



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes' Foegele, Svechnikov focused on winning, not 'other stuff'

By Chip Alexander

Warren Foegele is treating it as just another game to be won. The same for Andrei Svechnikov.

The Carolina Hurricanes will go into Washington's Capital One Arena on Saturday to play the Capitals, looking to start the new season with back-to-back wins, albeit with a backdrop of animosity and possible retaliation by the Caps that might be directed at Foegele.

It was Foegele whose slight crosscheck sent the Caps' T.J. Oshie tumbling into the boards in Game 4 of their Stanley Cup playoffs series in April. Caps captain Alex Ovechkin called it a "dirty hit" while Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Foegele "barely hit him." But Oshie, one of the Caps' best forwards, broke his collarbone on the play and was lost for the remainder of the series as the Canes won in seven games.

Could some retribution from the Caps be coming Saturday, either from Oshie or, say, Caps tough guy Tom Wilson?

"I'm just going out there, work hard," Foegele said Friday. "We're trying to get the win and that's my prime focus right now."

Wilson, a bruiser at 6-4 and 220 pounds, loudly made his feelings known Sunday at PNC Arena as the Canes and Caps played their final preseason exhibition game. While Oshie also was in the game, it was Wilson who skated over and shouted at the Canes bench and in Foegele's direction, causing Brind'Amour to bluntly tell Wilson to skate away from the bench.

Caps coach Todd Reirden wasn't happy with an opposing coach talking to one of his players and said so after the game.

"That's kind of hilarious to me," Brind'Amour said Friday. "I've always said if you've got an issue I'm 100 feet away. Come down and we can talk it out."

"I think that's what sometimes happens. There's two sides to every story. Of course you're going to take your player's side of things. Let the players play. If you've got an issue with anything I'm doing, I'm happy to discuss it."

Brind'Amour said he had not spoken to Foegele, who had four goals and was a series-long pest against the Caps, about his approach to Saturday's game, the Caps' home opener.

"I don't think I need to," Brind'Amour said. "I think he's got to play his game. ... To me it should be a non-issue. He's got to go out and play and do what he does. If other stuff happens we'll deal with it but he can't be worrying about other things. He needs to worry about his game."

Foe Svechnikov, it will be the first time on the ice with Ovechkin since Game 3 of the playoff series. In was in that game that Ovechkin and Svechnikov dropped the gloves for a Russian vs Russian fight that was one-sided, Ovechkin knocking Svechnikov to the ice with a big right hand.

Svechnikov, who suffered a concussion, did not return to the Canes' lineup until the third game of the second-round series against the New York Islanders. But no hard feelings, Svechnikov said Friday. Nothing that needs to be renewed or resolved Saturday.

"It's just another game for me, another day," Svechnikov said. "That's all."

Svechnikov, like Foegele, is more intent on following up a 4-3 shootout win Thursday over the Montreal Canadiens, in the Canes' opener, with a first road victory of the season.

"It's something I was waiting for all summer," Svechnikov said of the opener. "Winning the first game is huge. We have so much energy in the locker room right now. We want to keep going with that."

That's Brind'Amour's focus: improve on the play in the opener, try to get a second win, not worry about any potential extracurricular things that may or may not happen.

"I expect a good hockey game," Brind'Amour said. "Every game we play against these guys is a tough game. There's a lot of emotion in this. I think with it being their home opener it will be a real hard-fought game, like they all are."



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Memories of heated playoff series still fresh for Canes, Caps

By Chip Alexander

Brock McGinn was jumping for joy.

Don Waddell was jumping for joy.

In Raleigh, thousands of Carolina Hurricanes fans were jumping for joy.

In the flash of an eye, the Canes had beaten the Washington Capitals, toppling the 2018 Stanley Cup champions on a quick scoring strike by McGinn.

The two teams had played more than 91 minutes at Capital One Arena in Washington, in the second overtime of Game 7 in their Stanley Cup playoff series, before McGinn slipped inside Caps forward Tom Wilson and batted Justin Williams' centering pass past goalie Braden Holtby.

Boom, just like that. Series over.

But for the Canes, it was more than winning a game or winning a Game 7 on that April day this year. It was more than beating the Caps. In their first Stanley Cup series since 2009, the Hurricanes, as Williams liked to put it, became relevant again.

McGinn hopped across the ice and into the arms of Williams and his teammates. High above the ice, Waddell, the Canes president and general manager, was hysterical, wildly hopping into the arms of Mike Bales, then the goaltending coach.

"That wasn't me, that was my body double," Waddell joked this week.

The Canes won the Stanley Cup in 2006, in a Game 7 against the Edmonton Oilers in the final. That was the biggest win in franchise history. But when you haven't been in the playoffs for nine straight years, when you've become an afterthought in the NHL, returning to the playoffs and beating the champs, in Game 7, in their own building, sent a message to the rest of the league and was a much-needed boon for the franchise.

"People always knew who the Hurricanes were but they lost interest in the Hurricanes," Waddell said in an N&O interview Thursday. "In the second half of the season we started to put it together and we became relevant in this marketplace again, and that continued all through the playoffs and through this summer.

"We've had the best summer in a long time from a business standpoint. From a team standpoint we had some guys who were here the last three or four years who hadn't experienced (the playoffs). To have that opportunity to play in the postseason and realize how tough it is, I think that's how you grow as a player and how you grow as an organization."

For the first time since that Game 7, the Canes and Caps will play Saturday at Capital One Arena in a game that matters, that counts. And if the preseason game last Sunday at PNC Arena is any gauge as to the mood of the Caps, anything could happen.

At one point, Wilson stood in front of the Canes bench, angrily jawing away before being pulled away by a game official. Wilson, who was given a 10-minute misconduct penalty, also was catching it from the Canes bench, told to cease and desist by Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour, and the back-and-forth was enough to irritate Caps coach Todd Reirden.

"That is something that I strongly, strongly disagree with, a coach talking to a player from the other team, and I had some comments for their bench as I walked off between periods," Reirden told the media after the 4-3 Caps win Sunday.

So there's that. Wilson, caught flatfooted by McGinn on the Game 7 winner, should be fully engaged in Saturday's game. So, too, Caps forward T.J. Oshie.

In Game 4 of the playoffs, Oshie was sent into the boards by the Canes' Warren Foegele. Oshie fell awkwardly and suffered a broken collarbone, his season over.

Oshie and Foegele were on the ice Sunday during the preseason game, but with no confrontation. The two teams also had a preseason game in Washington, but with the lineups sprinkled with younger players it was a nondescript 60 minutes of hockey.

Will that be the case Saturday? The Caps, coming off a Friday road game against the New York Islanders, will be playing their home opener and will want to make it a good, crowd-pleasing show.

The Canes and Caps once were old Southeast Division rivals before the NHL realignment. They're both in the Metropolitan Division but the friction, some real testiness between the two, hadn't been quite the same until the playoffs last season.

"Rivalries in the NHL today are predicated on the playoffs," John Forslund, the Canes' longtime play-by-play television broadcaster, said this week. "It doesn't matter what geographic or divisional situations you might come up with. It's the playoffs series, the seven games, those two teams. The next season, scores have to be settled."

To recap, the Caps won the first two games of the playoff series. As Waddell said, the oddsmakers gave Washington a 90-percent chance of winning the series, but the Canes then beat the odds and won four of the last five games.

"Much like the team had played for months, they believed in each other and were committed to getting it done," Forslund said. "Far more than making the playoffs, though, winning that series gave the city a chance to celebrate again that real joy."

That playoff joy in Raleigh. Games 7s can do that. The memories linger, both good and bad, for both teams.

"We needed it more than they did, I think, at that time," Brind'Amour said Friday. "It was big for us but now that's long gone. We've got to move forward."



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Preview: Hurricanes at Capitals

Divisional foes meet after thrilling First Round series

by Michael Smith

WASHINGTON - A little more than five months after ousting the then-defending Stanley Cup champions in the First Round of the playoffs, the Carolina Hurricanes return to Washington to square off with the Capitals in their home opener.

The divisional match-up pits the 1-0 Hurricanes against the 2-0 Capitals, two teams who will likely be jockeying for playoff positioning in the Metro until game 82.

"I expect a good hockey game. Every game we play against these guys is a tough game," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "There is a lot of emotion in this. It's their home opener. I would expect a real hard-fought game, like they all are."

Now We've Got Bad Blood

As Brind'Amour said, there is sure to be a lot of emotion in Saturday's contest. Five months later, a double-overtime, Game 7 dagger still stokes the flames of this escalating rivalry.

"It should be [emotional]. I wouldn't expect anything less. We had a hard-fought, seven-game series. That was probably the most intense hockey I've ever played," Jordan Martinook said. "Every time we play them, it seems like it elevates. I think everyone needs to ramp up their game and prepare for a battle because we know it's going to be. They should think the same thing."4th,

Saturday will mark T.J. Oshie's first regular-season game back on Washington ice after he suffered a broken collarbone in Game 4 of the First Round, the unfortunate result of a check levied near the boards by Warren Foegele.

"He has to play his game," Brind'Amour said of Foegele. "It should be a non-issue. He's got to go out and play and do what he does. If other stuff happens, we'll deal with it, but he can't be worrying about other things. He's got to worry about his game."

1-0

The Hurricanes began their 2019-20 campaign with a shootout victory over the Montreal Canadiens at home. With goals from Lucas Wallmark and Martin Necas, the Canes jumped out to a 2-0 lead before the Canadiens stormed back with three straight goals to take a 3-2 advantage into the second intermission.

"We didn't really play our game for two periods. I give the other team a ton of credit because they were forcing us to do things that's just not how we play," Brind'Amour said after the game. "In the third period, the guys made a commitment to just get back to doing it how we draw it up."

Erik Haula netted his first goal with the Canes in his return to regular-season action, 11 months after suffering a season-ending knee injury. His goal eventually forced extra hockey, the fourth straight Canes' season opener that has progressed to overtime, and a shootout was required to decide a winner. Dougie Hamilton scored the lone goal, while Petr Mrazek was a perfect three-for-three at the other end of the ice.

"We didn't want to give up a two-goal lead and all that, but we showed resiliency in the first game, which is always nice," Martinook said. "We'll try to clean up quite a few defensive lapses."

In any case, a win is a win, and the Hurricanes are 1-0. As strength and conditioning coach Bill Burniston likes to say, they won the day.

"We found a way to come back and have a real good third period," Brind'Amour said. "The most important thing is getting the win."

The Opposition

Saturday's game marks the tail end of a back-to-back divisional set for the Capitals, who edged the Islanders 2-1 on Long Island on Friday night. Washington opened its season by spoiling the St. Louis Blues Stanley Cup banner raising with a 3-2 overtime win.



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Raucous Crowd Sparks Hurricanes on Opening Night

Canes resurrect original Storm Surge after 4-3 shootout win
by Michael Smith

When the Carolina Hurricanes defeated the New Jersey Devils 3-1 on April 4 to secure their berth in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, a wave of euphoria washed over the crowd of 17,645 at PNC Arena, the ghouls of a 10-year playoff drought exorcised through pure bombastic elation.

Even Petr Mrazek, who had been with the organization for no more than nine months, seemed to somehow capture the playoff-starved crowd's cathartic exuberance with seven simple words and a few emphatic fist pumps: "We're in! We're in! Yes! Yes! Woo!"

Over the next month, the crowds only continued to grow, the noise becoming more deafening with each and every victory. It was a magical, unforgettable ride that ended eight wins too early.

Five months later, on a wickedly hot October evening, the Hurricanes were anxious to return to the ice for the 2019-20 regular season.

Tailgaters weren't discouraged by near triple digit temperatures and fired up their festivities well before puck drop on what would have otherwise been a mundane workday.

Inside PNC Arena, a good 30 degrees cooler, excitement only amplified as game time neared. An already sizeable crowd roared as the team took the ice for warm-ups. An immersive light show powered by LED bracelets hyped the then-full building before player introductions. Former Canes goaltender Cam Ward, sporting one of the team's new white sweaters with Jordan Staal's No. 11 and the captain's C, whipped the building into a frenzy as he cranked the warning siren. By the time the game lights illuminated the ice below, the sellout crowd and the Hurricanes alike were brimming with eager enthusiasm for the journey ahead.

Even a malfunctioning goal horn couldn't damper the jubilation of Opening Night.

"They picked up right where they left off last year," noted hype man Jordan Martinook said. "They were loud and into it. They know when the team needs a boost and when to get loud. It's nice to have that in your back pocket when you feel like you're behind a little bit and then they pick you up."

The group of 18,680 helped spark the Hurricanes in the third period. Erik Haula smacked in his first goal with his new team,

dropped to a knee and pumped his fist as he evened the score, eventually forcing extra hockey.

"I love when the crowd is going. I feel like everybody feeds off that," Haula said. "Tying the game, you could feel the crowd, and we could feed off their energy."

In the shootout, the crowd stood to watch as Dougie Hamilton netted the first and only goal, opening up Carey Price with his quick hands before sliding the puck five-hole. The cheers grew louder as Mrazek made one save and then another, the crowd then erupting as the Canes' fiery netminder shut the door on Nick Suzuki - the brother of Ryan, who the Canes selected 28th overall in the 2019 NHL Draft - to award the Hurricanes their first two points in the standings.

Never one to hide his emotions, Mrazek raised a leg and pumped his fist in celebration, shouting along with the crowd, before being mobbed by his teammates.

The anticipation of what might happen next gripped the joyous arena.

"We had talked about it," Martinook said. "We were huddled there, and the crowd got into it."

Hamilton skated to center ice while the 19 other red sweaters lined the team's blue line. The din grew louder, and the clap began.

The Storm Surge was back.

"We had to give the people what they wanted," Martinook said. "It just seemed like it all worked out."

The clap sped up, and the team skated down the ice, leaping into the far end boards, a replication of the original Storm Surge.

It was a picture-perfect coda to a season-opening victory that, while featuring a somewhat different cast of characters, hearkened back to the wonderment of a season ago. Wherever this journey takes the 2019-20 Hurricanes, sure to be distinct from the 2018-19 campaign in some form or fashion, the unique bond between the team and the community endures.

"It's about the fans, and they love it," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "They deserve it after last night. It was a special night."

What's next?

"Wait and see," Martinook smiled.



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By The Numbers: The Canes' Newcomers and Offensive Production

The Hurricanes create scoring chances among the best teams in the league, but have traditionally had trouble converting those chances to goals. Will that change with this roster?

By Andrew Ahr

The Hurricanes have lofty expectations as they look to build on an impressive Eastern Conference Final appearance last spring. The team has traditionally lacked scoring, but not necessarily scoring chances. That changed last season to a degree — the Hurricanes led the league in expected goals for at 189.69, and they sat at 18th in the league with 160 goals. 18th in the league isn't a much of an improvement over their 19th best 155 goals in the 2017-18 season, but it doesn't tell the whole story.

Their below average goal total was heavily influenced by the bad start to the season that carried through the end of December. From January 1st onward, the team had 101 goals for — good for fifth in the league (interestingly, their Scoring Chances For dropped in the same time frame). The hope is that the Hurricanes can carry that string of strong offensive play into the new season. And with some key additions to the offensive corps, it may be easier than it was last year.

The Hurricanes lost Justin Williams and his 23 goals, but they added multiple forwards with 20+ goal histories. With that kind of firepower, it seems reasonable to expect that — barring the Hurricanes' usual difficulty in converting expected goals to actual ones — the discrepancy between the two should be a bit smaller this season.

The highest profile offensive newcomer is probably Ryan Dzingel, who was considered one of the best UFA wingers this offseason. Dzingel is not the most defensively minded forward, but he can most likely be relied on to produce at a 20 goal pace slotting in on the second and third line. His career shooting percentage is considerably above league average (14.9 percent), which speaks to his ability to convert on

scoring chances — something that the Hurricanes brand of hockey produces plenty of. Dzingel unfortunately rang one off of the crossbar on the breakaway last night, otherwise I could point to that as evidence of his scoring prowess.

Another big offseason acquisition on offense was Erik Haula, who showed us a bit of what he could bring as he potted the game tying goal in the third period. Haula is another blazing fast forward who had his breakout on the Golden Knights two seasons ago, putting up 29 goals and 26 assists. He's a very solid two way middle six center who will help further compensate for Williams' absence this year, and is very reliable on both ends of the ice. He may have over-performed a bit in his first season in Vegas, but it's very realistic for him to reach the 20 goal mark here in Carolina.

Along with new offensive talent, it's reasonable to expect offensive improvement from a few other Hurricanes. Most notably among those is Andrei Svechnikov, who is as good of a candidate for a breakout season as anyone in the NHL. Martin Necas has already made his presence felt in Carolina, earning first star honors last night in the team's shootout win against Montreal.

Sebastian Aho is expected to step into a bigger role as a top line center, and Dougie Hamilton will likely be shouldering more offensive responsibility in his second season on the blue line. Jake Gardiner has picked up 82 points over the past two seasons in Toronto — his presence alongside Brett Pesce will surely act as an offensive catalyst.

The key for the Hurricanes this season will be continuing to build on a very solid second half of the season and playoff run. The key to their success will be converting on the wealth of scoring chances that the Hurricanes system produces. The team's roster construction seems to be much better equipped for this than in seasons past.



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About Last Night: The Quest For 82-0 Begins

A Dougie Hamilton shootout goal sent Montreal away faster than a matched offer sheet.

By Cody Hagan

For the second straight season, the Carolina Hurricanes tied their opening night game in the third period forcing overtime inside PNC Arena. Last year the New York Islanders took home victory on a Josh Bailey overtime shot. But this year was different. Despite blowing a two goal lead, their top player not playing his best hockey, and even a goal horn controversy, the Hurricanes were able to take down the Montreal Canadiens 4-3 via the shootout last night, while their quest for 82-0 is just beginning.

The Good - The New Guys Shine

After Lucas Wallmark got the Hurricanes on the board in the first period, it was Martin Necas who would net the first power play goal on the year early in the second period. While he might not be technically new, he wasn't around most of last year despite making the opening night roster. Necas was eventually sent to Charlotte so he could improve on many small things about his game and he entered camp this year with a lot of expectations. Most of those were centered around filling the offensive void left by Justin Williams stepping away from the NHL.

If opening night was any indication, Necas may be well prepared to fill those offensive shoes. Necas redirected a Dougie Hamilton shot past Carey Price early in the second period on the power play notching his second career goal.

While his overall game still needs improvement, it was clear Necas' offensive instincts are NHL ready. There were many times throughout the game where he created space and offensive opportunities. The Hurricanes' power play woes from a year ago could certainly use productivity from Necas and it will be interesting to see how he progresses moving forward.

Two other new faces to the organization teamed up to tie the game in the third period last night as Erik Haula scored and Ryan Dzingel picked up an assist. While these two were brought in for different reasons, both need to factor in to the offensive game for the Hurricanes to be successful this year. Coming at the very tail end of another power play, Haula found himself in the right place at the right time for an easy tap in past Price.

Haula provides the Hurricanes with depth at center unlike they've seen in a very long time and his ability to kill penalties will be big for the team. But don't be fooled by his defense-first mentality, as this is a guy who put up 55 points two years ago and could be a true X-factor for the Hurricanes. Dzingel got the secondary assist on the play but he had multiple great opportunities to score including a breakaway and you can easily see where his skill will be a major benefit to the Canes.

The Bad - Minute To ~~Win~~ Lose It

Shortly after Necas tied the game in the second period Brett Pesce took an interference penalty setting up Montreal with their second power play chance. Tomas Tatar cherry picked Warren Foegele's clearing attempt and fired a wrist

shot past Petr Mrazek. It was a very bad clearing attempt by Foegele after a failed attempt by Joel Edmundson as he sent the puck up the middle of the ice, which is a major no-no in the NHL. After the turnover Haydn Fleury was unable to get in the way of Tatar's shot but ultimately it's a goal Mrazek would likely want back.

