cogliano that number drops to about 77 per cent.

Now, the best penalty-kill unit remains the one that doesn't have to play – discipline is always better than the alternative. But in the instances where the Ducks do have to play two minutes or more down a man, they have the league's preeminent weapon in Cogliano.

On the defensive side, I had two easy choices. The minute the Carolina Hurricanes become a legitimate playoff threat – which, I suspect, is this season – will be the minute we start hearing an awful lot more about Jaccob Slavin. He's entering his third season and has flown under the radar thanks to middling Carolina performance. His numbers are anything but middling.

In fact, they look just as good as another great young defender – Anaheim's Hampus Lindholm. Lindholm is, perhaps after the aforementioned Patrice Bergeron, the player analytics folks drool over. I'd agree he's still underrated. I know this because one media outlet just this summer identified him as just the 21st best player under the age of 25. Another didn't even name him as a top-50 player, despite placing 13 defenders on the list.

Consider the below table which looks at six key performance indicators – the way shots fall, the way expected goals fall, and the way goals actually fall with either of these defenders on the ice. Each player is compared to every other defender in the league. Thus, a defender grading out in the 100th percentile would signal as being better than every single one of his peers in that category.

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Slavin's numbers are definitively first-pairing quality – pretty nice for a former fourth-round pick. But I think the Lindholm story is an even bigger one, and more evidence that great players can still be tremendously underrated. Lindholm grades out as being better than 95 per cent of his peers in every major on-ice statistical category. That's better than Erik Karlsson, Brent Burns, Drew Doughty or any other defender you can name.

Is Lindholm the NHL's best defender? Probably not. But I think it's time we start at least having that conversation. Anaheim owns the puck like no other team when he's out there, and for the Ducks last season that was almost 40 per cent of the game.

The Duds

F: Justin Abdelkader (DET) – Claude Giroux (PHI) – Ryan Strome (EDM)

D: Cody Ceci (OTT) – Rasmus Ristolainen (BUF)

Justin Abdelkader is one of those classic players where the eye test seems much more encouraging than the statistical measures. Abdelkader, to briefly review, is on a seven-year contract and made an appearance with the United States men's hockey team at last year's World Cup of Hockey. Whichever way you slice it, it appears that the executive groups within hockey see Abdelkader as some type of cornerstone.



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The argument against Abdelkader is multi-faceted, but is by and large predicated on the fact that he's being paid and played like a top-six option. Offensively, (and it's worth pointing out, the value in Abdelkader's game – if it exists – is that he's a stronger defensive option than an offensive one), his production is infrequent. His 1.2 points per-60 minutes are bottom 25th percentile in the league over the last three seasons, trailing names like Matt Calvert, Brian Boyle, and Ryan White. Although it's worth mentioning that he doesn't exactly get to play with snipers, it's also worth pointing out he's individually a career 8 per cent shooter.

Defensively, he doesn't add nearly enough to offset the offensive zone struggles. The Red Wings, despite being about a 49 per cent Goal% team at 5-on-5 in the last few years, score just 45 per cent of the goals with Abdelkader on the ice. That's largely because Abdelkader and company give up about 2.3 goals against per-60 minutes, which is actually higher than the median goals against rate in the league.

Philadelphia's Giroux is my pick at centre. Giroux's strengths are obvious – he's still a great distributor when he has time and space, and that's patently obvious on the power play. Giroux's anchored a strong Philadelphia power-play unit for years and, generally speaking, has been one of the big reasons why their first unit has had success.

But everywhere else, his drop-off is alarming – particularly at even strength. Giroux scored just 0.9 points per-60 minutes last year, which was better than only 21 of the league's regular forwards. A large part of this is the fact that Giroux's individual shooting went completely in the tank, and his evolution into a pure playmaker hasn't happened. Just look at how his conversion rates and shot generation rates have trended over time:

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The other winger on the list is Ryan Strome, acquired by Edmonton from the Islanders in June for Jordan Eberle. There was some contractual stuff in play as part of this swap, but the Oilers – thanks to the presence of Connor McDavid – are a legitimate contender in win-now status. The general consensus is that Strome can come in and reasonably replace Eberle's production, and the Oilers will be no worse off for it.