The momentum inside PNC Arena had been sucked out but it was the Habs' second goal just 64 seconds later that seemed all too predictable. After the high of going up 2-0 was quickly ripped away by Tatar's goal, Montreal tied the game on a Jesperi Kotkaniemi goal just over a minute later and there was an overwhelming feeling that the game may slip away.

For Petr Mrazek, emotions play a large part in his game - for better or worse. This felt like a goal where he was still thinking about the first goal and got caught trying far too much moments later. It doesn't help that Dougie Hamilton's stick got tangled up with Mrazek as he was coming across the crease, but regardless he found himself scrambling and suddenly the game was tied.

It also does not help that Hamilton was left with no help from his forwards in front of the net which allowed Kotkaniemi to just walk out and wait out Mrazek. It was a major mental lapse that felt predictable, and it's something the Canes need to work on.

To top off a forgettable second period, the Canes allowed Montreal to score their third straight goal when Jordan Weal one timed a puck past Mrazek putting the Canadiens up 3-2. This was another tough play by Foegele as he got beat back to the net by Weal, but Dougie Hamilton failed to stop the pass creating an easy goal for Montreal. It was another mental lapse and it capped off a very bad second period for the Hurricanes who went from being up 2-0 to being down 3-2 in just over ten minutes.

Mistakes will happen, especially in the first game of the year, but the hope is Rod Brind'Amour can work with his players and they will come out better by learning from the mishaps. The Hurricanes should just be thankful that they were able to come back and these mistakes did not cost them the game.

The Great - The Storm Surge Lives On

With minimal action in overtime, the Canes and Habs headed to a shootout. Dougie Hamilton would score on the very first attempt with a fine double move on Price and Mrazek stopped all three Montreal attempts sealing an opening night victory for Carolina.

But as soon as Mrazek stopped that third attempt there was a unanimous question prevalent among 18,680 fans inside PNC Arena - what happens now?

The beloved Storm Surge was the mastermind of Justin Williams who, in case you had forgotten, is no longer around. He retired the Surge just before the playoffs began so the team could focus on the important games ahead of them. Many suspected that we had seen the end of the Storm Surge and it would remain a distant memory of Williams' historical season as captain.

Think again!



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After the players had finished congratulating Mrazek just past the blue line, shootout hero Hamilton lead the guys to center ice and to every fan's joy (minus Don Cherry and presumably some Habs fans in Twitter), started the infamous skol clap. The team performed the OG Surge, skating down to the boards and leaping in to the glass.

The question remains however, will they continue? Will they get creative and elaborate like last year, and if so who is the new mastermind? Or was this a simple encore, a reminder of what was last year, and a salute to a fun everyone had with the celebrations. We will have to wait and see what happens next - hopefully the answer comes as soon as Sunday.

Moral of the Story

It's always good to win no matter how you get there. The Hurricanes' third period was fantastic, but the second period left a lot to be desired. Many mental mistakes nearly cost them the game and those will need to improve as they take on better competition this weekend. The new faces like Haula and Dzingel have already made their mark on Hurricanes just one game in but older faces like Foegele need to be better.

A very tough test lies ahead of Carolina with Washington on Saturday, who appear to still be upset over the playoff series as we saw in the final preseason game, and the Lightning who want to prove to everyone that their sweep at the hands of the Blue Jackets in last year's playoffs was a fluke. How Carolina plays in these two games will be interesting to watch and could be a good test to see if they are ready to hang with the big guns of the NHL.



2019-20 Season Preview

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The nature of the AHL is change, and after capturing the Calder Cup a season ago the Checkers will head into the 2019-20 season with a distinctly different look.

With some big names gone and even more on board, here's a breakdown of Charlotte's outlook on the new campaign that begins Saturday in Hartford.

GOALIES

It makes sense to start with what is shaping up to be the Checkers' biggest strength. The addition of James Reimer as Petr Mrazek's backup in Carolina has inflated an already staggeringly deep pool of goaltending for the organization, as evidenced by Charlotte's duo of Alex Nedeljkovic and Anton Forsberg.

Nedeljkovic is coming off a dominant season in which he established himself as the league's top netminder, while newcomer Forsberg is another former Calder Cup winner who is a proven commodity at this level. Together they give the Checkers' one of the most intimidating tandems across the league.

"You could say we have two number ones at this level and two guys who probably belong in the NHL," said head coach Ryan Warsofsky. "That's a great piece of our team because we know we have guys who can stop the puck and we have full confidence in both guys. We'll probably rotate to start but we have full confidence in both of them."

The goaltending depth extends beyond just Charlotte, as Callum Booth and Jeremy Helvig – both of whom are

Carolina draft picks on NHL contracts – are manning the crease for the ECHL affiliate in Greenville.

DEFENSE

After a year in which they boasted the AHL's second-best goals-against average, the Checkers are again poised to be stingy on defense.

One of the biggest returning pieces among a sea of change on the roster is Roland McKeown, a consistently strong presence over the years who can contribute in a variety of ways.

"Roland McKeown is a guy who has come a long way in the last year," said Warsofsky. "He kind of put his name back on the map with earning an NHL call up."

Alongside McKeown on the blue line is a cast with a diverse set of skills.

"Freddy Claesson is going to be a great defensive defenseman and a guy that has been in the NHL and been through all these different situations and can be a leader," said Warsofsky. "Then [Jake] Bean and [Chase] Priskie are two high-end threats, [Gustav] Forsling is a guy who can move pucks. So we have a little bit of everything."

Add to that group the offensive prowess of newcomer Kyle Wood, the physicality of Derek Sheppard and fresh starts for Alex Lintuniemi and Cavan Fitzgerald, and Charlotte's defensive group looks to be a well-rounded group that the team will lean on.

"I'm happy with what we have," said Warsofsky. "We're going



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to continue to work and get better and be a five-man unit on the ice, but our D-corps is definitely a strength of ours.”

FORWARDS

The biggest change between last year and this year can be seen up front. The corps of forwards went through a big turnover this past summer, with several key contributors departing via free agency and trades.

“We’re probably going to have a little different forward group than last year,” said Warsofsky. “We have some depth in that area but I think it’s going to be a little different than last year as far as the scoring throughout the lineup. It will likely be more focused on our top two lines.”

Highlighting that top six are plenty of high-end threats, whether they be incoming scorers like Brian Gibbons and Eetu Luostarinen or returning stars like Janne Kuokkanen, Morgan Geekie and Julien Gauthier.

“Our first two lines are going to look to carry the load

Roland McKeown named Checkers captain

by Nicholas Niedzielski

Charlotte Checkers head coach Ryan Warsofsky announced today that Roland McKeown has been named the sixth captain in franchise history.

The 23-year-old defenseman is the franchise’s active leader in games played, having logged 210 games in a Checkers sweater.

“He’s been a captain in junior, he’s obviously coming off a championship and he had a really good training camp,” said Warsofsky. “He’s a true pro, he comes to the rink every day and wants to get better.”

McKeown joins a list of Checkers captains that includes Bryan Rodney (2010-11), Brett Sutter (2011-14), Michal Jordan (2014-15), Derek Ryan (2015-17) and most recently Patrick Brown (2017-19). The blueliner, who wore an A at times last season, will bring his own brand of leadership to his new role.

“He works on his craft and speaks up when he needs to,” said Warsofsky. “He’s not Patrick Brown, he’s a different leader and that’s OK. Patrice Bergeron is a different leader than Steve Yzerman was. That’s just how it is. I think he’s the right guy for it.”

Joining McKeown will be a trio of rotating alternate captains

offensively,” said Warsofsky. “There’s Geekie, who we’re hoping he takes another step in his development, we’re hoping Goat can finish those grade-A chances, a guy like Dave Gust we think has a really high upside coming over from Bakersfield, Anthony Louis, same thing.”

That’s only half of the equation up front though, as the bottom two lines will go a long way toward establishing Charlotte’s identity. Returners like Clark Bishop and Steven Lorentz have proven more than capable of filling those roles, while the additions of an experienced vet like Max McCormick will help flesh things out, as will the potential upside of a full year of Jacob Pritchard, who looked strong in his time with the team during the playoffs.

“I think we’re going to have a third line that’s really hard to play against,” said Warsofsky. “Hopefully they chip in offensively but that’s a bonus for me. The third and fourth lines will really set the tone for how we play.”

in Clark Bishop, Brian Gibbons and Fredrik Claesson.

Gibbons and Claesson both joined the organization via free agency this offseason and bring with them eight and seven pro seasons, respectively, worth of experience, making them two of the most tenured players on the Charlotte roster.

“Gibbons and Freddy have a lot of experience in the NHL,” said Warsofsky. “They are older guys who have been through it before and know what it takes to be a pro.”

Bishop is a familiar face for the organization, having pulled himself from ECHL time his rookie year to 20 NHL games this past season.

“The reason I like Bishop is he plays at an extremely high level,” said Warsofsky. “He competes extremely hard and that’s how you have to play night in and night out. He’s not going to be a rah-rah guy either, he’s going to be a guy where Steven Lorentz is sitting on the bench watching him and going ‘Wow, he plays hard. That’s how I need to play.’”

While that is the group that will wear letters, there are plenty of other voices in the room that Warsofsky will count on, most notably one between the pipes.

“We’re going to have a good leadership group,” he said. “Alex Nedeljkovic is going to be in there, it’s important that he has a voice.”

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SportScan

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

1155587 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Foegele, Svechnikov focused on winning, not 'other stuff'

CHIP ALEXANDER

OCTOBER 04, 2019 05:31 PM

RALEIGH

Warren Foegele is treating it as just another game to be won. The same for Andrei Svechnikov.

The Carolina Hurricanes will go into Washington's Capital One Arena on Saturday to play the Capitals, looking to start the new season with back-to-back wins, albeit with a backdrop of animosity and possible retaliation by the Caps that might be directed at Foegele.

It was Foegele whose slight crosscheck sent the Caps' T.J. Oshie tumbling into the boards in Game 4 of their Stanley Cup playoffs series in April. Caps captain Alex Ovechkin called it a "dirty hit" while Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Foegele "barely hit him." But Oshie, one of the Caps' best forwards, broke his collarbone on the play and was lost for the remainder of the series as the Canes won in seven games.

Could some retribution from the Caps be coming Saturday, either from Oshie or, say, Caps tough guy Tom Wilson?

"I'm just going out there, work hard," Foegele said Friday. "We're trying to get the win and that's my prime focus right now."

Wilson, a bruiser at 6-4 and 220 pounds, loudly made his feelings known Sunday at PNC Arena as the Canes and Caps played their final preseason exhibition game. While Oshie also was in the game, it was Wilson who skated over and shouted at the Canes bench and in Foegele's direction, causing Brind'Amour to bluntly tell Wilson to skate away from the bench.

Caps coach Todd Reirden wasn't happy with an opposing coach talking to one of his players and said so after the game.

"That's kind of hilarious to me," Brind'Amour said Friday. "I've always said if you've got an issue I'm 100 feet away. Come down and we can talk it out."

"I think that's what sometimes happens. There's two sides to every story. Of course you're going to take your player's side of things. Let the players play. If you've got an issue with anything I'm doing, I'm happy to discuss it."

Brind'Amour said he had not spoken to Foegele, who had four goals and was a series-long pest against the Caps, about his approach to Saturday's game, the Caps' home opener.

"I don't think I need to," Brind'Amour said. "I think he's got to play his game. ... To me it should be a non-issue. He's got to go out and play and do what he does. If other stuff happens we'll deal with it but he can't be worrying about other things. He needs to worry about his game."

Foe Svechnikov, it will be the first time on the ice with Ovechkin since Game 3 of the playoff series. In was in that game that Ovechkin and Svechnikov dropped the gloves for a Russian vs Russian fight that was one-sided, Ovechkin knocking Svechnikov to the ice with a big right hand.

Svechnikov, who suffered a concussion, did not return to the Canes' lineup until the third game of the second-round series against the New York Islanders. But no hard feelings, Svechnikov said Friday. Nothing that needs to be renewed or resolved Saturday.

"It's just another game for me, another day," Svechnikov said. "That's all."

Svechnikov, like Foegele, is more intent on following up a 4-3 shootout win Thursday over the Montreal Canadiens, in the Canes' opener, with a first road victory of the season.

"It's something I was waiting for all summer," Svechnikov said of the opener. "Winning the first game is huge. We have so much energy in the locker room right now. We want to keep going with that."

That's Brind'Amour's focus: improve on the play in the opener, try to get a second win, not worry about any potential extracurricular things that may or may not happen.

"I expect a good hockey game," Brind'Amour said. "Every game we play against these guys is a tough game. There's a lot of emotion in this. I think with it being their home opener it will be a real hard-fought game, like they all are."

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1155588 Carolina Hurricanes

Memories of heated playoff series still fresh for Canes, Caps

CHIP ALEXANDER

OCTOBER 04, 2019 04:15 PM

RALEIGH



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Brock McGinn was jumping for joy.

Don Waddell was jumping for joy.

In Raleigh, thousands of Carolina Hurricanes fans were jumping for joy.

In the flash of an eye, the Canes had beaten the Washington Capitals, topping the 2018 Stanley Cup champions on a quick scoring strike by McGinn.

The two teams had played more than 91 minutes at Capital One Arena in Washington, in the second overtime of Game 7 in their Stanley Cup playoff series, before McGinn slipped inside Caps forward Tom Wilson and batted Justin Williams' centering pass past goalie Braden Holtby.

Boom, just like that. Series over.

But for the Canes, it was more than winning a game or winning a Game 7 on that April day this year. It was more than beating the Caps. In their first Stanley Cup series since 2009, the Hurricanes, as Williams liked to put it, became relevant again.

McGinn hopped across the ice and into the arms of Williams and his teammates. High above the ice, Waddell, the Canes president and general manager, was hysterical, wildly hopping into the arms of Mike Bales, then the goaltending coach.

"That wasn't me, that was my body double," Waddell joked this week.

The Canes won the Stanley Cup in 2006, in a Game 7 against the Edmonton Oilers in the final. That was the biggest win in franchise history. But when you haven't been in the playoffs for nine straight years, when you've become an afterthought in the NHL, returning to the playoffs and beating the champs, in Game 7, in their own building, sent a message to the rest of the league and was a much-needed boon for the franchise.

"People always knew who the Hurricanes were but they lost interest in the Hurricanes," Waddell said in an N&O interview Thursday. "In the second half of the season we started to put it together and we became relevant in this marketplace again, and that continued all through the playoffs and through this summer.

"We've had the best summer in a long time from a business standpoint. From a team standpoint we had some guys who were here the last three or four years who hadn't experienced (the playoffs). To have that opportunity to play in the postseason and realize how tough it is, I think that's how you grow as a player and how you grow as an organization."

For the first time since that Game 7, the Canes and Caps will play Saturday at Capital One Arena in a game that matters, that counts. And if the preseason game last Sunday at PNC Arena is any gauge as to the mood of the Caps, anything could happen.

At one point, Wilson stood in front of the Canes bench, angrily jawing away before being pulled away by a game official. Wilson, who was given a 10-minute misconduct penalty, also was catching it from the Canes bench, told to cease and desist by Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour, and the back-and-forth was enough to irritate Caps coach Todd Reirden.

"That is something that I strongly, strongly disagree with, a coach talking to a player from the other team, and I had some comments for their bench as I walked off between periods," Reirden told the media after the 4-3 Caps win Sunday.

So there's that. Wilson, caught flatfooted by McGinn on the Game 7 winner, should be fully engaged in Saturday's game. So, too, Caps forward T.J. Oshie.

In Game 4 of the playoffs, Oshie was sent into the boards by the Canes' Warren Foegele. Oshie fell awkwardly and suffered a broken collarbone, his season over.

Oshie and Foegele were on the ice Sunday during the preseason game, but with no confrontation. The two teams also had a preseason game in Washington, but with the lineups sprinkled with younger players it was a nondescript 60 minutes of hockey.

Will that be the case Saturday? The Caps, coming off a Friday road game against the New York Islanders, will be playing their home opener and will want to make it a good, crowd-pleasing show.

The Canes and Caps once were old Southeast Division rivals before the NHL realignment. They're both in the Metropolitan Division but the friction, some real testiness between the two, hadn't been quite the same until the playoffs last season.

"Rivalries in the NHL today are predicated on the playoffs," John Forslund, the Canes' longtime play-by-play television broadcaster, said this week. "It doesn't matter what geographic or divisional situations you might come up with. It's the playoffs series, the seven games, those two teams. The next season, scores have to be settled."

To recap, the Caps won the first two games of the playoff series. As Waddell said, the oddsmakers gave Washington a 90-percent chance of winning the series, but the Canes then beat the odds and won four of the last five games.

"Much like the team had played for months, they believed in each other and were committed to getting it done," Forslund said. "Far more than making the playoffs, though, winning that series gave the city a chance to celebrate again that real joy."

That playoff joy in Raleigh. Games 7s can do that. The memories linger, both good and bad, for both teams.

"We needed it more than they did, I think, at that time," Brind'Amour said Friday. "It was big for us but now that's long gone. We've got to move forward."

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1155589 Carolina Hurricanes

A forgotten era of expectation has returned for the Hurricanes

Sara Civian

Oct 4, 2019

As a local celebrity of a pig exited the PNC Arena elevator before the Hurricanes season opener Thursday, a father and a son entered.

"This is my first Canes game since '06," the father told the elevator attendant.

"Maybe you're good luck," the attendant smiled.



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Last season's magical run to the Eastern Conference Finals is over, and the Hurricanes made it a point not to overdo it with the reminiscing during this preseason.

But 2018-19's pawprints were all over the first chapter of 2019-20 — a 4-3 shootout win over Montreal.

That pig, Hamilton, showed up and somehow cranked the siren. Petr Mrazek flexed his mobility in net and survived an overtime full of sustained Canadiens pressure. There was even a Storm Surge.

The standing ovation for Rod Brind'Amour kept going for minutes, and I've talked to maybe 15 people so far about how cool the moment was in an impossible-to-capture way. You know at least 20 percent of the participants were wary about the hire when it happened. You felt their relief, standing there with the certainty that the most important person in franchise history exceeded their expectations and brought hockey fever back to Raleigh, North Carolina. It was the embodiment of a growing catharsis that maybe they won't have to harbor mixed emotions about Brind'Amour, like they've had to with Canes legends past.

Someone said he must have no idea how much he means to the fanbase because of how humble he is in the face of praise, how focused he seemed chewing his gum and giving a fist bump during the standing ovation.

I'd argue that's his way of showing that he knows and that it goes both ways. Earlier Thursday he half-joked that as a player he'd lay awake thinking of his own mistakes, and as a coach he lies awake thinking of everyone's mistakes.

He preaches trying to enjoy the ride more, but he knows this ride is just getting started.

Last season proved something everyone knows about sports until, for some reason, we're talking about hockey in the south: Winning gets the butts in the seats. That's step one. Compared to last season's opening night, the Canes' total ticket plans sold are up by 51.1 percent at 13,320. Two seasons ago that was more like a total attendance figure.

The next step is keeping them there, a more complicated feat that the Hurricanes franchise has never really mastered.

The winning comes with the butts, but those butts aren't so happy-go-lucky anymore. They're butts with an investment and expectations.

"Seeing the fans over the summer and building up to the season and how excited they've been, we know how important it is to have a good start and keep them engaged," said Dougie Hamilton, who had two regulation assists and the shootout winner. "And that's a pretty good way to start."

An opening night affair with the team behind the infamous Sebastian Aho offer sheet, a dramatic comeback effort, power play competence (Bo Time), promising young talent, new guys chipping in, Aho's wizardry, overtime, a shootout, a win and a Surge.

I kept thinking of the dad in the elevator.

Pretty good start, yeah.

"The expectations are too high to let that slide," Brind'Amour said.

Trending up

Martin 'the people's First Star' Necas

Necas' season debut wasn't perfect (whose was?) but it reaffirmed the decision to roll with him instead of another promising prospect.

Power play competence? What a time to be alive.

"It feels great to be on the power play," he said. "That's the spot where I want to be, where I can create those chances and create those goals. It always feels good to be there."

"He's got a lot of skill, right?" Brind'Amour said. "We know that. I mean, captain obvious, but he's still gotta learn some things in the NHL — that one goal he kinda spun off, you can't do that. But he's got a lot of talent and we'll work with him, and he'll hopefully help out big on the power play because we need it."

Necas ended the night with 15:16 TOI (3:19 on the power play), one goal, two shots, several great passes that went unrewarded and the all-important First Star of the Night accolade.

Dougie being Dougie

Sort of funny that two short postgame conversations I had summed up such a huge source of last season's frustration.

"Do you think Justin Faulk's absence gives you (Hamilton) more of an opportunity to do your thing?"

Hamilton: "Yeah, for sure. I think that's obvious. I'm just trying to make the most of it."

Brind'Amour: "I don't think that has any bearing. Dougie was a huge part of our group last year, and he will be again this year."

Have to agree with Dougie here ...

"I haven't been scoring a lot in practice lately, so I wasn't really sure what to do," Hamilton said of his shootout winner. "You're going against the best goalie in the world, so I just kind of did whatever and was happy to see it go in. The brain shuts off and that's what happens."

Hamilton got 20:54 TOI on Thursday, fourth-highest for the Canes. Let's be real — that probably would've been fifth-highest if Faulk was still around.

The new guys impressed

Erik Haula's equalizer above was obviously huge, and he went a sneaky 73 percent from the faceoff dot. Ryan Dzingel's backhand pass leading up to it was just as smooth. Joel Edmundson had three hits, what felt like way more than two blocked shots and led the team in shortanded TOI (2:30).

I'm betting Jake Gardiner was mostly on the third pairing for injury precaution and/or rust concerns, but there were a few brilliant stretch passes in the mix that could've made an impact.

L'offre hostile

Aho didn't show up on the scoresheet, but he's been saying lately that it's all about the little things. His 22:15 TOI was third-highest among all Canes skaters, and those little things were everywhere.

The Hurricanes' CF% with him on the ice was 65.38, he had one particularly dangerous chance and four takeaways.

SEBASTIAN AHO @PIC.TWITTER.COM/VWQA3MYFF0

— BRETT FINGER (@BRETT_FINGER) OCTOBER 3, 2019

Loose pucks

It's only one game, but Haydn Fleury didn't instill much confidence pinching down low, and he got a defenseman-low 12:11 TOI to show for it. Don't know if that will ever change, but maybe the Hurricanes can find a way to play to his strengths without exposing him to too much danger. That seems like wishful thinking. You can already see



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why the Edmundson acquisition was important in replacing a Calvin de Haan type.

Not a great night for Warren Foegele, who got only 11:31 TOI.

You can't exactly call it rust with the way he accelerates, but it looked a bit like opening night jitters. Nothing to get concerned about yet.

I asked Lucas Wallmark last week which teammate is going to have a big year and he silently pointed at Aho. Maybe he should've pointed at himself.

The PNC Arena parking cones are back, baby, and they're bigger than ever.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155731 Washington Capitals

Capitals goaltender Ilya Samsonov wins long-awaited NHL debut vs. Islanders

Isabelle Khurshudyan

October 4, 2019 at 9:32 PM EDT

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Barry Trotz was at the draft table in 2015 when the Washington Capitals made a surprising choice with their first-round selection, taking a goaltender that high for the first time in nearly a decade. But Trotz, then the team's head coach, had heard that Ilya Samsonov was special from people outside of the organization — that, at 18 years old, the Russian was ahead of where Tampa Bay star netminder Andrei Vasilevskiy was at that age.

"He's a tremendous young man," said Trotz, now the coach of the New York Islanders. "He's got size; he's athletic; he's been coached very well. I know he's got a real bright future."

That NHL future began to be realized Friday night, when Samsonov, 22, beat the Islanders in his debut, 2-1. He finished with 25 saves in a game that could, one day, mark the start of a new era in net for the Capitals. The team reassigned incumbent backup Pheonix Copley to the American Hockey League after he cleared waivers Thursday, settling on Samsonov in large part because, with Braden Holtby in the final year of his contract, Washington wants to see what it has in Samsonov before deciding on Holtby's future.

"I thought I was going to be more nervous, but no, I felt normal," Samsonov said in a Russian-language interview. "The guys all helped and said there's nothing scary. I felt great, it was a good game, and I'm happy we won."

Martin Fehervary modeled his game on Michal Kempny's. Now they're teammates.

Captain Alex Ovechkin was the first to pull Samsonov into an embrace on the ice after the final horn sounded. Then in the locker room, Samsonov donned a Washington Nationals batting helmet — teammates award it to one player after every win — and as is tradition for Capitals rookies who have something to celebrate, he got a towel of shaving cream smeared into his face by Capitals forward Tom Wilson.

Samsonov's night began with a different ritual, skating onto the Nassau Coliseum ice all alone for warmups, a tradition for players making their big league debut. Rather than take a solo lap, he skated right over to a spot in front of Washington's bench and started stretching, flashing that poised, cool presence Coach Todd Reirden has praised so often.

But after forward Jakub Vrana lifted the Capitals to a 1-0 lead with his second goal in as many games, the first goal-against of Samsonov's career was the epitome of a bad bounce. A pass from New York's Devon Toews deflected off two Washington players before caroming off defenseman Radko Gudas's skate and past Samsonov 12:27 into the game. T.J. Oshie restored the Capitals' lead with a power-play goal in the second period, and it held up with eight saves by Samsonov in the third frame.

With Holtby, 30, due to become an unrestricted free agent after this season, Washington felt urgency to see Samsonov in NHL games and determine whether he really is the team's goaltender of the future. He has played just one year of North American professional hockey, but Samsonov's hot finish to his first season in the AHL — from Jan. 12 on, he posted a 15-3-1-1 record with a 1.78 goals against average and .948 save percentage — is what convinced Washington he was ready for this promotion. The trade-off is that his playing time is largely limited to spelling Holtby, either when the Capitals have two games in two nights or in relief if Holtby's hurt or struggling.

Samsonov was tabbed the starter for Friday night's game because Washington wanted to save Holtby for its home opener Saturday, and after this set of back-to-back games, the Capitals won't have another until Oct. 24 and 25, potentially a 20-day wait until Samsonov's next start. Holtby, a Vezina Trophy winner in 2016, has played at least 54 regular-season games in each of the past five seasons.

Samsonov is waivers-exempt, so the Capitals could shuttle him to Hershey and back occasionally to keep him playing regularly, but that doesn't appear to be their plan at this point. Reirden said the team has a projected goaltending schedule for the season, but it's flexible depending on how Samsonov performs.

"He's going to get some games, but the goal is to continue to develop and learn and grow," goaltending coach Scott Murray said. "Obviously, it's a different league, but he's gotten better his whole career. That's the goal, and it's not stopping now. And he's got to continue to earn his ice time, just as he's done."

Across the ice from Samsonov was Semyon Varlamov, the last goaltender the Capitals drafted in the first round and someone Samsonov has long looked up to. Samsonov said the two had dinner together once in Russia and exchanged a few texts and phone calls in the past, with Varlamov offering advice on how to get used to life in North America and in the NHL. Samsonov is now experiencing it all for himself, including getting the better of his idol Friday night.

"I thought he played great," Reirden said. "He looked very comfortable in there. I'm not surprised. That's how he's looked this year in particular since he's returned. Just the composure that he has, the confidence that he gives the bench, he definitely looks the part. He was the part for sure tonight."

Washington Post LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155732 Washington Capitals



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Ilya Samsonov shuts down the Islanders in strong NHL debut

By J.J. Regan

October 04, 2019 9:41 PM

Ilya Samsonov allowed only one goal in his NHL debut as the Capitals spoiled another home-opener in their 2-1 win over the New York Islanders on Friday. The Caps are now 2-0-0 to start the season despite being without Evgeny Kuznetsov and Michal Kempny.

Here are four reasons the Caps won.

Jakub Vrana's second goal of the season

Vrana was one of the Caps' top players in the season-opener after scoring the overtime winner. He picked up right where he left off on Friday with the game's first goal.

Lars Eller passed it up on the breakout. It looked harmless, but Vrana used his speed to turn this into a scoring opportunity. He zipped past Jordan Eberle, leaving defenseman Ryan Pullock the only one between him and the net. Because Eberle was suddenly behind Vrana, he shifted to the left to cover Martin Fehervary who jumped into the rush, and Pullock shifted over to cover Vrana. The shift gave Vrana room to work with as he entered the offensive zone and he took advantage, lining up the shot and snapping it past the glove of goalie Semyon Varlamov.

That's two goals in two games for Vrana.

John Carlson's stick

The Islanders tied the goal on a triple deflection that beat Samsonov. Then the ice began to tilt in New York's favor in the second period.

Brock Nelson thought he had the go-ahead goal when he pounced on a turnover. He showed great patience skating through the slot and holding onto the puck until Samsonov committed and made a desperate dive to try to force Nelson, skated around the outstretched glove, then went backhand to forehand looking to tuck it into the net from behind the goal line. Nelson's easy goal was met by Carlson, who got his stick on Nelson's just at the right time, knocking the puck back to Samsonov who smothered it.

Another power play goal

T.J. Oshie put the Caps up late in the third period on the power play. The refs were stingy with the whistles, so the Caps had to make their opportunities count. John Carlson had the puck at the blue line and wristed a puck in looking for a deflection. Oshie had his stick out, but the shot was blocked by Scott Mayfield. The puck bounced right into the slot and behind Johnny Boychuk. Oshie found it first, pulled his stick in, turned and chipped the puck with the backhand that went right over the shoulder of Varlamov.

Ilya Samsonov's impressive debut

Samsonov made his NHL debut on Saturday and boy did he look impressive. The first shot on goal came at 2:41, which he gloved confidently to freeze the play. Of the 26 shots he faced, he turned away 25 of them. The only shot that beat him came from Devon Toews and it was a complete fluke. The shot hit off of Brendan Leipsic, Garnet Hathaway and Radko Gudas and even then Samsonov came very close to getting a pad on it.

Still, you can forgive the rookie for giving up a triple deflection. He did not allow another goal the rest of the game.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155733 Washington Capitals

Capitals Prospect Report: Connor McMichael is tearing it up in the OHL

By J.J. Regan

October 04, 2019 11:45 AM

Connor McMichael was hugely impressive in the preseason for the Capitals and he has certainly carried that momentum with him to the OHL with the London Knights.

McMichael currently leads the league with seven goals and is tied for third with 10 points. That's just through four games. His numbers were aided by a five-point night Saturday against the Hamilton Bulldogs. McMichael tallied a hat trick and two assists.

McMichael's shot appears to be pretty deceptive as all three goals were wristers from the faceoff circle. There were no deflections, no screens, just McMichael against the goalie with McMichael coming out on top.

The big week earned McMichael OHL Player of the week honors and a spot on the CHL's Team of the Week for September 23-29.

Other prospect notes

Ryan Merkley, a draft pick of the San Jose Sharks, was recently traded to the London Knights and clearly McMichael has already left an impression on him. "First two power plays (in Hamilton Saturday), I just gave the puck to (McMichael) and it's under the (cross) bar," Merkley said. "There's two easy points. Didn't have to do much." McMichael, meanwhile, credited Merkley's presence on the power play for giving him so much room to work with.

McMichael and fellow 2019 Caps draft pick Aliaksei Protas seem to have caught the eye of prospect expert Corey Pronman who wrote: "Aliaksei Protas' (C, Washington) camp was promising for a third-round pick coming in as an 18-year-old. If he gets a little quicker, he has the skill and brain to become a player. He and fellow Capitals prospect Connor McMichael both had strong camps and starts to their CHL seasons." In four games this season, Protas leads Prince Albert in goals (3) and points (7).

For those of you eagle-eyed fans who saw the Caps' opening roster released by the NHL, you may have noticed two names you were not expecting. Prospects Kody Clark and Riley Sutter are still technically with the Caps as both players are injured and, by rule, cannot be loaned to another organization. I asked the team for clarification on this. Both players are rehabbing in Hershey and have not yet passed their physicals. Once they do, they will be officially loaned to Hershey.

Two players who were injured in camp, but who are not included on the Caps' roster are Alex Alexeyev and Liam O'Brien. Both players are healthy enough that they have both been officially loaned to Hershey. Alexeyev played in two of the Bears' preseason games.



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O'Brien has not suited up yet, but a team official confirmed he has "two black eyes" but is healthy.

Not to steal the thunder of Capitals Radio host Ben Raby, but he asked Caps media to make several predictions before the start of the season, presumably so that we can all embarrass ourselves as we look back at them at the end of the year. One question that is relevant here was which prospects would make their NHL debuts this season. I had four: Martin Fehervary (already did), Ilya Samsonov (scheduled to start Friday), Alex Alexeyev and Beck Malenstyn. I was surprised by just how much Todd Reirden raved about Malenstyn. He was relentless on the forecheck and I could see him fitting a fourth-line role if the team needs it this year. The one issue with him is that you don't want to see him go down the path of Nathan Walker. Walker can/should be a full-time NHL fourth line player, but the biggest knock on him is he never played within the system and every time he got into the lineup just seemed to chase the puck. There's a lesson there for Malenstyn on how to stay in the NHL once he gets there.

Erick Florchuk suffered a shoulder injury in the first period of the first game for the Saskatoon Blades. He is listed as day-to-day.

Kristian Roykas-Marthinsen, who was teammates with Florchuk in Saskatoon last season, is now 20 and has advanced past juniors but is not with Hershey in the AHL this season. Instead, he has returned to Europe and is playing in the third-tier Swedish league, Hockeyettan for HC Dalen. He has one assist in six games.

Alex Kannok-Leipert has been named the captain of the Vancouver Giants in the WHL.

One final quick aside, Caps prospect Martin Has has probably one of the worst last names possible for research purposes. I quickly realized that while I was researching for this week's report. That is going to be a struggle.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155734 Washington Capitals

The number one reason you should watch Caps-Islanders: The debut of Ilya Samsonov

By J.J. Regan

October 04, 2019 6:00 AM

The Capitals take their 1-0-0 record to Long Island on Friday for the home opener of the New York Islanders (0-0-0).

You can catch all the action on NBC Sports Washington with Caps FaceOff Live at 6 p.m. and Caps Pregame Live at 6:30 p.m. before the game at 7 p.m. Stick with NBC Sports Washington afterward for Caps Postgame Live, D.C. Sports Live and Caps Overtime Live.

I could talk about how this is Washington's first game of the season against a divisional opponent or how the Islanders finished just one point shy of the Caps in the standings last season. I could talk about any number of things, but really there is one reason Caps fans should watch this game and it's a big one.

Samsonov is making his NHL debut

Pheonix Copley was placed on waivers Wednesday signaling that Samsonov will start the season as Braden Holtby's backup. With the Caps playing a back-to-back on Friday and Saturday, the highly touted goalie prospect will get his first-ever NHL game on Friday against the Islanders.

Samsonov, 22, played well in the preseason and it is important to get him playing time this season with Holtby on the final year of his contract and his future uncertain. Not only did Samsonov play well, but one thing that was evident in the preseason is he seems to have a presence in net. It is not just him keeping the puck out of the net, it is seeing him there and knowing you are going to have to work your butt off to get anything past him. At 6-foot-3, he has good size and incredible athleticism.

Caps fans could be watching the team's next starter take the crease Friday night.

Adding to the intrigue is the fact that Semyon Varlamov is expected to start for the Islanders. If he does, that means two of the three goalies the Caps have picked in the first round of the draft in the history of the franchise will be in net facing off against one another.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155735 Washington Capitals

'Taking what's illegal and moving it into the light': Ted Leonsis on why he's all in with sportsbook in Capital One Arena

By Fred Katz

Oct 4, 2019

WASHINGTON — There might not be a pending sportsbook in Capital One Arena right now if Washington, D.C. hadn't made a play for the 2024 Olympics.

Ted Leonsis was one of the leaders of that movement, and before Boston knocked Washington out as the U.S.-nominated city for 2024, before Paris eventually won the right to host, the man who's made a broad imprint on D.C. sports had to scout. And so he took multiple trips to London.

Leonsis — whose Monumental Sports & Entertainment owns the Wizards, Capitals and Mystics amongst other D.C. squads — was impressed with the job the city had done holding the 2012 Summer Olympics. He wanted to study what made them successful. But while he was there, he noticed something unrelated: London was overflowing with sportsbooks, places where citizens of age could eat, watch games and bet on them.

"There's that joke of there's a Starbucks right across the street from the Starbucks. Well, that's what it's like (in London) with William Hill and Ladbrokes," Leonsis said in an exclusive interview with The Athletic. "In fact, their issue right now is that there's too many of them. I think there are more William Hill, Ladbrokes individual betting parlors in London, in Britain than there are Dominos pizza places in the United States."

Less than a decade later, there's about to be a sportsbook in Leonsis' building.



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Monumental announced Thursday what has been long rumored: That the group will partner with William Hill to open up a sportsbook in Capital One Arena, the first in-arena sportsbook in the United States.

Only a year and a half ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) was unconstitutional, a decision that reversed a federal ban on sports betting and handed the legality of it back to the states. D.C. and others legalized sports betting not long after. The NBA — including its commissioner, Adam Silver — has embraced the change. And amongst league chairmen, Leonsis has been one of the most outspoken advocates for bringing legal, regulated sports gambling into the culture of professional basketball.

"There was a report on what the illegal gaming and gambling business was, and I think the figure that was thrown out was between \$80 billion and \$100 billion was bet illegally. And people were offended about, do we really want legal gaming and gambling?" Leonsis said. "I said, 'So it's OK for consumers to be betting on March Madness or to be sending dollars to the Cayman Islands?' And we're desperate for job creation for taxes. ... This is just about taxes and jobs and taking what's illegal and moving it into the light."

He paints the picture of a luxury experience that includes a bar, fine dining and the chance to watch games aplenty ... as long as all participants are 21 or older, of course.

The details of when the sportsbook will open are still fuzzy. The plan is for some time in 2020, but there's no date more specific than that. Much of it still needs to be constructed.

Monumental and William Hill are also waiting to hear back on regulations from the city. Leonsis needs to work out a specific protocol with both the NHL and NBA, considering all the issues that could arise with a sportsbook housed in arenas. This includes developing rules about employees' involvement in the sportsbook, how money might change hands, how to deal with inside information and more. Leonsis says he will err on the side of being more "conservative" with whichever policies both leagues want to write and enforce. The same goes for what the city decides to allow.

"We're gonna take the lead from the city," Leonsis said. "We're not gonna rush anything, because I understand the scrutiny that will be on us. We have to take a long view on this."

The long view, in Leonsis' mind, is that years from now, sportsbooks in the U.S. will be as common as they are in London. They'll be on everyday street corners, next to those ubiquitous Starbucks or Dominos (which, by the way, has a U.S. presence that outnumbers Britain's Ladbrokes and William Hills by about 15 percent) — and yes, they'll be inside arenas that house professional sports franchises, too.

"My belief is that it'll take a decade to become mainstream, but I do think we will look back at this not unlike you're watching television. ... A black and white film (is) on, and they're talking about prohibition. You see people in the forest making moonshine, delivering it," he said. "And now, beer companies, spirit companies, they're mainstream."