Unfortunately, I'm not sure if it will shake out that way. For starters, Strome – despite being billed as an elite playmaker since his time with OHL's Niagara IceDogs – hasn't really produced at the NHL level. His power-play numbers amongst regular forwards in that environment are some of the lowest scoring rates the NHL has had to offer, with him getting credited for 2.5 points per-60 minutes of 5-on-4 time. (As a frame of reference, 10 NHLers beat that number at 5-on-5; 95 per cent of forwards on the power-play were better.)

So, what exactly is Strome, and how do the Oilers use him? He's not a power-play weapon. And his scoring rates in general (despite some encouraging signs in 2014-15) haven't played out the way you'd think for a guy seeing substantial ice time with John Tavares and Brock Nelson. For Strome and Edmonton, the bet is that a change in scenery will pay dividends. But right now, Strome looks like a low-end top-six option – a reasonably far cry from what Eberle has been for most of his career.

For my choices on the blueline, we have two players with (a) a ton of draft pedigree as former first-round picks; and (b) a bunch of ice-time on generally underwhelming defence groups. There's no doubt that both Cody Ceci and Rasmus Ristolainen have played some pretty tough minutes for their respective teams – Ceci in a shutdown role behind the Karlsson pairing in Ottawa, and Ristolainen trying to carry a series of underwhelming partners to decency.

The biggest objection that you can levy with both of these players is that neither is showing any sign that they'll be the first-pairing talents they were once projected to be. I've made this argument before, but one of the easiest ways to spot a first pairing defender is to see how on-ice numbers move when they're on the ice. This is true for Corsi% but it's also true for things like Expected Goals% – which is essentially just Corsi% adjusted for shot quality and location – and, in longer-term, goals.

Below is a table – the same table from the Slavin and Lindholm series – showing the percentiles Ceci and Ristolainen compare against other defenders across the league. Again, keep in mind that most 'first pairing' guys by minutes played are consistently out-performing 75 per cent or more of their peers at each level.

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The question I continue to ask: If you want to chalk up some of the above to tough matchups, less-than-stellar partners or inconsistent quality of teams, fine. But I can't think of another defender in the modern era who has put consistent third-pairing numbers up for three years (or more) pivoting and becoming a truly talented two-way player. The odds are with neither right now.

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TSN.CA / The search for solid bounce-back candidates

By Travis Yost

The post-mortem of Alexander Ovechkin's 2013-14 season was a fascinating one.

You remember it, right? Ovechkin – after suspiciously low goal-scoring totals in 2010-11 and 2011-12 – rebounded on that front, finding the back of the net 51 times and pulling down another Rocket Richard Trophy. But plenty of observers were still underwhelmed.

That's because his other numbers were all over the place. Ovechkin's point totals were substantially lower versus prior years. His plus-minus was in the tank. Outside of his raw goal-scoring totals, it genuinely looked like Ovechkin had a bad year.

But consider the table below for one moment, with the subject year highlighted:

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The takeaway here is clear: Ovechkin had little or no help around him. Whether that's because he was playing with substandard teammates or was victimized by randomness or a combination of the two, the reality is that the Capitals didn't do much of anything with Ovechkin on the ice unless Ovechkin quite literally scored a goal himself.

When your teammates aren't scoring, your point totals plummet. When your goaltender doesn't stop shots, your plus-minus drops off of a cliff. Despite having a great individual season, your numbers at aggregate appear horrifying.

It's one of many lessons of why digging into the data beyond just point totals is critical for player analysis. A quick glance at Ovechkin's year would have all but guaranteed a bounce-back season in 2014-15, mostly because it was highly improbable that Ovechkin's teammates would play as poorly as they did in the year prior.