Still, even if it is becoming more accepted, there remains a taboo about gambling, whether that means playing the slots or betting on sports. If Leonsis wants to change the culture of an activity that's been historically connected with shadiness, if he doesn't want gambling associated with addiction or — rightly or not — bookies who walk around with baseball bats, and if he wants to do all this

within a decade, he will have to be one of many who helps, as he puts it, bring this subject into the light.

"I hate the word 'betting' because there are games of skill, and there's games of chance. And to me, gambling is a game of chance. You're rolling the dice. There's no skill. There's no analytics. ... It's craps. And you look at Wall Street. You look at fantasy gaming. ... (Sports) publish more information in real-time and data (than Wall Street). We have high-speed cameras.

"It's amazing. And I'm on the board of several public companies. And I would laugh and say ... 'There's all these banking regulations about telling people what's going on in a company. We give quarterly reports and annual reports.' And I go, 'In sports, we get all of that information and 10 times more on a daily basis for free!' And so, I think it'll tip. And the stigma will be, 'Well, this is like Wall Street but better.' More regulated. More information."

The initial diciness of placing a sportsbook inside an area is obvious.

If Monumental stands to make money off William Hill, and it also owns the Wizards and Capitals, and fans at Wizards and Capitals games will presumably be betting on those games at William Hill's sportsbook, wouldn't that make fixed games just a little more plausible? Leonsis says a hearty no — because the premise of the question is flawed.

Neither he nor Monumental will receive any of the gambling money, he says. He insists they don't get a commission on betting or food/alcohol sales inside the sportsbook. His financial relationship with William Hill is to act as a landlord (Monumental owns Capital One Arena and William Hill will lease the club for its sportsbook from it) and an advertiser.

"I read the comments on Twitter on the announcement, and it's like, well, you haven't spent any time to understand we're not touching the money," Leonsis said. "You haven't spent any time to understand how much money is being bet illegally today. You haven't spent any time to understand what's happening around the world and how mainstream it is."

So, the incentive for Leonsis? Fan interactivity, specifically because of in-game and prop betting.

He references a theory that NFL ratings increased at the beginning of this season because of legalized sports gambling. The payoff of having the in-arena sportsbook comes from more than just betting on the result of the game, he says. Fans will be able to live bet on the William Hill app and guess on prop bets, like how many points Bradley Beal might put up or if Alex Ovechkin will score a goal. Second-half lines can adjust depending on halftime scores, and fans can place bets on the new ones.

Ideally, the full-game experience keeps the average fan in the arena for longer. And, the sportsbook will be open to the public throughout the day, which brings people to the building when there's no event going on at all.

"I think people will come to the arena if you have great teams. That always will be my main focus," Leonsis said when asked about how he thinks the sportsbook could affect attendance. "(But) if we don't have people coming to the arena except for 7:00 to 11:00 or 10:00, to me, that's crazy. This morning, Dunkin' Donuts was packed at 7:00. People were getting their coffee and their donuts. ... I look across the street of my building, and I see all these food trucks outside. And I go, 'William Hill; you should get that local traffic.'"

But it will be a process — if it even gets to such a point of success.

Leonsis seems confident it will.



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"It'll take a while," he said. "We'll look back at it one day and I think kinda laugh to say, 'Jeez, remember when we would think of sports betting as, like, the movie Casino and people smoking cigarettes and being up all night?' That's not what this is gonna be."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155736 Washington Capitals

Inside the Capitals' dressing room: Who sits where and why it matters

By Tarik El-Bashir

Oct 4, 2019

ARLINGTON, Va. – Todd Reirden is a planner.

He plans practices.

He plans for opposing teams.

He has backup plans just in case his original plans fall through.

So it should come as no surprise that Reirden put a lot of thought into where players sit in the Capitals' dressing room at the team's Ballston headquarters.

"It was a conscious decision," Reirden told The Athletic, referring to the seating plan. "Everything has a reason and a purpose."

Just don't expect Reirden to explain, in detail, the reasons or purposes. That's internal business, he said, and he'd prefer to keep that stuff in-house.

Still, a lot can be gleaned simply by studying the layout and talking to the players about their stallmates.

(The entrance to the room is between Holtby's and Samsonov's stalls, so the top of the diagram is on your left when you walk in.)

The first thing one notices upon walking into the room is that the established leaders – and a handful of emerging ones – are located in the middle of each wall.

In the heart of the left wall are stalls belonging to John Carlson, Dmitry Orlov, T.J. Oshie, Nicklas Backstrom, Carl Hagelin and Tom Wilson. Carlson and Backstrom are full-time alternate captains; Oshie, Hagelin and Wilson, meanwhile, all had an 'A' stitched to their jersey during parts of the preseason. They are the backbone of the team; to get anywhere in the room, you've got to walk past them.

"Sometimes it's about helping one guy understand how he can lead more by paying attention to the next closest guy," Reirden said without naming names.

Reporters typically gather around Carlson and Oshie for post-practice interviews. Orlov said he often finds himself listening to what's being said and how it's being delivered.

"It's OK, they are famous guys," Orlov joked before turning serious. "It's good if media wants to come and talk to these guys. They are our leaders and have good opinions. Sometimes I listen to what they said. Maybe I hear some new words for me."

Directly across from Carlson and Co. are captain Alex Ovechkin and newcomer Radko Gudas, a rugged defenseman the Caps hope will, in time, become a leader on the blue line. Gudas, acquired this summer from Philadelphia, sits in the stall vacated by noted dressing room leader Brooks Orpik, who retired in June.

There's a four foot gap between the stalls belonging to Ovechkin and Gudas. Hanging on the wall is a rectangular piece of frosted glass, emblazoned with a Stanley Cup and a "Weagle." It's the centerpiece of the right wall, and it serves as a constant reminder of the team's 2018 championship.

Intentional or not, the additional space is also helpful. Ovechkin usually draws a crowd of cameras. When he speaks at his stall, it serves as a buffer between the gaggle of media and the players on either side of him.

"I used to sit over there," Ovechkin said, pointing across the room. "But when (Barry) Trotz came, he changed my seat."

Ovechkin said he never asked Trotz why he got moved. He did make a request, though.

"I said, 'Don't change my seat in Capital One Arena!'" Ovechkin said, referring to his stall downtown. It's the first stall on the left when walking into the room, and it's brought him good fortune over the years.

"Over there," Ovechkin said of the game arena, "that's my seat and nobody can take it."

On the other side of Ovechkin's stall is Nic Dowd. Dowd said he enjoys sitting next to Ovechkin, though their time in the room doesn't overlap much. Ovechkin is a big minute player and is often one of the first off the ice following practice. Dowd, on the other hand, plays fewer minutes on game days and, thus, spends more time on the ice during practice honing his skills. By the time Dowd usually shows up after practice, Ovechkin's sweaty gear is hanging up and No. 8 is gone.

"Our timing is just different," Dowd said.

The goalies, meantime, flank the entrance. Their stalls are much wider than everyone else's to accommodate their bulkier pads. Holtby sits to the left when entering the room, Ilya Samsonov on the right.

(Courtesy of Washington Capitals)

A closer look around the room reveals another theme: stallmates are often grouped by geography and familiarity – and sometimes a bit of both.

Hagelin joined the team via trade midway through last year and started his Caps' tenure on the right wall. This year, however, he's been moved across the room and is now situated right next to Backstrom, a fellow Swede. Hagelin and Backstrom have been teammates on national teams over the years.

"I sat next to (Jakub) Vrana last year," Hagelin said. "It's a different look this year. But it's good. I've got good stallmates – Willy and Backy. Backy is the one guy on this team that I knew from before. I played in some national tournaments with him. I (also) got to know him a little bit, seeing him down in Spain in the summers. That made it an easy transition for me; it's nice to sit next to him now."

Backstrom joked that Hagelin requested the move.

"He wanted to be closer to me," Backstrom said with a chuckle. "It's nice."



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Interestingly, Backstrom said he and Haglin resist the urge to speak their native language in the presence of teammates.

"We speak English in the locker room," Backstrom said. "We're trying to respect everyone else. When people are around, we speak English."

Further down that same wall, Czech defenseman Michal Kempny and Slovak forward Richard Panik are seated next to each other. Panik is new to the Caps, having signed a four-year contract in free agency over the summer. He played with Kempny in Chicago for parts of two seasons.

"He can talk in Czech and I can talk in Slovak, so we understand each other," Panik said. "It's always good to have someone you can talk to in your native language. For sure, it was good in the beginning when I got here at first."

Something else that stands out upon closer inspection: the youngsters get dressed at the back of the room.

Vrana, a Czech forward, sits next to Slovak rookie defenseman Martin Fehervary, whose stall adjoins a cabinet that contains chewing gum and skate laces along the back wall.

"The youngest guys are in the corner, you know? It's just how it is," cracked Vrana, 23, who had been the youngest player on the team until Fehervary, a 2018 draft pick, earned a spot in training camp. Fehervary now holds that distinction; he turns 20 on Sunday.

"I'm really happy to have Jakub," Fehervary said. "He's taking care of me everyday almost. We spend a lot of time together. He's a good guy, a Czech guy, so (it's) a lot of fun with him. He helps me a lot.

"Jakub tries sometimes to talk in Slovak and it's really funny. I would say for Czechs, it's a little harder for them to understand me. But in Slovakia, the movies are in Czech so I understand (them) a little bit more."

Vrana said veterans showed him the ropes when he was a rookie, so it's only fair that he does the same with Fehervary.

"I kind of took him under my wings a little bit here," Vrana said. "We go for dinner, hang out together. He's a talented player and he has some potential in the future. When a player like that comes to the league, the veteran guys are helping him out a bit. We've been having some great times together. It's fun."

Across from the kids is another group of youngsters still hoping to establish themselves. Chandler Stephenson, Travis Boyd and Tyler Lewington bookend the left side of the room. They've been teammates in Washington's organization since 2015, dating back to their days with the American Hockey League's Hershey Bears.

"It's great sitting in between Chandler and Lewie because I've been playing with both of these guys for the last five years now," Boyd said. "So obviously I'm very comfortable with both of them. I've had a relationship with both of these guys for multiple years as opposed to some guys I'm just starting to play with now."

Seating arrangements can and do change over the course of a season.

Indeed, in just the past few days, Christian Djoos and Pheonix Copley – regulars on last season's roster – were waived and demoted to the minors. Sometimes, if they are next in line for a recall, their stall is kept in tact, nametag, equipment and all.

Other times, though, Reirden might make a change to the seating arrangement to switch things up.

"Sometimes it even changes within the year, depending on how things are going," he said, "if your team needs an adjustment or you want to show them a different look."

The reasons for who sits where and why are different. Reirden's goal, however, is a singular one: Put his players in a place that allows them to be their best.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155716 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning get a little revenge against Sergei Bobrovsky in opening-night win over Panthers

George Richards

Oct 4, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — The pregame video was most definitely not your usual hype.

As the sellout crowd settled into Amalie Arena for the season opener, video "highlights" from the final moments of the Lightning's stunning sweep at the hands of the Columbus Blue Jackets last April were shown on the massive center-ice scoreboard.

THE CHASE BEGINS TONIGHT. ⚡ #GOBOLTS
PIC.TWITTER.COM/FEUJPAHPWY

— TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING (@TBLIGHTNING) OCTOBER 3, 2019

The Lightning may have had the best team in the league during the regular season, but a quick exit in the opening round continues to sting. Anyone who thought the bitter end to last season would be glossed over — the team quietly hung its President's Trophy and division banners from the rafters prior to the opener — was mistaken.

The Lightning were here to put last season to bed just as much as they were primed to get a new one going.

And with the Florida Panthers in town, Tampa Bay could take out some pent-up frustrations on a player who played a big role in its demise six months before.

One of the video clips showed the handshake line following Game 4 in Columbus. Right there, front and center, was then-Blue Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

On Thursday night, Bobrovsky was back in Tampa — only this time, he was wearing differing gear.

Although Bobrovsky was in goal for the Panthers in each of the final three preseason games against the Lightning, this one counted. And the Lightning treated the game accordingly, scoring twice on Bobrovsky in the third period and adding an empty-netter to roll to a 5-2 victory.

The two teams — with Bobrovsky back in net — meet again Saturday night in Florida's home opener at BB&T Center.

"It was a tight game. I thought the guys worked hard and, unfortunately, we lost the game, but it's a long season," said



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Bobrovsky, who made 25 saves off 29 shots faced in his first game since signing a seven-year, \$70 million deal with the Panthers this summer.

"I don't think we have to think too much. Just reset and regroup and get ready for the game (Saturday). ... We would have loved to have the W in the first one, but again, it is a long season. We will move on."

Florida has its own memories to try and erase. The Panthers have not made the postseason in the past three years, but with a revamped team, there are big plans and high hopes.

Thursday, the Panthers went stride for stride with the Lightning for a while. Florida never led but tied the score twice — first when Mike Hoffman made it 1-1 less than three minutes into the second period and at 2-2 on a shorthanded goal from Vincent Trocheck midway through the third.

VINCENT TROCHECK BURIES THE BISCUIT ON A SHORTHANDED BREAKAWAY. Is Is #FLAPANTHERS 2#GOBOLTS 3

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— FOX SPORTS FLORIDA & SUN (@FOXSPORTSFL) OCTOBER 4, 2019

"Bob was fine," said coach Joel Quenneville, also making his debut with the Panthers. "They got a couple of bounces which went off us or the end boards. ... It was one of those games where he did what he could, made a couple of big saves."

Florida never could build on its momentum, though, as the Lightning were able to break the stalemate each time. Tied at 2, the Lightning cashed in on the power play just 45 seconds after Trocheck's goal when Ondrej Palat beat Bobrovsky.

Pat Maroon, fresh off a successful playoff run with the Blues, opened the game up via his goal with 6:09 remaining when Bobrovsky made a number of big saves but the Panthers failed to clear the puck — and the Lightning made them pay for it.

"I liked the first 40 minutes, but I thought the third period was a little too loose for us," Quenneville said.

"They got some timely goals late in power plays, but otherwise, I thought we were in pretty good shape. We just didn't have the puck a lot in the third, and that's not good because they're a team with a lot of skill and a lot of speed."

Lightning honor Stralman

Florida defenseman Anton Stralman spent five seasons with the Lightning and enjoyed his time in Tampa so much he would have liked to continue that relationship.

But once it became clear the team couldn't afford him after last season, Stralman left as a free agent and signed a three-year deal with the Panthers.

On Thursday after a first-period timeout, the scoreboard showed a tribute video that focused more on Stralman's time off the ice than on it. As the fans stood and cheered, players on both benches slapped their sticks on the boards.

"Yeah, it was cool and it was very much appreciated, obviously," Stralman said afterward. "It was hard because you wish you had more time to take it all in and not have to jump right back into the game."

"I spent five years here, felt like I had a strong connection with the fans. That was very nice for them to do that. It is a mutual feeling. I enjoyed my time here very much. There was much love."

Game observations

The Panthers had an up-and-down opener on special teams.

On the plus side, Trocheck scored on a shorthanded goal after Aaron Ekblad intercepted a pass in the neutral zone and fed a streaking Trocheck who walked in on Andrei Vasilevskiy and tied the score.

Florida did not score its first shorthanded goal last season until New Year's Eve in Detroit.

On the negative side, the Panthers went 0 for 4 on the power play.

The first two attempts with the advantage did not look too hot as the first power-play unit looked off.

"The first couple, no, not that good. I wasn't sharp on the faceoffs, and no one was sharp," said Barkov, who leads the top power-play unit. We just need to get better at everything, myself included. Maybe we were a little nervous early, I don't know. We didn't make plays. But we will figure it out."

On the third chance, the first power-play group had its best showing as it took three shots on goal by holding possession for over a minute. The second unit came right back down the ice and continued working.

BREAK IT ON DOWN: @JOESMITHTB AND YOURS TRULY TALK ABOUT THE SEASON OPENER BETWEEN THE #FLAPANTHERS AND LIGHTNING — [HTTPS://T.CO/EO2ABGOLPP](https://t.co/EO2ABGOLPP)
PIC.TWITTER.COM/EV7Y3EUVNU

— GEORGE RICHARDS (@GEORGERICHARDS) OCTOBER 4, 2019

Florida and Tampa Bay had the top two power plays in the league last season; they ended Thursday a combined 1 for 7 — but the Lightning should have scored two power-play goals.

A penalty on Jonathan Huberdeau had just expired when Kevin Shattenkirk scored to make it 2-1 in the second.

"I thought we got some shots through, created some things, had Vasilevskiy moving but just couldn't capitalize," said Ekblad, who quarterbacks the second power-play group.

"We are always trying to make a difference in the game (on the power play) and getting a goal there would have made a huge difference. We have to find a way to get just a little better, but there was progress. We're going to keep working at it."

Said Quenneville: "We missed the net, had some decent looks, hit the post at the end. But our power play has to be better. That's the difference."

— Hoffman got the first goal of the season for the Panthers at 2:35 of the second period as he charged through the slot and popped in a pass from Trocheck past Vasilevskiy.

Hoffman scored a career-high 36 goals last season.

— Ekblad and defensive partner Mike Matheson led the Panthers in minutes Thursday; Ekblad skated 23:50 (with almost three minutes on the power play) with Matheson going 21:30.

Barkov was the highest-used forward at 20:37.



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— The Panthers took 37 shots Thursday, and Vasilevskiy made 35 saves. Florida put up 16 shots in the second period alone but got just the one goal from Hoffman.

— Evgenii Dadonov could be the most frustrated Florida player, as he was stopped on a number of high-end chances and finished with seven shots on goal and 11 shot attempts overall. Despite all of that, Dadonov did not find the scoresheet.

The Panthers ended up taking aim at Vasilevskiy 60 times in the opener.

"We have to take advantage of our opportunities, and we will," Ekblad said. "Giving up five goals was not in the game plan, and we have been working really hard to cut down on things. But this was no one's fault in general — more just like a couple bad bounces."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155633 Florida Panthers

The Panthers 'need to learn how to win' as they try to avoid another slow season start

BY JORDAN MCPHERSON

OCTOBER 04, 2019 11:20 AM

TAMPA

Florida Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov didn't mince words after Thursday's 5-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning to open the regular season.

Yes, it's only one loss in an 82-game schedule.

But the Panthers' propensity for slow starts amid high expectations in recent years is hard to avoid. They have lost their season opener each of the past three seasons and have not had a winning record through 10 games since the 2011-2012 season.

Something needs to change. Barkov wants that message heard loud and clear.

"This is not a good feeling," Barkov said. "We had the game in our hands. We played really well. ... We need to learn how to win."

The one bit of respite to come out of this: They don't have to wait too long for a shot at redemption.

The Panthers (0-1-0) host the Lightning (1-0-0) Saturday at the BB&T Center to begin their home schedule. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.

"That's the good thing about this league," said center Vincent Trocheck, who scored a game-tying goal in the third period Thursday before the Lightning closed the game with three unanswered scores. "If you lose a game, the next night, you're going back at it. We're excited to get at them again."

The Panthers have had success in their home openers as of late, winning seven of their nine season debuts in the BB&T Center.

But as they saw Thursday, their opponent is no slouch.

"I thought we played aggressive," Trocheck said. "We played a tough matchup game. They're obviously a great team. We played it tough and close. The score was more lopsided than the game actually was ... I think if we continue on the track we're on, we'll be fine."

The main talk of the Panthers offense is going to come from its top line.

It's a fair assessment, considering the trio of Barkov, Jonathan Huberdeau and Evgenii Dadonov combined for 93 goals and 165 assists a year ago.

"If you talk about best lines in the league, Lightning coach Jon Cooper said, "you have to throw them in there as one of the top ones. ... Those are three special players."

But watch out for the group immediately behind them.

The Panthers' new second line, centered by Trocheck with Mike Hoffman and Brett Connolly on the wings, has the ingredients to be something special, too.

"We all compliment each other really well," Trocheck said.

Hoffman, who led the Panthers with 36 goals last season, scored Florida's first goal of the year in the second period Thursday when he tapped in a pass from Trocheck who skated behind the net and centered the puck into the slot for Hoffman charging in.

Connolly, signed in the offseason after spending the last three years with the Washington Capitals, earned the secondary assist on the play.

"I like our play ever since the first shift," Hoffman said in a mid-game interview on Fox Sports Florida. "We had opportunities, a couple in that period. I like the way everyone's playing. If we keep going that way, we'll get a few more."

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1155634 Florida Panthers

Lightning get a little revenge against Sergei Bobrovsky in opening-night win over Panthers

By George Richards

Oct 4, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — The pregame video was most definitely not your usual hype.

As the sellout crowd settled into Amalie Arena for the season opener, video "highlights" from the final moments of the Lightning's stunning sweep at the hands of the Columbus Blue Jackets last April were shown on the massive center-ice scoreboard.

The Lightning may have had the best team in the league during the regular season, but a quick exit in the opening round continues to sting. Anyone who thought the bitter end to last season would be glossed over — the team quietly hung its President's Trophy and division banners from the rafters prior to the opener — was mistaken.



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The Lightning were here to put last season to bed just as much as they were primed to get a new one going.

And with the Florida Panthers in town, Tampa Bay could take out some pent-up frustrations on a player who played a big role in its demise six months before.

One of the video clips showed the handshake line following Game 4 in Columbus. Right there, front and center, was then-Blue Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

On Thursday night, Bobrovsky was back in Tampa — only this time, he was wearing differing gear.

Although Bobrovsky was in goal for the Panthers in each of the final three preseason games against the Lightning, this one counted. And the Lightning treated the game accordingly, scoring twice on Bobrovsky in the third period and adding an empty-netter to roll to a 5-2 victory.

The two teams — with Bobrovsky back in net — meet again Saturday night in Florida's home opener at BB&T Center.

"It was a tight game. I thought the guys worked hard and, unfortunately, we lost the game, but it's a long season," said Bobrovsky, who made 25 saves off 29 shots faced in his first game since signing a seven-year, \$70 million deal with the Panthers this summer.

"I don't think we have to think too much. Just reset and regroup and get ready for the game (Saturday). ... We would have loved to have the W in the first one, but again, it is a long season. We will move on."

Florida has its own memories to try and erase. The Panthers have not made the postseason in the past three years, but with a revamped team, there are big plans and high hopes.

Thursday, the Panthers went stride for stride with the Lightning for a while. Florida never led but tied the score twice — first when Mike Hoffman made it 1-1 less than three minutes into the second period and at 2-2 on a shorthanded goal from Vincent Trocheck midway through the third.

"Bob was fine," said coach Joel Quenneville, also making his debut with the Panthers. "They got a couple of bounces which went off us or the end boards. ... It was one of those games where he did what he could, made a couple of big saves."

Florida never could build on its momentum, though, as the Lightning were able to break the stalemate each time. Tied at 2, the Lightning cashed in on the power play just 45 seconds after Trocheck's goal when Ondrej Palat beat Bobrovsky.

Pat Maroon, fresh off a successful playoff run with the Blues, opened the game up via his goal with 6:09 remaining when Bobrovsky made a number of big saves but the Panthers failed to clear the puck — and the Lightning made them pay for it.

"I liked the first 40 minutes, but I thought the third period was a little too loose for us," Quenneville said.

"They got some timely goals late in power plays, but otherwise, I thought we were in pretty good shape. We just didn't have the puck a lot in the third, and that's not good because they're a team with a lot of skill and a lot of speed."

Florida defenseman Anton Stralman spent five seasons with the Lightning and enjoyed his time in Tampa so much he would have liked to continue that relationship.

But once it became clear the team couldn't afford him after last season, Stralman left as a free agent and signed a three-year deal with the Panthers.

On Thursday after a first-period timeout, the scoreboard showed a tribute video that focused more on Stralman's time off the ice than on it. As the fans stood and cheered, players on both benches slapped their sticks on the boards.

"Yeah, it was cool and it was very much appreciated, obviously," Stralman said afterward. "It was hard because you wish you had more time to take it all in and not have to jump right back into the game."

"I spent five years here, felt like I had a strong connection with the fans. That was very nice for them to do that. It is a mutual feeling. I enjoyed my time here very much. There was much love."

Game observations

The Panthers had an up-and-down opener on special teams.

On the plus side, Trocheck scored on a shorthanded goal after Aaron Ekblad intercepted a pass in the neutral zone and fed a streaking Trocheck who walked in on Andrei Vasilevskiy and tied the score.

Florida did not score its first shorthanded goal last season until New Year's Eve in Detroit.

On the negative side, the Panthers went 0 for 4 on the power play.

The first two attempts with the advantage did not look too hot as the first power-play unit looked off.

"The first couple, no, not that good. I wasn't sharp on the faceoffs, and no one was sharp," said Barkov, who leads the top power-play unit. We just need to get better at everything, myself included. Maybe we were a little nervous early, I don't know. We didn't make plays. But we will figure it out."

On the third chance, the first power-play group had its best showing as it took three shots on goal by holding possession for over a minute. The second unit came right back down the ice and continued working.

Florida and Tampa Bay had the top two power plays in the league last season; they ended Thursday a combined 1 for 7 — but the Lightning should have scored two power-play goals.

A penalty on Jonathan Huberdeau had just expired when Kevin Shattenkirk scored to make it 2-1 in the second.

"I thought we got some shots through, created some things, had Vasilevskiy moving but just couldn't capitalize," said Ekblad, who quarterbacked the second power-play group.

"We are always trying to make a difference in the game (on the power play) and getting a goal there would have made a huge difference. We have to find a way to get just a little better, but there was progress. We're going to keep working at it."

Said Quenneville: "We missed the net, had some decent looks, hit the post at the end. But our power play has to be better. That's the difference."

— Hoffman got the first goal of the season for the Panthers at 2:35 of the second period as he charged through the slot and popped in a pass from Trocheck past Vasilevskiy.

Hoffman scored a career-high 36 goals last season.



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— Ekblad and defensive partner Mike Matheson led the Panthers in minutes Thursday; Ekblad skated 23:50 (with almost three minutes on the power play) with Matheson going 21:30.

Barkov was the highest-used forward at 20:37.

— The Panthers took 37 shots Thursday, and Vasilevskiy made 35 saves. Florida put up 16 shots in the second period alone but got just the one goal from Hoffman.

— Evgenii Dadonov could be the most frustrated Florida player, as he was stopped on a number of high-end chances and finished with seven shots on goal and 11 shot attempts overall. Despite all of that, Dadonov did not find the scoresheet.

The Panthers ended up taking aim at Vasilevskiy 60 times in the opener.

"We have to take advantage of our opportunities, and we will," Ekblad said. "Giving up five goals was not in the game plan, and we have been working really hard to cut down on things. But this was no one's fault in general — more just like a couple bad bounces."

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1155746 Websites

The Athletic / Duhatschek Notebook: Predicting the NHL's divisional cellar-dwellers and game speed hits a new level

By Eric Duhatschek

Oct 4, 2019

In the sports-writing dodge, predictions are a necessary — I was going to say evil, but evil is too strong a word. Predictions are a necessary function of the gig and when taken in the right spirit, they can be a lot of fun too. But they're guesses. Sometimes, educated guesses — but as with all exercises that involve predicting the future, they are also subject to so many variables beyond your control that you're never completely at peace with your choices (and sometimes, want to adjust them 24 hours later).

Predictions are further complicated in team sport by how interdependent the players are on one another. If in the opening game of the season, you happen to lose — as the Edmonton Oilers did — one half of your shutdown defense pair (Adam Larsson) to a broken leg for what could be a two-month absence, well, there's not much you can do, other than plunge ahead with phlegmatic stoicism.

On the other hand, the unpredictability is also what makes professional sport so compelling. It's the ultimate reality show — completely unscripted; and thus, from night to night, you never know what the outcome might be. The St. Louis Blues launched their Stanley Cup defense this past Wednesday with a loss to the previous year's Stanley Cup champion, the Washington Capitals — and represent the ultimate reminder of how maddeningly difficult it is in the parity-driven NHL to get your forecast right. Most everyone liked St. Louis well enough last October as a playoff contender. By January, they'd sunk to the NHL basement and people were second-guessing their original guesses. In June, when the Blues circled the ice with the Stanley Cup, all you could do is gape, wide-eyed and

utter, 'OK — didn't see that coming.' Effectively, the Blues jammed two completely different seasons into one action-packed adventure.

The natural tendency, when gazing into your crystal ball at this time of year, is to pick the league from top to bottom.

But it's actually a far more interesting — and challenging — exercise to do it the other way around.

That's especially true in the heady, optimistic first few days of the season when everything still seems possible. This year, on paper, you could legitimately identify a handful of elite teams; one obvious bottom feeder (Ottawa Senators) — and in between, a thick and practically indistinguishable middle class.

Therefore, instead of trying to figure out who's going to finish first in the Pacific, Central, Metropolitan and Atlantic Divisions respectively, let's try to select the four last-place finishers. (Which, by the way, is also a guaranteed way of getting four fan bases on your back early in the season. There'll be a meet-and-greet later in the comments section. I promise.)

Now, if you go back and examine the consensus picks from a year ago, you could safely argue that three of the four divisional champions were relatively easy to predict. The Tampa Bay Lightning, the Washington Capitals and the Nashville Predators all won their respective divisions in 2017-18 and they all repeated, the way a lot of prognosticators imagined they might. The only outlier last year was Calgary, where the Flames unexpectedly finished atop the Pacific Division, after having missed the playoffs the year before.

But the race to the bottom was far more interesting and difficult to predict — and it didn't go nearly the way most anticipated. Reminder: Last year's divisional cellar-dwellers were the Senators, the New Jersey Devils, the Minnesota Wild and the Los Angeles Kings.

The Senators were a team that had 67 points two years ago and then, in a 12-month span, shed themselves of the top five scorers from that 2017-18 team (Mark Stone, Erik Karlsson, Matt Duchene, Mike Hoffman and Ryan Dzingel). You didn't need a lot of advanced data to anticipate that result. The most amazing part of the Senators' season was that they didn't sink even deeper — only a three-point year-over-year decline.

But how about the other cellar-dwellers?

At this time last year, Minnesota, Los Angeles and New Jersey were all coming off thoroughly respectable middle-of-the-pack finishes — 101, 98 and 97 points respectively. All had made the playoffs in 2017-18 and were reasonably positioned to do so again.

But then New Jersey lost the reigning Hart Trophy winner Taylor Hall to injury — he missed 49 games last year — and the Devils didn't have the depth to recover.

Minnesota was an intriguing mess under Paul Fenton's watch last season. Back in 2016-17, the Wild were a 106-point team that finished second in the Central — and by the way, were a full 58 points ahead of the Colorado Avalanche that season.

No, that is not a typographical error — Minnesota, 30 months ago, finished 58 points ahead of an Avalanche team that looks like a rising power today.

But even in 2017-18, Minnesota was a respectable 101-point team — but then dropped 18 points in the standings to sink to the basement this past April. Eric Staal wasn't likely to duplicate his 42-goal season (he dropped to 22) and Jason Zucker fell to 21 from 33, so those were two contributing factors. The Matt Dumba and Mikko Koivu injuries hurt, but they did get a positive push from a (relatively) healthy Zach Parise and it wasn't as if goaltender Devan Dubnyk's



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numbers fell off the face of the earth either – 35 wins and a 2.52 GAA two years ago; 31 wins and a 2.54 GAA last year.

After 41 games, the Wild had 45 points and were clinging to the second wild-card spot, before it all went off the rails. Attempts to shake up what was perceived to be a stale nucleus saw Mikael Granlund, Charlie Coyle and Nino Niederreiter swapped out for Kevin Fiala, Ryan Donato and Victor Rask, a collection of moves that also contributed to Fenton's dismissal as the team's general manager.

Ultimately, Fiala and Donato may develop into top six forwards for the new Bill Guerin-led Wild management team down the road, but ...

The injuries, the disruption and the sting of at least one of those deals (Rask for Niederreiter) backfiring meaningfully and immediately contributed to the Wild's second-half spiral.

Through it all, Minnesota stuck with Bruce Boudreau behind the bench, which is one area where they differed from the Kings, who a year ago, considered themselves a team in transition with maybe one last hurrah in their aging nucleus. The decision to bring in Ilya Kovalchuk was made by an organization in a win-now move that backfired spectacularly.

The larger issue in L.A. was how they miscalculated their coaching change. In St. Louis, the decision to switch from Mike Yeo to Craig Berube resulted in a championship. In Chicago, once Jeremy Colliton got his feet wet, the Blackhawks were a much-improved squad.

But in L.A., the decision to fire John Stevens and replace him with Willie Desjardins proved to be a disastrous error. Desjardins was the wrong coach at the wrong time for L.A., someone who couldn't ride herd on a veteran group that grossly underachieved.

Even when healthy (which he was only for 46 games), goaltender Jonathan Quick saw his numbers greatly inflate (from a Jennings' Award-winning performance in 2018 to a 3.38 GAA and a .888 save percentage last year, which placed him among the worst-performing goalies in the league).

Anze Kopitar went from a Hart Trophy finalist 92-point season to just 60. As noted, Kovalchuk was a complete miss. Injuries turned Jeff Carter into just a shadow of his former self. In trying to do too much, Drew Doughty had perhaps his worst-ever NHL season (a minus-34 overall rating, after going plus-23 the year before). I know not everyone loves plus-minus as a stat, but Doughty's struggles were about as telling an indication of how the Kings' season unfolded as anything else.

Now, history will show you that residency at the bottom can shift dramatically from year to year – and if you peel back the standings over the last four seasons, you'll see that the only teams to finish at the bottom of the divisional heap more than once in that span were Buffalo and New Jersey.

In the Atlantic, it went from Toronto (last place in 2016) to Buffalo twice and then to Ottawa. In the Metropolitan, it was Columbus, New Jersey, the Rangers and then New Jersey again. In the Central, residency in the basement shifted from Winnipeg to Colorado to Chicago and then to Minnesota. And in the Pacific, it went from Edmonton to Vancouver to Arizona and then to Los Angeles.

There's been a lot of churn, especially in the Western Conference, where the Kings – despite bringing in a stable new coach in Todd McLellan – look as if they are widening the gap at the bottom of the standings between themselves and the rest of the division. Until they

can integrate Alex Turcotte and the rest of the prospects they are stockpiling into their lineup, the Kings seemed destined to struggle.

We'll pick the Kings to repeat in the Pacific Division basement, if only because the other emerging candidate, the Anaheim Ducks, have the otherworldly John Gibson in goal – and he will keep them competitive most nights.

Right now, Dallas and Colorado look like the class of the Central to me. Nashville added Duchene and subtracted P.K. Subban to a team that never quite found its stride last year, but is still within its championship window. The Blues are the reigning champion and have enough talent to contend again.

Winnipeg is an obvious candidate to plunge. The Jets need to replace either three of their top five defensemen (Jacob Trouba, Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot) or four of six if Dustin Byfuglien opts for retirement, which will put the Jets' organizational depth to the test. If goaltender Connor Hellebuyck can hold up his end, however, the Jets may have enough offensive talent to outscore their defensive shortcomings.

That leaves Minnesota and Chicago, theoretically fighting it out for the basement. The Wild didn't look great in that opening night loss to Nashville, but I still believe they have more going for them than the Blackhawks, where I think their aging defense corps catches up with them this year.

Pencil in Chicago for last in the Central.

Over in the East, Ottawa looks like an easy pick to finish at the bottom of the Atlantic, but the Metropolitan is trickier, maybe the trickiest of all.

New Jersey enters the new season with great optimism. With Subban, Jack Hughes, Nikita Gusev, Wayne Simmonds and both Hall and Cory Schneider healthy again, they're playoff contenders.

Philadelphia and Carolina both puzzle and intrigue me. The Hurricanes were one of the feel-good stories of last season, making the playoffs and then advancing to the conference final, after missing them 10 years in a row. But they could easily yo-yo back to the pack this season if they cannot recapture their 'us-against-the-world' narrative. Justin Williams' absence, as a glue guy in the dressing room, could be pivotal.

I didn't love the way the Flyers spent all that money on Kevin Hayes as a free agent and then gave up second- and third-round Draft choices to acquire Justin Braun from San Jose, but they did add them both without taking players off the roster, so there is that. Matt Niskanen-for-Radko Gudas probably isn't going to move the needle much. If Carter Hart is the real thing, goaltending often masquerades shortcomings elsewhere. The Flyers are, for me, maybe the NHL's biggest question mark heading into the season – I can see it going both ways. A surge up the standings under new coach Alain Vigneault or a team continuing its search for an elusive identity.

The Rangers have made substantial gains on paper – Artemi Panarin and Trouba become arguably their best and second-best players, and their impact was immediate in the opener. Moreover, there is good reason to be excited about Adam Fox, Kaapo Kakko and Vitali Kravtsov going forward. Logically, their heavy reliance on youth suggests their best days are not coming in the next nine months but the next three years. How that trio acclimates to the NHL will in large part determine if the Rangers are in the playoff conversation in April or lagging. I like the direction they're going in. I just don't see them arriving at their playoff destination this year.



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With all their free-agent departures, and especially with their uncertainty in goal, Columbus seems like the best bet to sink, but to the bottom of the division? That would be an incredible freefall.

But by the process of elimination, we'll go with the Blue Jackets for the Metropolitan cellar.

One final thought about the race to avoid disgrace:

The NHL's draft lottery means that completely tanking a season doesn't necessarily get you the first overall choice in the draft.

Also, even if an organization takes steps to ensure that they are positioned to struggle – like playing their kids, no matter what the consequences – it is hard to get professional athletes, who have the competitive gene wired deeply into their DNAs, to completely shrug off a new season, even if the light at the end of the tunnel happens to be Alexis Lafreniere.

Finishing in last place can have its advantages. It's just too hard to plot a course to finish there. Circumstances will get you, almost every single time.

As noted in last week's column, contract extensions get signed nowadays when each party in the negotiation – team and player – is willing to give ground somewhere. Compromise. What an original thought. So refreshing and it's what happened in the case of Friday's signing in St. Louis, where Brayden Schenn agreed to an eight-year extension worth \$52 million. Schenn gave ground on the dollar value and the Blues on the term.

Schenn was born in 1991, the same as Duchene, and was the fifth player chosen in the 2009 draft, the year Duchene went third overall. Needless to say, there are lots of comparables. Duchene ultimately went to the market and thus could only get a seven-year term from the Nashville Predators, where he signed as an unrestricted free agent. Duchene's AAV ultimately came in at \$8 million, which is \$1.5 million a year higher than Schenn received – a fair bit of money for players who contribute roughly in the same way.

The tradeoff, from Nashville's perspective, for paying the bigger bucks is that Duchene comes off the books at the end of the 2025-26 season. Accordingly, the Preds can reasonably expect him to perform to his current standard for most of the duration of the contract.

Schenn's deal, by comparison, doesn't kick in until the start of next season, which means, it's on the books until after the 2027-28 season, at which point a \$6.5-million cap charge for an aging player isn't going to look great. But Schenn, on the open market, likely could have gotten Duchene's deal. By taking less, he gives the Blues a little more cap flexibility and enhances their chances of winning again, while their championship window is open.

My new theory when examining completed contract negotiations: If it doesn't make you openly cringe the minute you hear the numbers, it's probably a good deal for both parties.