Not surprisingly, that's exactly what happened. Ovechkin remained a great goal-scorer (winning another Rocket Richard Trophy), his teammates shot at normal rates, his goaltender stopped shots at a normal rate, and Washington's top line oscillated back to elite status.

You might ask here how to easily differentiate between unlucky and truly degrading performance. There are a million ways to slice this sort of data up, but one quick way to accomplish it is by considering the following factors:



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Was there a substantial divide between a player's shooting percentage and his 5-on-5 shooting percentage?

Was there any drop-off in the generation of shots?

If the answers are yes and no, respectively, then you have a possible "rebound" candidate – a player who probably played better than his numbers showed in the year prior, and, with a little bit of luck, should see a substantial rebound in overall performance.

The next logical question, then, is who is this year's forward rebound candidate? To find applicable players, I looked for every forward who (a) had an individual shooting percentage above league average; (b) had an on-ice shot generation rate above league average; (c) had an on-ice shooting percentage below league average; and (d) had a Point% below league average.

Two players met those criteria: Philadelphia's Michael Raffl, and Tampa Bay's Alex Killorn.

Let's take a peek at Raffl first, much in the same way we did Ovechkin:

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Raffl didn't have as rough of a go at it last year (primarily because he did get decent goaltending behind him), but Philadelphia did struggle to score when he was on the ice. Nothing suggests that Raffl's game individually was the driver of that – the numbers that do matter were eerily similar to years prior, and the only thing that seemed to degrade was his teammates' ability to find the back of the net.

To that end, I'm highly confident in Raffl having a nice 2017-18 season. (For what it's worth, his most common linemates last year were Claude Giroux and Jakub Voracek – two guys who I'd bet on rebounding for a lot of the same reasons.)

Now, Alex Killorn:

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Killorn's a bit of an odd case. Clearly, he played more of a distributing/playmaking role in prior years, and you can put that largely on the fact that his most common teammate in that window was superstar goal-scorer Steven Stamkos. When Stamkos went away, Killorn assumed more of the goal-scoring duties. But from a team scoring perspective, that void created quite the hole – not only is Killorn not the same calibre goal-scorer as Stamkos, but his teammates (most commonly Brayden Point and Jonathan Drouin) weren't nearly as effective at 5-on-5.

This is more of a lesson in how substantially injuries and the lack of requisite depth can have on individual player performance. Killorn's a fantastic, if perhaps complementary player. He's probably at his best when he's playing on a first or second-line with another player who can create just as much havoc as he can.

Either way, it's something to keep in mind for Tampa Bay's outlook, too. Killorn's going to continue to get sweet minutes on a Lightning roster loaded with talent. It might have some kind of a negative impact on his goal-scoring numbers, but his total output – and his team's performance – will almost certainly improve on what we saw last year. Forty-five per cent of goals over an entire season is absurdly low, especially for a team as strong as Tampa Bay.

Like Raffl, expect Killorn to be a solid bounce-back candidate this season.

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USA TODAY / Can the Penguins make it three Stanley Cups in a row?

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 5:33 p.m. ET Oct. 3, 2017 | Updated 6:07 p.m. ET Oct. 3, 2017

The Pittsburgh Penguins understand how strong they are simply by seeing the glee opponents show when they knock off the Stanley Cup champions.

"I saw it even in the preseason," general manager Jim Rutherford told USA TODAY Sports. "Teams that beat us were excited about it."

That's the respect an NHL team earns when it when it becomes the first team in 19 years to win back-to-back Stanley Cup championships. That's the aura a team owns when it attempts to become the first NHL team to win three in a row since the Al Arbour-coached New York Islanders won four from 1980-83.

Rutherford was still an NHL goalie when the Islanders were dominating, and he recalls "many of the things that made the Islanders (successful) we have on our team."

Star power. Noteworthy goaltending. Quality coaching. Committed defense.

There are similarities. But the game has changed so much that is impossible to draw meaningful conclusions.

The NHL had only 21 teams during the Islanders' dynasty and 15 scored 300 or more goals in 1982-83. The Edmonton Oilers scored 424 goals then.