Losing Larsson is going to put a crimp in the Oilers' defensive style for the next two months or so, but the one thing about coach Dave Tippett is he'll never let injuries become an excuse. Tippett had a few talent-challenged teams in his Arizona days and he wouldn't ever let his players off the hook. He believes if you're outmatched on paper, you just have to ramp up the game planning and the execution. It's just 60 minutes of hockey (sometimes 65). At the NHL level, any team can beat any other team over 60 (or 65) minutes of hockey.

Tippett left a good situation as a consultant in Seattle to get back into coaching and the other day, we were talking about why he did that.

One reason, according to Tippett, is the chance to chase a Stanley Cup alongside general manager Ken Holland, who won multiple championships in Detroit. Tippett has never won the Cup and says that's a goal he's still very much focused on.

But the other factor was a strong desire to work in a Canadian market. Not everybody in the NHL wants to deal with the accompanying pressure or scrutiny, but Tippett said he found the prospect "appealing, really appealing. I enjoyed playing for Canada, but I've never played or coached in a Canadian market. I really wanted to do that and I've enjoyed it so far. People said to me, 'Be careful, there's a lot of scrutiny' but I think it's been a good thing.

"There's an atmosphere or an aura about a Canadian market, but you have to want to do it. For me, the last couple of years off, recharged me a bit. I got to watch a lot of games. I got to miss the game. (Last week), I was at the Elton John concert with Kenny Holland and people were going crazy and I tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'this would be great, if we're in the playoffs, and it's like this.' And Kenny said, 'that's exactly what it'll be like.' And you've got a franchise here that has a lot of upside. A long way to go – but a lot of upside."

The Oilers' provincial neighbors, the Flames, got off to their annual slow start, losing the first game of the season in Colorado Thursday night, which leaves them with only a single victory (5-3 over Vancouver, 2009-10) in the past 17 season-opening games. The Flames were a little undisciplined against the Avs, which hurt them, but it was also a go-go, track meet of a game.

According to coach Bill Peters, his bold prediction for the upcoming season: That as fast-paced as the NHL was a year ago, he believes the league is going to collectively play at an even higher gear this year, which seems inconceivable.

"It's faster," Peters argued. "No doubt. More throw-caution-to-the-wind offenses. Not having a guy back to cover all the time when the D go in. It used to be that the D would go down and someone would cover all the time automatically. Now, it's 'I'll cover, but I'll kinda come in a little too, to stress the D-zone coverage.'

"There are some teams that have gotten a lot better. There are some teams that are playing quicker than they have in the past – and more aggressively. So, I think you're going to see a real fast NHL in 2019-20."

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1155747 Websites

The Athletic / DGB Grab Bag: Breaking down another wild NBC portrait, hashtags thoughts and Dave Tippett's tool problems

By Sean McIndoe

Oct 4, 2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The season started this week and there were some games played and that was all great, but NBC Sports did another one of their completely insane NHL portraits so we're going to talk about that.

These things pop up once or twice a year; you may remember the fun we had with the mountain-climbing motif in last spring's playoff edition. For the regular season, they went with a back-to-school theme, and boy was it ever something

Once again, it looks like a nicely drawn but otherwise pretty basic marketing tool until you start to notice the little touches. And as always, the fact that it's posted on Twitter in a format that's too small to really make out any key details, somehow makes it even better.

Sadly, there's nothing in this classroom that's as legitimately laugh-out-loud funny as having John Tavares climbing a mountain while wearing a bed sheet for a cap. But that's understandable because the bed sheet will probably never be topped. Let's not set the bar too high here.

So what have we got? To start with, Ryan O'Reilly isn't wearing skates, but he does have on shoes that look like skates. That's an artistic choice and I can go with it. Some of the players are pretty boring – I can understand Elias Pettersson and Roman Josi not giving you all that much to work with, but you'd think they could have come up with some sort of sight gag for Money Mitch Marner. Other parts are just weird, like the octopus or Kaapo Kakko's NY shirt.

But a whole lot of it works. Here's my list of the five best details I could find.

5. Claude Giroux is clearly asleep, which might be a reference to him having a newborn at home but I'm going to assume it is actually a commentary on the Flyers' playoff chances.

4. Brad Marchand being the class prick.

3. Drew Doughty running his hand through his full head of hockey hair while sitting next to Ryan Getzlaf, which is absolutely something Doughty would do.

2. Phil Kessel having a dancing hot dog.

1. Connor McDavid, because: a.) apparently his broken shoulder from a few years ago never healed properly; b.) the perfect rendition of the ever-present Connor McDavid "I hate it here" face; and c.) even in a fictional drawing of all the biggest stars in the world, he still can't get an actual hockey player on either side of him. That's attention to realism, folks.

Honorable mention to P.K. Subban face-timing with Lindsey Vonn, Marc-Andre Fleury's flowers, Johnny Gaudreau's candy, Jack Eichel eating a steaming hot chicken wing which I initially thought was something else and the Gritty lunch box.

As for Blake Wheeler passing a secret note to Sebastian Aho, I am 100 percent convinced that was a Montreal Canadiens player in the first draft and somebody made them change it. You will not be able to convince me otherwise.

Still, great work by the artist. Now go figure out which one you are.

The second star: Taylor Hall proves dreams to come true – Solid callback here by the Devils to one of the best hockey tweets ever. And congrats to Taylor on the new license. I wonder if he signed it already or if Darren Ferris is making him wait until July 1.

The first star: Whatever this is – I've watched this dozens of times and it gets funnier with each one. Don't even worry about the context. It doesn't need any. It's perfect just the way it is.

Earlier this week, the NHL unveiled this year's list of official hashtags for every team. And right away, people made fun of them. Most of the mockery seemed to be aimed at the New York Rangers, whose #PlayLikeANewYorker is vague, awkward and way too long.

I could join in and make fun of the Rangers, and a few of the other unwieldy ones like #ALLCAPS and #FlyrOrDie, but I'm not. I could also go the contrarian route and applaud the more creative entries while yawning at the more basic versions – ooh, #Flames, nice work. How many of you had to work on that one? But I don't want to do that either.

No, I'm going to make a completely different suggestion and I want you to hear me out.

How about ... we just don't use these stupid things at all?

Seriously, why are we doing this? Hashtags? Is it 2009? Do I have to list a few teams on Follow Friday too? This is dumb. There's no benefit to any of it, and no, making a little five-pixel-wide logo show up doesn't count. I'm sure it helps some social media team somewhere track engagement or whatever, but that's not my problem. So knock it off.

OK, that was a little harsh. I've got a longstanding rule of letting hockey fans do pretty much whatever they want as long as they're not bothering anyone else. Wear whatever weird jersey you want. Cheer for whichever random role player you like. If you're at the game, as long as you're not banging the glass or standing up and waving at the camera, go nuts. Do you, hockey fans.

But good lord, can we at least get the media to stop using this stuff? You look ridiculous. You're trying to break news that might be important, but you're using cutesy hashtags to do it. "After another tough loss, we're told there's a players-only meeting happening right now in the #LetsGoOilers dressing room." What? Why? Just because some marketing consultants came up with a whimsical branding exercise doesn't mean any of us are obligated to participate. Just type the team's name.

So be it resolved: No more NHL team hashtags for media. And if you're a fan who's not completely sure why you're supposed to be using them, don't.

One of my favorite parts of early-season Grab Bags is we can comb through the archives of players who got off to ridiculously good starts in a given season. This always comes in handy when somebody puts up crazy numbers for a few games and we all try to figure out what it means.

For example, did you know that in the last 40 years, there are just 27 times that a player started the year by recording 15 or more assists in their team's first ten games? The list includes several names you'd expect; Wayne Gretzky did it six times, while Mario Lemieux had four. We also get appearances by other star forwards, like Adam Oates, Peter Forsberg, Jaromir Jagr and Pat LaFontaine. But only three defensemen show up on the list. One is Paul Coffey and another is Ray Bourque. And then there's the third blueliner, who'll be this week's obscure player: Greg Hotham.

Hotham was a smallish defenseman who was selected by the Maple Leafs in the fifth round of the 1976 Draft, one pick before a fellow blueliner who the Kings found simply irresistible. Hotham spent two years in the IHL and one more in the AHL before debuting with the Maple Leafs during the 1979-80 season, playing 46 games and recording 13 points. He only appeared in 11 NHL games the following year, spending most of it the minors and was traded to the Penguins for a sixth-round pick midway through the 1981-82 campaign.



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Like every other player during the Harold Ballard era, being traded away from the Maple Leafs caused Hotham to level up into a much better player, although in his case it took a few months; he finished the season by playing 25 games in Pittsburgh and had 10 points. But by the time the 1982-83 season arrived, Hotham had temporarily morphed into Bobby Orr. He opened the season with two assists against the Devils, added one against the Rangers and then two more against Bruins. In all, he was only held pointless in one of the Penguins' first nine games and went into the tenth with a goal and 11 helpers. That tenth game was at home against the Capitals and was the best of Hotham's career; he had four assists in a 7-5 win. (Pat Boutette had a hat trick that night and was off to a great start of his own, with 11 goals through 10 games.)

That was pretty much it for Hotham's playmaking golden touch, both for the season and beyond. He had just two multi-assist games the rest of the season, finishing up with two goals and 30 assists on the year. He'd play one more full NHL season in the Pens' big tank year of 1983-84 and 11 more in 1984-85 and that was it for his big league career. He'd spend five more years in the minors before retiring in 1990, having played 230 NHL games and recording 15 goals, 74 assists and 89 points. He was inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame in 2014, which you can watch here. And he can always say he shares a record with Paul Coffey and Ray Bourque.

Classic YouTube clip breakdown

It's been a big week for Dave Tippett and Mike Liut. Tippett made his debut behind the Oilers bench in Wednesday night's win over the Canucks, while Liut put the finishing touches on a pair of big deals as the agent for Patrik Laine and Mikko Rantanen.

Did that intro seem like a convoluted way to mention two seemingly unrelated names? It sure did. Does that mean this week's video features both of those guys performing in an awkward comedy sketch from the mid-80s? Loyal readers, you know me too well.

Yeah, I have no idea what this is or where it's from. It was posted to YouTube in 2012 by the Connecticut Hockey Hall of Fame, which is apparently a thing. But the clip itself appears to be from the 1986-87 season when Tippett and Liut were both members of the Hartford Whalers.

We begin with a shot of Tippett, who is dressed in the most Canadian outfit that's theoretically possible without wearing a Tim Hortons uniform with a Mountie hat. He's engaging in two typical Canadian hobbies: hanging out in his garage and complaining about his neighbor's annoying children.

"I don't mind, I like kids." Based on this year's Oilers roster, let's hope that's still true.

A small infant wanders into the frame just as Tippett gets to his real problem, a mysterious neighbor who keeps borrowing his tools and doesn't give them back. I'll just say it: Dave Tippett is a pretty good actor, right? He's just out here nailing his lines like a pro. Let's keep this in mind during the season when he convincingly says things like "We can still make the playoffs" and "Connor is very happy here." Dude is a bit of a thespian.

That's the cue for Liut to make his entrance. He's pretty nonchalant about the fact that his child has apparently just wandered off onto his neighbor's property and immediately greets "Tipper" before asking to borrow his tractor. And no, I don't know why the role of Liut is being played by Kevin Nealon, let's just go with it.

That conversation gets quickly derailed by the realization that little Justin has wandered off and grabbed some matches. Uh, I could be wrong but don't think that was part of the script. I think the kid

legitimately just decided that setting fire to the set would be a better option than letting this skit go on any longer. He's wise beyond his years.

Since I know you expect me to know these things: Liut did indeed have a son named Justin who was born in 1985. He went on to a hockey career that saw him play in the NAHL and NCAA, but he was not a goaltender, because every parent wants their kid to have a better life than they did.

After a quick break to quell the imminent act of toddler arson, Liut is back with a short monologue about the importance of appreciating your neighbors' tools. It's a solid enough performance, although not quite as good as his legendary rock-out on the Capitals' "More Than a Team" music video a few years later. He does make it through this one without having to hold a piece of paper with his lines on it, though.

At this point, we just kind of abandon the whole neighbor storyline and Tippett is never seen again. We don't get an explanation for that, but I'm just going to assume that we're supposed to think Liut ran over him with the tractor and took over his garage. Yeah, let's go with that. That's Hartford Whalers canon now.

The rest of the video is basically a highlight reel of Liut saves and career accomplishments. It's not all that exciting, but it is 1980s goaltending which is always entertaining. Liut was a pretty solid fundamentals guy, so we don't get any clips of him actively flailing or being unable to stand up, but you do get that 80s sense that he's yelling "Oh no, what do I do now!" after every shot that produces a rebound.

And that's it for our clip. Tippett never did seem to get his tractor back, but Liut never got his child back and that seems like a fair deal to me. The trade is one for one.

Tragically, it does not appear that Liut has any clients on this year's Oilers roster, although there's still time for Ken Holland to swing a deal. Go get it done, Ken. Your lineup could always use a few more guys who have all the tools.

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The Athletic / One prospect from all 31 NHL teams poised for a breakout season

By Scott Wheeler

Oct 4, 2019

Day 1 of the NHL season has come and gone and you can now be forgiven if any attention you were paying to the early-season progress of your favorite team's prospects takes a backseat.

Fear not, we've got you covered at The Athletic.

Here, I've broken down the one prospect from all 31 teams who I believe is poised for a major step forward. These are players who I think still have a lot more to offer than we've seen to date — or those whose natural progression I think will be steeper than most anticipate.



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Anaheim Ducks

Blake McLaughlin — LW, 19, University of Minnesota

The Golden Gophers have built the current iteration of their program around depth at defense. So while they've just graduated last year's three leading scorers (Rem Pitlick, Tyler Sheehy and Brent Gates Jr.), the freshman crop of forwards is weak enough that McLaughlin will be awarded a huge opportunity as a sophomore after he posted 20 points in 35 games as a freshman. I've always been really high on McLaughlin and he hasn't shown any real red flags for me yet. I'd like to see him get stronger, fill out and use his shot a little more but that will come in time, especially in a college schedule; he also plays a lot bigger (and peskier) than his slight frame would suggest. When the Ducks selected him 79th overall in 2018, he was No. 33 in my final draft ranking. I don't think a 30-point season and close to point per game production is out of the question for him this year. He's going to play in a lot of offensive situations and he's got the playmaking ability to rise to the occasion and make some waves on a team that desperately needs him to be productive.

Arizona Coyotes

Aku Raty — RW, 18, Kärpät

I wasn't high enough on Raty to include him in my final top 100 ranking for the 2019 draft last May and NHL Central Scouting had him all the way down at No. 67 among European skaters. He was ultimately selected 151st due to concerns about his upside. Last season, he played more like a checker than someone who wanted to — or could — take over a game offensively. But I've watched him three times already this season (twice in Liiga and once in junior) and he has been outstanding in each, to the tune of five points (a three-point game in the junior viewing and a goal in each of his first two career games in Liiga). Maybe this is recency bias kicking in because I watched him a lot last year too but I was always more impressed with teammate Tuukka Tieksoala (who landed at No. 81 on my list) but Raty's off to an excellent start and the Kärpät coaches are deploying him like they already trust him.

Raty has done a really good job going to the net (he's not the biggest) to play a high-volume, shot-generation game early in the year, something that complements his strong forechecking.

And while there have been flashes of skill throughout, including this nice release off the rush:

It has been that net-front game that has leaped out at me.

In fact, two of his four goals in my viewings were scored with the same move, going post-to-post for a tuck play. Here's one:

Here's the other:

And the third was scored on a redirect at the top of the crease:

If Raty can make that a consistent part of his game (a game that was always built around a complementary north-south style that supports his linemates rather than drives a line), he's got a chance to be a versatile forward at the next level and prove a lot of scouts wrong.

Boston Bruins

Victor Berglund — RHD, 20, MODO

The big concern with Berglund has always been one of strength. When he engages in a man-on-man board battle, he struggles to win them. But he has built his game around that deficiency and out of it has come a real knack for defending the rush with his stick and using his feet to anticipate the play in the defensive zone and intercept passes. Add in that he has always had a lethal release and

he's showing an increasing willingness to take risks and activate to use it, plus power play time, and you've got all the makings of a breakout season for a seventh-round pick who I believe has medium odds of becoming a third-pairing defenceman with some offensive flair. He needs to commit to working up the ranks in the AHL with Providence first but the Bruins' prospect pool is really weak these days. They desperately need some of their late-round picks to work out and he's one of the only guys I like enough to even moderately believe in.

Buffalo Sabres

Rasmus Asplund — C, 21, Rochester Americans

I considered Dylan Cozens for this because I still can't believe the Sabres got him seventh overall and he's going to make the WHL look like child's play — but that seemed too easy. Given the play of guys like Tage Thompson and Victor Olofsson, Asplund has almost flown under the radar despite progressing well in each of his three seasons since his draft year. He was one of the better rookies in the AHL last season and I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if that 41 points in 75 games (0.55 points per game) became a 65-point pace (around 0.85 points per game) with an NHL call-up mixed in. Asplund already plays a well-rounded two-way game that would make him a fine bottom-six forward in the NHL. He's an underrated playmaker too. I think he's got more to offer as a scorer, though. If he can use his shot more and look off a pass here or there, that's how he'll take his game to the next level and potentially someday become a second-line option. Either way, the learning curve is behind him on the smaller ice and you should expect a big AHL season.

Calgary Flames

Jakob Pelletier — LW, 18, Moncton Wildcats

If you followed my draft coverage closely last year you'll know that I had Pelletier anywhere from the late teens to the mid-20s on my draft board and that I was surprised when he (even considering that he was injured) didn't play well in the QMJHL playoffs or at the under-18 worlds. Don't expect that to continue. Last year, four players broke 100 points in the QMJHL. This year, I expect Pelletier will be one of them — and challenge for 50 goals along the way.

Carolina Hurricanes

Anttoni Honka — RHD, 18, JYP

Don't let his lone point in eight games fool you, Honka is finally taking on a bigger role in Liiga, averaging the fifth-most ice time on the team at 18:48. He has also continued to drive possession on a mediocre team, leading them in early-season Corsi For percentage at 57.5 percent (115 shot attempts for vs. 85 shot attempts against with him on the ice at 5-on-5).

This, after Honka blew me away at the World Junior Summer Showcase this season. I stand by ranking him where I did on my final list (No. 20). His talent will supersede his shortcomings.

Chicago Blackhawks

Jake Wise — C, 19, Boston University

Wise can't catch a break. Injury after injury. Derailed season after derailed season. His freshman year at BU couldn't have gone worse after a shoulder injury put an end to a slow start. I still think he was a good pick for the Blackhawks in the third round in 2018, though. If he can remain healthy, I expect he'll produce as a sophomore and begin to work towards a four-year college career that ends with him as the legitimate prospect I know he can be. It's going to take him



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some time to get back on track and rebuild his confidence but Wise's blend of competitiveness, playmaking and pace are all still exciting.

Colorado Avalanche

Sampo Ranta — LW, 19, University of Minnesota

Like McLaughlin, Ranta is well-positioned to take on more of an offensive role this season as a sophomore. And if his showing in Plymouth at the World Junior Summer Showcase was any indication, he's entering the year with a quickly-developing game that should help him take advantage. He was the player who most impressed me relative to my expectations for him heading into the tournament. Ranta looked like Finland's best forward most games. I've always felt like his speed and straight-line game would make him an effective checker at the pro level but I'm beginning to think there's more offensive upside there than I might have given him credit for. He's never going to be a dynamic offensive threat but he can finish around the net and push defenders back.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Eric Hjorth — RHD, 18, Sarnia Sting

Hjorth played in a total of 10 games last season (four regular-season games and six playoff appearances) due to a knee injury, so my book on him was pretty thin heading into the draft, despite the fact that he showed well in those games with five goals and nine points in as many under-18 junior games. Early on this year, I've made an effort to watch him play in the OHL (I've watched two of his three games to date), where the Sting took him 17th overall in the import draft. Though his defensive game needs some kinks worked out and his skating needs to improve, Hjorth has some exciting offensive tools to go alongside a 6-foot-3, 191-pound frame. He's also already playing a prominent role on the rebuilding Sting. I expect him to have a big rookie season in the OHL and begin to justify the Blue Jackets taking a leap of faith on him in the fourth round.

Dallas Stars

Ben Brinkman — LHD, 18, University of Minnesota

I swear the University of Minnesota theme in a lot of the players highlighted here is a coincidence (though they deserve a lot of credit for recruiting them). Brinkman, who turns 19 tomorrow, didn't get enough love in his draft year because he didn't produce offensively as a freshman. I'm confident there's more there, though, and wrote as much in my pre-draft look at 10 sleepers. He played a major role as one of the youngest players in college hockey last year and held his own. This year, I expect he'll take a natural step forward offensively to catch up to what is already a mature defensive game. Brinkman is legit and the Stars did well to land him in the sixth round.

Detroit Red Wings

Antti Tuomisto — RHD, 18, Ässät

This is kind of cheating because Tuomisto is already off to such a fabulous start with 14 points in 11 games in junior but he has just continued to grow on me after I was already impressed with him last season (he finished at No. 91 on my final ranking). He's always had the big shot. Tuomisto can score with his wrist from distance:

And his slapshot is a major, major weapon:

But it's his improved footwork (he's never going to have pull-away speed but if he can work on his feet then he'll be able to escape pressure with his length) and his ability to stretch the ice as a passer that have stood out to me. Both of those things are on display here:

Nice job walking the line and opening up for a 6-foot-4 defender here, too:

Edmonton Oilers

Kailer Yamamoto — LW/RW, 21, Bakersfield Condors

It's hard to argue that a prospect who has played 26 NHL games in the two seasons directly after he was drafted has underwhelmed but that's kind of where we're at with Yamamoto. The Oilers desperately need help on the wing, he's talented enough to fill a void but he's hasn't really grabbed hold of it. This year, in more ways than one, feels like it's make or break for him in that sense. I suspect he takes advantage and starts the season on a tear in the AHL — where he has the talent level to be point per game — before eventually earning a promotion when Edmonton's wingers inevitably struggle.

Florida Panthers

Vladislav Kolyachonok — LHD, 18, Flint Firebirds

Kolyachonok has undergone arguably the most impressive, rapid growth of any of the prospects featured on this list. And he has picked up the start of this season where he left off the second half of last year. He defends well, he's physical, he's calculated with the puck and his offensive tools are just beginning to take shape (he's never going to have a big shot but he handles the puck well, escapes pressure effectively and can make plays as a passer). I'd bank on Kolyachonok developing into one of the best defencemen in the OHL this year.

Los Angeles Kings

Aidan Dudas — C/RW, 19, Owen Sound Attack

Dudas' coming-out party is almost set in stone. Hockey Canada is high on him and they've made it clear he's a contender for the world juniors team. He played well at the World Junior Summer Showcase and he's now finally the go-to guy in Owen Sound, where he is excelling early in the year. The Kings have a lot of high-end NHL prospects (Arthur Kaliyev, Rasmus Kupari, Alex Turcotte, Akil Thomas, etc.) and I expect Dudas will work his way into that conversation this year as a potential piece of the rebuild.

Minnesota Wild

Jack McBain — C, 19, Boston College

The adjustment from the OJHL to the NCAA was always going to be a challenge for McBain. But he showed well in spurts last season and I expect that level of comfort and an increased role under Jerry York will help McBain put together a pretty big (relatively speaking) sophomore year. He's already a lot to handle off the cycle but he's got enough skill as a handler to become more of a rush threat than he showed last year. McBain's never going to be a star but I think he'll surprise some people and become a serviceable third-line forward who can play up and down a lineup at the next level.

Montreal Canadiens

Jake Evans — C/RW, 23, Laval Rocket

There were a number of prospects to choose from here. Jesse Ylonen should take another step forward. There's little holding back Allan McShane from being one of the more dominant players in the OHL. But Evans just doesn't look like he's going to let up. He hasn't in some time, dating back to his sophomore year at the University of Notre Dame. And though I'd like to see him be a little more assertive offensively as a creator for himself (he has the puck skills and the skating ability to get into dangerous spots), he's always going to be a playmaker above all else. He, like Yamamoto (more so, even), has



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a point per game pace in the AHL written all over him, with an eventual promotion in sight.

Nashville Predators

Jachym Kondelik — C, 19, University of Connecticut

Kondelik had one of the more under-recognized freshman years in the NCAA last year. I watched him a ton, including a live viewing, and he always looked effective. The 6-foot-7 frame is the first thing that stands out but he's an excellent passer and there's more finishing touch than his four goals suggested. Preds fans should be excited about Kondelik. He doesn't turn 20 until December and there's enough talent to match his size and create an intriguing package. It's his team this year, too. Look for Kondelik to lead UConn in scoring and eclipse a point per game as a sophomore.

New Jersey Devils

Aarne Talvitie — C/LW, 20 Penn State University

Last year was already a breakout season of sorts for Talvitie before he tore his ACL in the gold medal game at the world juniors. He was on pace to have one of the best freshmen years in the country and he was dominant for Team Finland. So let's call this year, which he is expected to be back and healthy for, the swan song of sorts. Talvitie is an electric offensive playmaker who can finish in tight with a lethal shot (something Penn State hasn't even really seen just yet) or play out wide as a passer. If he can stay healthy, I have little doubt another season or two will have him on his way to an NHL future.

New York Islanders

Ruslan Iskhakov — C/W, 19, University of Connecticut

This is another team where I debated a few players here. I will forever fight for Sebastian Aho, who I had ranked 51st in my final ranking at McKeen's Hockey in 2015, the first of two years where he went undrafted before ultimately getting selected in 2017. But Iskhakov has become a favorite of mine. He's one of the smallest humans in elite-level hockey but he's also one of its slickest and he routinely executes passes that surprise opposing defenders. A huge sophomore season would go a long way to convincing more people that he's talented enough to overcome being 5-foot-8 and a shade over 150 pounds. He's talented enough to pull it off and, like Kondelik, break a point per game.

New York Rangers

Karl Henriksson — C, 18, Frölunda HC

I saw the two sides of Henriksson this summer. He didn't impress me in Plymouth when he was paired with two elite talents in Lucas Raymond and Alexander Holtz. He looked like he was deferring to them too much and it meant that his biggest talent (his line-driving ability as a primary handler and playmaker) was muted. But he blew me away as one of the biggest standouts in Traverse City, where he was all over the ice, making quick decisions and just flat out executing every time he was on the ice. It was fun to watch, it's going to make him a big part of Team Sweden at the world juniors, and it should eventually (finally) earn him an extended look in the SHL, where I think he's talented enough to surprise people and make a lot of plays.

Ottawa Senators

Vitalii Abramov — RW/LW, 21, Belleville Senators

As if there were ever any doubt ...

All seriousness, though: This is it for Abramov. Everyone knows his puck skills and his ability to turn nothing into something are elite. But the rest of his game didn't manifest itself at the pro level last year, he was quickly dealt because of it, and then he didn't take advantage of a second opportunity with the Sens. He has to have a big year to remain an NHL prospect. So I'm putting all of my chips on the table and banking on it happening. There's definitely an opportunity in front of him after the graduation of players like Drake Batherson. When he's on, he's just a thrill to watch and uses talent. Now he's got to stay on. I believe!

Philadelphia Flyers

Yegor Serdyuk — RW, 18, Victoriaville Tigres

An honorable mention in my top-100 ranking in 2019, Serdyuk is a one-man playmaker whose size may well hold him back from the NHL but whose talent level should make him a handful offensively in junior on a completely different level than he was last year as a rookie. While an impressive crop of young players fight for attention and opportunity in Lehigh this year, Serdyuk is well-positioned to impress Flyers fans and brass with his ability to make things happen in the offensive zone and create on the power play. He's also extremely young, having turned 18 the month he was drafted, which bodes well for a steep development curve this season and, in theory, his ability to still add some muscle. The six goals through four games doesn't hurt, either.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Pierre-Olivier Joseph — LHD, 20, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins

Joseph's offensive progression since an impressive draft year has been a little slower than I expected it would be — and than the Penguins probably hoped for after trading for a player selected 23rd overall by the Coyotes. But his game has always been built for the modern pro game. He's smooth in transition, he's smart with the puck, he makes little plays in all three zones to create exits and entries, he defends well with his stick despite often being at a strength disadvantage and he's relatively low-risk. All of those things bode well for an impressive rookie season in the AHL. Joseph's not dynamic offensively but he looks a lot like many of the young defencemen who are now entering the NHL and finding success in today's game. The transition to Wilkes-Barre should be smoother than most defenders making the leap from major junior to pro.

St. Louis Blues

Nikita Alexandrov — C, 19, Charlottetown Islanders

The Blues don't have a ton in the pipeline these days but I liked the Alexandrov pick at No. 62 (he was 32nd on my board). The Islanders graduated their leading scorer (Daniel Hardie) and their top defenceman (Hunter Drew), turning the team over to Alexandrov, who has scored in both of his first two games of the year. I expect him to take a major step and push 80-plus points if he's healthy. Alexandrov does an outstanding job generating shots, is strong on the puck, and can make plays in tight spaces. If the Blues want to sustain long-term success, especially after moving on from a player like Dominik Bokk, Alexandrov needs to pan out. His strong play in Traverse City — and early in the Q season — have him on the right track.

San Jose Sharks

Jonathan Dahlen — LW, 21, Timrå IK

Like Abramov, Dahlen is one of my longtime favorites who lost his way last season and is now back home and hitting restart on a promising career that began to get away from him a little bit (if you



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can call 33 points in 57 games as an AHL rookie that). I still think he has middle-six NHL upside, with definite power play utility. He was taken in the second round in 2016 for a reason, followed it up with two brilliant years in Allsvenskan, and is now back and looking like he doesn't belong (which he doesn't), to the tune of 13 points in six games. You'd prefer if he were in a tougher league, like the AHL or the SHL, but Dahlen needs to get his confidence back and a second run at Allsvenskan MVP is a surefire way to do that, if he isn't pulled off his loan and back to North America before the end of the year. Give Dahlen an offensive role in the AHL when he returns and I'd bank on him making the most of his second chance with the Sharks.

There's no denying the puck skill:

Tampa Bay Lightning

Nolan Foote — LW, 18, Kelowna Rockets

Foote nearly scored 40 goals in the WHL last season while playing the entire year with a wrist injury; now that he's healthy, there's no reason he shouldn't break that marker this year. Foote was also one of the standouts at the World Junior Summer Showcase when most probably didn't have him as a major contender for a role with Team Canada this Christmas. His acceleration remains a bit of a concern (he's fine when he gets moving) and he needs to do a better job staying out of the box but Foote's ability to use his size, control the wall and finish in the slot are all really exciting. He's off to a slower start than I anticipated in Kelowna but I expect that will be short-lived.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Nick Robertson — C/LW, 18, Peterborough Petes

Robertson is healthy (which, like Foote, he wasn't for much of last year), he looked possessed at the World Junior Summer Showcase, he looked possessed in Traverse City, and he looks possessed to begin the year in Peterborough. He screams massive leap forward. Like Morgan Frost going from 62 points in 67 games in his draft year to 112 points in 67 games the following season kind-of-massive. Watch out.

Vancouver Canucks

Olli Juolevi — LHD, 21, Utica Comets

Juolevi is finally healthy, he finally got back into preseason action with the Comets, and he looked good. Disappointment in his progression has a lot to do with the Canucks taking him too high, which isn't on Juolevi. I'm still really confident in his ability to turn into a steady, fluid second-pairing defenceman. That starts with a full, uninterrupted season in the AHL, where he should play a big role with the Comets and be given every opportunity to succeed offensively. He's one of the prospects I'm most looking forward to keeping close tabs on this year. If the Canucks are willing to keep his progression at the forefront and can avoid rushing him into the NHL, I think he'll have a big year in Utica.

Vegas Golden Knights

Pavel Dorofeyev — LW/RW, 18, Metallurg Magnitogorsk

If you thought I was going to stop being Pavel Dorofeyev's biggest fan just because he fell to 79th overall after I had him ranked 15th, you are mistaken. He has looked dangerous early on in the KHL season and Magnitogorsk, who just re-signed him are clearly invested in giving him some offensive opportunities and allowing him to blossom. He can still get caught playing on the perimeter a bit too often but his ability to make one-off plays happen in the offensive zone helps him create even when he's not playing his best. You

don't often see teenagers produce in the KHL but Dorofeyev looks like one of the exceptions.

Washington Capitals

Connor McMichael — C/LW, 18, London Knights

I mean ... McMichael has seven goals and 10 points in four games. Will that last forever? Absolutely not. But his ability to score isn't new (he was at the top of the non-Kaliyev tier of his age group in the OHL last year too) and the keys to the Knights have been handed to him now that Evan Bouchard has moved on. Given the start he's had to the year, a run at 50 goals and a role with Team Canada at the world juniors aren't out of the question. I felt for most of last season like McMichael was more of a second-round pick than the 25th overall pick the Capitals made him. If he keeps it up, the Capitals will be right to have taken him where they did.

Winnipeg Jets

Mikhail Berdin — G, 21, Manitoba Moose

I've pumped Berdin's tires a lot for a few years but the stars finally seem to be aligned for him to show that he's the heir apparent in Winnipeg after the Coyotes claimed Eric Comrie off waivers. Berdin is legit and his numbers in the last four seasons should speak for themselves, even if, at 6-foot-2 and 163 pounds, he doesn't have the size of most of the top goalies in the world these days.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Jason Spezza working way back into Babcock's good graces

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

October 5, 2019, 12:16 AM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The door might finally have swung open for Jason Spezza with his new head coach.

At the heart of the uncertainty over the veteran centre's status with the Toronto Maple Leafs is the fact Mike Babcock hasn't been totally convinced he'd be willing to put his ego aside and embrace life as a grinder.

Let's face it: The NHL isn't exactly brimming with former superstars who may only get on the ice a couple times a period to take a defensive zone draw and immediately head to the bench. Yet there Spezza was Friday, eking out 10 minutes in a 4-1 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets after being scratched for the season opener, and still finding tangible ways to contribute to the cause.

"I was impressed with him tonight," said Babcock. "I was impressed [that] he was happy with what we need him to do."

That attitude will be vital to making this homecoming a happy one for the former No. 2 overall pick.

What's clear in these early days of the Leafs season is that Spezza is among a handful of depth forwards still battling for a roster spot. He and Nic Petan joined Frederik Gauthier on the fourth line here at



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Nationwide Arena but will be replaced by Dmytro Timashov and Nick Shore for Saturday's home game against Montreal.

However, Babcock has already indicated that Spezza-Gauthier-Petan will be reunited for Monday's visit by the St. Louis Blues as the coaching staff enacts a rotation before deciding what look it likes best from the lunch-pail crew.

Spezza didn't let his lack of minutes keep him from making an impact against Columbus. He drew a first-period interference penalty against David Savard and saw teammate Mitch Marner make it 1-0 on the ensuing power play, before delivering a pair of perfectly executed seven-second FOGO shifts: Face-off, get-off.

This is not glamorous work when you've had multiple 90-point seasons and appearances at the all-star game.

"You judge your nights differently now," said Spezza. "We're trying to be a good positive influence on the game. We're trying to make sure that we're playing down there [in the offensive zone]. We're getting D-zone assignments and making sure we get out quick. Trying to be good on both ends of the special teams."

The 36-year-old would prefer not to have been at the centre of a couple media uproars already with his new team. One came in the early days of training camp when Babcock questioned whether Spezza really wanted the role he envisioned for him and the second arrived Wednesday when he watched the season opener from press level in a suit.

Still, he's remained outwardly stoic, saying: "I understand it's been talked about quite a bit, but to me it's really just next game, next day, kind of try to establish myself here. It's a long season."

Whether by design or not, he's being tested. And he earned something better than passing marks with the way he responded in his Leafs debut.

Consider that the 10:36 he played was the 36th-lowest total he's received during a 17-year NHL career. Put another way, he's seen the ice more in 1,030 games in the world's top hockey league.

Spezza still found a way to win a couple big draws — he was officially listed as 5-5 in the faceoff circle — while generating two shots on goal and playing on a line that generated 100 per cent of the even-strength shot attempts despite starting all three post-whistle shifts it took in the defensive zone.

"He was definitely a force for us tonight," defenceman Cody Ceci said of Spezza. "He's a big body, he controls the puck and, yeah, he was drawing penalties and hemming them in their zone. He's always good at controlling the puck since he's got that long reach."

"I thought Spezza was real good and I thought he was real happy to be doing what he's doing," added Babcock. "He was great on the bench. He was great on the ice. He was good in the room."

These are all things Spezza has previously said he would do, but clearly needed to show his new boss. Actions over words and all that. He only dressed for three pre-season games — the last coming Sept. 25 — so there was a wait before he had a chance to do it in this kind of environment.

The only reason he's still willing to grind through all of this adversity and drama is because he so badly wants to lift the Stanley Cup. Yes, it was the opportunity to do something money can't buy that brought him to the Leafs on a league-minimum contract near the end of a \$90-million career.

"I think we have a good team and that's why I'm here," said Spezza. "For me I think I can help on the second power-play unit. I want to

grasp the penalty-kill stuff and be able to be someone they can put on to win draws and get us out of our end.

"Being a role player on a team this good is something I think I can do."

It sure looked like it on Friday night.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155750 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' Quinn Hughes rising to meet increased expectations

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

October 4, 2019, 6:56 PM

BANFF, Alta. — Near the end of the first game of his rookie season, Vancouver Canucks defenceman Quinn Hughes was trapped slightly by a turnover and failed to prevent the best player in the world from scoring the winning goal for the Edmonton Oilers.

Too bad. The 19-year-old might have been overmatched against Connor McDavid, right? Shouldn't have been in that position.

Except, this is what happened before Hughes' first shift, when he and defence partner Chris Tanev were started by coach Travis Green and immediately countered by McDavid's line.

"(Hughes) was like: 'Are we going to stay out here?'" Tanev explained Friday of their short conversation before the opening faceoff. "I said, 'Yeah.' And Quinn was like, 'OK, let's go.' He's a confident kid. He's a helluva player who's only going to get better."

Hughes actually made the right play on McDavid's decisive goal, using his speed to get close enough to momentarily knock the puck off the Oiler captain's stick on a partial breakaway. But McDavid found the puck just in time to roof it over goalie Jacob Markstrom in Edmonton's 3-2 win.

"It happened two days ago, so I'm over that," Hughes said Friday as the Canucks ended a brief retreat to the Rockies with a practice in Banff. "I was pretty much over that right after the game. It was a lucky play but it was a really good player who made that play and capitalized on the chance."

Hughes will see more really good players, including Johnny Gaudreau, when the Canucks visit the Calgary Flames on Saturday night.

It will be the seventh game of Hughes' National Hockey League career.

"When he came in at the end of the year last year and played straight out of college, I think it was almost easier because you're super excited and you jump in and go play, and the team didn't really have any expectations," Tanev said. "Now, first game of the year, we have more expectations and he still played well. It's going to continue to get better. You guys will see, every couple of games he's going to do stuff that surprises everyone."



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When extra forward Adam Gaudette practised Friday at centre on Green's third line, bumping Brandon Sutter to the wing and Loui Eriksson apparently out of the lineup, it fanned debate in Vancouver about how much Gaudette may or may not play, where and with whom.

There is no such uncertainty about Hughes, who turns 20 on Oct. 14. The seventh pick of the 2018 draft is going to play a ton (mostly with Tanev), be important to the power play and drive the Canucks' attack.

Including his sneak preview last spring, Hughes has four assists in six NHL games.