Today, there are 31 teams and last season the Penguins led the league with 284 goals.

Plus, the league now operates under a salary cap, \$75 million this season.

What the Penguins will have to do to win a third Cup will be different from what the Islanders had to do to win their four. Pittsburgh hosts the St. Louis Blues in its season opener on Wednesday.

"Our team is going to have to be disciplined because even last year teams played us harder than ever before," Rutherford said. "And they are going to another level this year."

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said the drive for a three-peat will be discussed.

"It's a lot of motivation," Crosby said. "That's the way we have to look at it."

However, Crosby said one of the Penguins' strengths is their ability to understand how difficult the climb can be.

"Even though we had a lot of guys back last year, we went through the process again," Crosby said. "We didn't sit on the fact that we won the year before and expect everything to fall into place. We knew we wanted to (repeat) but we didn't look too far ahead."

He said that will also be the approach this season.

Rutherford has always been a realist, understanding that there are always multiple teams capable of winning it all.

"We have a talented team, and it's a group that knows how to win," Rutherford said. "And we have good goaltending. We lost some key guys (Nick Bonino, Chris Kunitz, Marc-Andre Fleury, Trevor Daley and Ron Hainsey) who helped us win the other two. But we have good replacements and our younger players have more experience."

Another plus for the Penguins this season is that No. 1 defenseman Kris Letang is healthy. Letang played 41 regular-season games and didn't play in the postseason. He is considered one of the league's best all-around defensemen.



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Rutherford's history as an aggressive and successful trader also makes it less scary that they will start the season without a proven No. 3 center.

Carter Rowney, a 28-year-old undrafted free agent who played well in the playoffs, might get a shot there. Greg McKegg, 25, could get a chance, too.

But at some point, Rutherford will trade for a veteran because that's long been his history.

"I'm going to be patient," Rutherford said. "When we add a center or two, it will be guys who can help us now and in the end."

One major difference on the Penguins now is their commitment to protect their star players — and Crosby, in particular.

Rutherford gave up a first-round pick and Oskar Sundqvist to the Blues to land noted tough guy Ryan Reaves and a second-rounder.

"Teams are going to try to beat us any way they can," Rutherford said. "We felt like we had to be prepared for different styles of play. He brings a certain element that is important to our team."

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USA TODAY / In Penguins' quest for a three-peat, what could trip them up?

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 4:01 p.m. ET Oct. 3, 2017

The Pittsburgh Penguins are trying to become the first team in 34 seasons to win three consecutive Stanley Cup titles.

Led by Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, the Penguins are a proven resilient group. No one doubts they have the talent to win again.

But here are five potential roadblocks that could undermine their quest for their third championship in a row.

Major injuries: Last season, the Penguins overcame the loss of defenseman Kris Letang for the playoffs and didn't have No. 3 center Nick Bonino in the Stanley Cup Final. But they lost some depth in the offseason, and they wouldn't be as formidable if they lost Crosby or Malkin, or even goalie Matt Murray. With Marc-Andre Fleury in Las Vegas, the Penguins signed Antti Niemi to be the backup.

Columbus Blue Jackets rising: The younger Blue Jackets, particularly defensemen Seth Jones and Zach Werenski, are learning what it takes to be successful in the postseason. The addition of Artemi Panarin gives them another dangerous offensive weapon. The Blue Jackets soon will be ready to take the next step. What if it's this season?

Missing No. 3 center: Bonino, a versatile player, was an important player during the playoffs. General manager Jim Rutherford is an effective trader, but what if he can't find the right fit in the trade market?

Tampa Bay Lightning are back: Preseason projections have the Lightning as one of the teams to beat in the Eastern Conference. If they stay healthy, they can cause trouble for every team. Their offense was already dangerous -- and their defense will be improved.

Sophomore slump for Jake Guentzel? Anyone who watched Guentzel's poised and prolific performance in the postseason (13 goals in 25 games) wouldn't believe that would be possible. But he's only played 40 regular-season games. Guentzel has a championship ring, but he's still short on experience.

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