On Wednesday, the teenager actually led the Canucks with 19:29 of even-strength ice time, and his overall TOI of 23:07 was behind only No. 1 defenceman Alex Edler's 25:40, which included 7:19 of special-teams play. The Canucks generated 65.5 per cent of even-strength shot attempts when Hughes was on the ice.

No matter how much Green tries to suppress projections for Hughes, the five-foot-10 defenceman from the University of Michigan is in danger of elevating them each time he plays.

"When I said taper expectations, I didn't say taper ice time," Green said Friday. "Those are two different things. My job is to not sit here and stand and talk to you guys about how many points he needs to get, how many minutes he needs to play. He just has to play and we'll figure out his minutes as we go. He'll help us do that."

So will Tanev.

The skill sets of Tanev and Hughes seem perfectly compatible — a veteran shutdown defenceman respected for his reliability and consistency, paired with a young skating dynamo who loves to rush the puck and create offence. But here's the thing: Tanev is probably better with the puck than given credit for, while Hughes is more conscientious defensively than people realize.

"I thought we played really well," Tanev said of the opener. "He's so mobile and he moves the puck so well, he sort of keeps me on my toes and makes me get up the ice. Playing with Quinn is really fun. It's a different style of game than I'm used to playing.

"You're sprinting to open ice, moving to different spots and in so many different places because he's so elusive that he tends to beat the first forechecker. So you get yourself in a position where you can help him make a quick play. You get up the ice really quick."

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

In 50 years, the Canucks have never had a defence prospect like Hughes.

"He skates well, but I think it's the elusiveness he has that's really impressive," Tanev said. "There's lots of guys who skate really well, but he is really shifty and knows how to make guys miss. He skates from pressure really well."

On one memorable shift at the end of the first period on Wednesday, Hughes and Tanev helped control the puck for more than a minute before Elias Pettersson was stopped at the back post by Oiler goalie Mike Smith.

"He's smart and he's creative in the o-zone," Hughes said of Tanev. "He's not stuck on his point there. He dives through and comes behind. At the end of the first period, that shift we had, he was diving

everywhere, creating space for me and Petey and making plays. For me, it's pretty easy to play with him.

"I didn't realize how good a skater he was."

Nobody should ever say that about Hughes.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155751 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Polak's agent rips Bruins announcer Jack Edwards for 'karma' comment

Mike Johnston | @MikeyJ_MMA

October 4, 2019, 11:53 AM

Jack Edwards has given hockey fans plenty of memorable soundbites over the years, yet prominent agent Allan Walsh thinks the Boston Bruins play-by-play announcer crossed the line on Thursday night when Dallas Stars defenceman Roman Polak went down injured.

Polak crashed awkwardly into the boards while attempting to lay the body on Bruins forward Chris Wagner midway through the second period. As soon as Polak went down, Edwards's colour commentator Andy Brickley said the injury "looked self-induced" and Edwards followed that up by saying it had "a little bit of bad hockey karma."

Both comments happened before medical staff began attending to Polak, who was eventually stretchered off the ice.

"I have tremendous respect for the Bruin players that sent best wishes. All class," Walsh tweeted early Friday. "As for Jack Edwards, to say Roman's injury was 'bad hockey karma' while he was laying on motionless on the ice, you are truly a piece of (expletive) and an absolute disgrace."

"The good news is Roman has full use of his extremities and we feel he's pretty good at the hospital," Stars head coach Jim Montgomery told reporters after the game. "But we don't have results yet. We're hopeful he may be a player in a couple days."

Dallas announced Friday afternoon that Polak had suffered a small fracture of his sternum and will be evaluated in one week.

The Stars also lost forwards Blake Comeau (lower-body injury) and Jason Dickinson (upper-body injury). The Bruins won the game 2-1 in regulation.

On Friday, Edwards was asked about his comment and he isn't backing down.

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1155752 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Q&A: McLellan on divorce with Oilers, new coaching project with Kings



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 5, 2019

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

October 4, 2019, 3:49 PM

It looked like Todd McLellan had pulled the sword from the stone back in the spring of 2017, when his Edmonton Oilers played their first two playoff series since the 2006 Cup run and seemed poised for annual success as he coached out his five-year contract in Edmonton.

Then the bottom fell out.

Cam Talbot ceased to be a No. 1 goalie, the dressing room chemistry did not weather well a fall-back season in 2017-18 and his general manager — Peter Chiarelli — began a disturbing pattern of transactions that had Oilers fans wondering if he was some kind of double agent in their midst.

On Saturday, McLellan returns to Rogers Place — in the late game on Hockey Night in Canada, no less — in his latest incarnation as head coach of the Los Angeles Kings. He's got another project on his hands in L.A., not unlike the Oilers team he took over in the summer of 2015. The Kings are not expected to make the playoffs, and will find their success in intangibles such as growth, or how competitively they play contenders like the Vegas Golden Knights and Calgary Flames.

If McLellan taught Oilers fans one thing, it is that no matter how good the head coach is, he still needs the right mix of players and a functional organization around him to win. And if McLellan learned one thing in Edmonton, it is that...

Well, let's let him tell you. We caught up with McLellan before he boarded the Kings charter to Edmonton on Friday.

Sportsnet: Tell me about the lifestyle switch. What is Los Angeles like for a Saskatchewan boy who spent the past four seasons in Edmonton?

McLellan: Life has changed immensely. (Wife) Debbie was with me for only about three months in Edmonton ... and she now lives full-time with me, which is great. (McLellan's wife stayed in San Jose because their youngest son was still in high school there). The lifestyle is almost a complete opposite: you get up in the morning, put shorts on and drive to the rink in flip-flops. In Edmonton, during the winter, you bundled up and out you went. It's a massive city here, and we live in a little bit of a bubble.

SN: When you walk into the coffee shop in L.A., do they know who you are?

T.M.: Surprisingly, in our area — Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach — there are people who recognize you, because it kind of a Kings hotbed. But once you get outside of that, it is not like it would be in any Canadian city, or certainly in Edmonton.

SN: You entered into a project in Edmonton that you ultimately were not able to finish. This is a project in L.A. too. What are the similarities/differences?

T.M.: Both are projects, but both in a different spot on the evolution line. The Kings, right now, are paying the price for (having won) championships. They moved assets out to win in 2012 and 2014, and they're not apologizing for that at all. Whereas Edmonton didn't have those championships. Both teams needed work. You're not coming into either expecting to win the Stanley Cup. You'd like to, but no one is picking us to.

SN: Looking back on Edmonton, what would you change that might have turned what ultimately was a failure, into a success?

T.M.: I've been asked that question a lot. I enjoyed every day I had in Edmonton — I could have stayed there for a long, long time. But the marriage has to be a two-way street, and obviously my partner (GM Peter Chiarelli) didn't want to stay married. Every day I was there was good. Except for the last day, just because of the way things shook down. I'll just leave it at that.

(Chiarelli, already planning to dismiss McLellan and having spoken with successor Ken Hitchcock, had McLellan fly with the team to San Jose for a road trip. There he fired McLellan the next morning, and put him on a plane back to Edmonton. It marked a sour, distrustful ending to the relationship, a story that McLellan does not tell, but one we learned elsewhere.)

We built the team up, and then it crumbled back down a little bit. We all need to take responsibility. And when I say "all," I mean all — not just the coach or the general manager. I've accepted my role in it, and I've moved on. I'm happy here in L.A.

SN: Did that team recover from the Taylor Hall trade?

T.M.: Well, our best years were post-Taylor trade ... Look, any time you take that type of talent and you separate it from a team, you're going to miss that. Now, with Adam Larsson out, they're going to miss that — he's an important part of that team. You know, I don't know the answer to that question.

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SN: You had success in San Jose, though not the ultimate success. You had less success in Edmonton, and now enter into a long-term project in L.A., is it critical to your coaching career to win again soon?

T.M.: Depends on the definition of winning. If it's defined by putting your name on the big silver trophy, there are a lot of us who still haven't done that as coaches. So, yes to that. Now, I thought it was a big win in Edmonton (in 2017), going to Game 7 in Anaheim. Those are seven playoff wins that didn't exist for a decade in Edmonton.

In my opinion, I had a poor (2017-18) and 20 games in Edmonton, and I'm not sure the 20 games were that poor either. Here in L.A., we know what we are, where we are on the evolution line. I accepted the responsibility of coming here and putting that in place. Some coaches don't like that challenge. I'm OK with it.

SN: Is it tempting to hurry a process like the ones in Edmonton or L.A.?

T.M.: It's like putting a puzzle together. When there are only 20 pieces left in a 1000-piece puzzle, you probably aren't going to bed. You want to finish. The closer you get to the ultimate goal, the quicker you want to do it — and sometimes that's a mistake.

You have to understand where you are, and evaluate a certain way. For us, we need some young players to evolve and get comfortable in the league, and we need some older players to get their game back. That is how we're evaluating our group, (not) purely on points and standings. We want to win 82 games, but the goal is to make surer this train is moving forward.



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SN: One last question: What would you say to Oilers fan about the experience you had in their town? Any words for them, as they start down the road on another regime change?

T.M.: I am so thankful I got the opportunity to coach in Canada, but particularly in Edmonton. For me, if I was ever to get adopted by a community, that's the community I would fit best. Growing up in Saskatoon, there are so many comparisons.

I would just tell the Edmonton fans, just keep being Edmonton fans. Because they are outstanding in their support of that team, and they just need to keep doing what they do.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155753 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Next Gen Prospects: Quinton Byfield eyeing No. 1 pick in 2020 NHL Draft

Ryan McKenna | @RyanBMcKenna

October 4, 2019, 12:37 PM

Cory Stillman took a second and let out a laugh when asked whether Quinton Byfield, his star centre with the Sudbury Wolves, had any areas of his game that needed improvement.

"No," the Wolves head coach replied.

Byfield is one of the top prospects for the 2020 NHL Draft and has already made a big impact during the first two weeks of the Ontario Hockey League season.

The 17-year-old has six goals and six assists through five games to lead the league in scoring.

"What you see with Quinton is he gets better every week. And he's picking up something in his game every week," Stillman said.

"Whether it's shooting, whether it's passing, whether it's his defensively play, whether it's his puck protection. Every time he comes to the rink, he's looking to improve on something and he's doing it."

Most early draft projections have Rimouski Oceanic forward Alexis Lafreniere going first overall next June when the draft takes place in Montreal.

But Byfield is making a strong case early to have his name jump up the rankings.

Even he believes he can be the top pick.

"If I just play my game as I said, just use my size, speed, use my teammates, utilize them, I think I definitely have a good shot to go first," Byfield said in a recent phone interview.

High expectations are nothing new for Byfield, who went first overall to Sudbury during the 2018 OHL draft.

His performance during his first junior season last year was nothing short of impressive with 29 goals and 32 assists in 64 games for the Wolves. The Canadian Hockey League awarded him rookie of the year honours for his efforts.

The Newmarket, Ont., native said he's trying to block out any hype regarding his NHL draft year and is avoiding social media and rankings.

Stillman, who played in the NHL for 16 seasons with six franchises while winning two Stanley Cups, said Byfield doesn't remind him of any player he's ever played with.

"You have a six-foot-five, 215-pound kid who can do everything," he said.

"He can be the full package."

Byfield finished the Hlinka Gretzky Cup this summer with three goals and two assists in five games as Canada earned silver. It was a roster filled with talent and plenty of names that could be called alongside Byfield and Lafreniere next summer.

Another international tournament Byfield has his sights set on this year is the World Junior Championship in Czech Republic.

He admits it's an event he's thought of and hopes he gets an invite to selection camp. It's also a dream of his to make the team.

"That would be really cool if I could make that team," he said. "If I don't, it just gives me something to strive for the next couple years."

Stillman believes Byfield is only going to get better as the year progresses.

The head coach said Byfield is going to get anywhere from two to three opportunities a game to score along with another handful of chances to set goals up.

Last season he worked on improving his play without the puck and Stillman is getting him to continue to work on his all-around game in 2019-20.

As for his potential? Stillman believes Byfield could overtake Lafreniere for this year's top prospect.

"A lot of teams looking for big centremen, and here you have a big left-shot centremen who can play both ends of the rink and who can skate, who can hound pucks and make people around him better," he said.

"I think he has a great chance to be No. 1 overall."

Here are 10 other players who have impressed early in the season:

Mattias Norlinder, D (MTL – 2019, 3rd round)

Current team: MODO (Allsvenskan)

Stats: 6 GP | 4 G | 0 A | 4 PTS

The 19-year-old is in his first full season with the senior MODO club in his native Sweden. He's also started the year with some dangles.

Zachary Emond, G (SJ – 2018, 6th round)

Current team: Rouyn-Noranda (QMJHL)

Stats: 5-1 | 2.50 GAA | .936 SV%

The defending Memorial Cup champions are off to a hot start and Emond is a big reason why. How about this highlight reel save?

Egor Sokolov, LW

Current team: Cape Breton (QMJHL)

Stats: 5 GP | 4 G | 7 A | 11 PTS

Cape Breton suffered its first loss of the season earlier this week and Sokolov is a big reason why they've started well. The undrafted



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winger is tied for second in league scoring and picked up a pair of goals in the Eagles' opening game.

Jakob Pelletier, LW (CGY – 2019, 1st round)

Current team: Moncton (QMJHL)

Stats: 3 GP | 3 G | 3 A | 6 PTS

It didn't take long for the Wildcats captain to make an impact after coming back from Calgary Flames training camp. He's shaping up to have a strong year.

Matej Pekar, C (BUF – 2018 4th round)

Current team: Barrie (OHL)

Stats: 4 GP | 5 G | 2 A | 7 PTS

Pekar had 14 goals in just 33 games last season, but he's off to a hot start for the Colts after scoring five goals in his first two games.

Tucker Tynan, G (2020 NHL Draft eligible)

Current team: Niagara (OHL)

Stats: 2-2-2 | 2.96 GAA | .932 SV%

Tynan is a 17-year-old from Chicago in his rookie season for the IceDogs. His highlights to date include a 38-save performance against Mississauga and a 41-save night against Saginaw.

Connor McMichael, C (WSH – 2019 1st round)

Current team: London (OHL)

Stats: 4 GP | 7 G | 3 A | 10 PTS

McMichael had a huge last couple of games for London over the weekend by striking twice against Erie before scoring a hat trick and two assists in a big win over Hamilton.

Dylan Cozens, C (BUF – 2019 1st round)

Current team: Lethbridge (WHL)

Stats: 3 GP | 4 G | 4 A | 8 PTS

Despite a strong camp with the Buffalo Sabres, Cozens was returned to junior last week and has dominated the Western Hockey League with four goals and four assists.

Justin Sourdif, C (2020 NHL Draft eligible)

Current team: Vancouver (WHL)

Stats: 5 GP | 4 G | 4 A | 8 PTS

Sourdif is following up a solid rookie campaign with four goals and four assists to start his draft eligible season. He scored twice over the weekend in a victory over Kelowna.

Michal Teplý, RW (CHI – 2019 4th round)

Current team: Winnipeg (WHL)

Stats: 5 GP | 4 G | 3 A | 7 PTS

Teplý has scored in four of his first five games in North America after being imported by Winnipeg from his native Czech Republic over the summer.

1155754 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Babcock lauds Matthews' growth on defensive side of puck

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

October 4, 2019, 1:48 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Auston Matthews has already earned plenty of accolades for his unique shooting talents and unmatched ability to create goals.

But as the Toronto Maple Leafs centre embarks on his fourth NHL season, his coach is lauding the growth he's showing on the defensive side of the puck.

"I think he has the chance to be the best two-way centre in hockey," Mike Babcock said before Friday's game against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Matthews identified defensive positioning as an area of focus over the summer. The 22-year-old felt that showing a little more attention to detail in his own zone could produce longer stretches where his line could be on the attack.

"When you take care of (defensive details), it goes the other way. You have the puck more," Matthews told Sportsnet at last month's NHL media tour. "When good players have the puck a lot of times good things happen. Of course, I want to score more goals, more assists, more points and create more offence, but I think a lot of that kind of starts in my own zone as well."

Where Babcock sees growth in the centre is the speed at which he plays the game through the middle of the rink. He believes an "ability to play defence fast" will lead to more transition opportunities.

It's an edict he's delivered to all of the Leafs players throughout training camp: The need to produce better 5-on-5 scoring chance differentials and time spent in the offensive zone. That was an area where Babcock determined his team had ground to gain on the opponents who played deep into the playoffs last spring.

"If you're playing in their zone, they're not getting any chances and it's way more fun," he said. "Rather than defending, staying on the inside, defending, staying on the inside. Why not play in their zone, check it back and spend a lot of time in there?"

The Leafs have already been enjoying a healthy advantage with Matthews on the ice. Last season they held an edge in even-strength shot attempts (52.8 per cent), expected goals (51.55 per cent) and scoring chances (53.66 per cent) during his shifts, according to naturalstatrck.com.

He's looked downright dominant these last few weeks — scoring a goal in each of the four pre-season games he's dressed for before kicking off the regular season with two more against the Ottawa Senators on Wednesday night.

"No one can shoot the puck like that," teammate John Tavares said of Matthews. "It's so rare and unique and he continues just to kind of tweak and change it up just enough. Just to keep everyone guessing and continue to improve.

"His second one the other night was really impressive, just taking it clean right off the pass, one-timed it. You know, no one's stopping that."



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The Leafs already pose a huge matchup challenge to opponents with Tavares and Mitch Marner on one forward line and Matthews and William Nylander on another. But Babcock believes they can become even more formidable if Matthews continues to boost his defensive acumen.

Playing in the Atlantic Division, he has a chance to regularly measure himself against some of the league's best 200-foot players: the Boston Bruins' Patrice Bergeron, the Florida Panther's Aleksander Barkov and the Tampa Bay Lightning's Brayden Point, among them.

"What you're trying to do is you're trying to build out your program so you're an absolute complete player," said Babcock. "To me, that's our focus. In the end, you win championships like that and that's what (Matthews) wants to do."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.05.2019

1155755 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators' Colin White ready for challenge as team's No. 1 centre

Ryan Dixon | @dixononsports

October 4, 2019, 1:15 PM

Colin White's influence on the Ottawa Senators was felt well before he started playing a lead role on the club.

"He loves to hear his own voice," says Brady Tkachuk, chuckling while discussing a guy he refers to as one of his best buds on the team.

White is one of those in-the-mix people, the type whose tastes dictate the music that gets played in the dressing room and whose hand doesn't hesitate to crank the volume. He'll certainly be in the middle of things this year like never before in Ottawa, filling the role of No. 1 centre on a youth-laden club.

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As a 22-year-old NHL sophomore, White certainly fits the green theme in Canada's capital. That said, 2019-20 marks the fourth season he's seen at least some game action with the Senators, giving him more of a link to departed Sens stalwarts like Erik Karlsson and Mark Stone than many on the team. In some ways, he's a bridge between the world Ottawa is leaving behind and the new, winning environment it hopes to cultivate in the coming years.

"He's gotten to know a lot of the guys who were here in the past and learn from them," says Tkachuk, who's known White since the latter skated for the U.S. National Team Development program with Tkachuk's brother Matthew.

Drafted 21st overall — three spots behind the new franchise cornerstone, Thomas Chabot — in 2015, White's big-boy role with the Sens probably feels like a long time coming to some observers because his path felt so linked to Chabot's. Beyond being from the same draft class, the two actually share the same Jan. 30, 1997

birthday. When Chabot's star exploded at the 2017 World Junior Championship — the defenseman was named MVP of the tourney — it was White's Team USA that downed Chabot and Canada in the gold medal game. The Massachusetts boy finished the event with seven goals in seven outings — including a game-tying tally against Canada in the final before the U.S. claimed victory in a shootout. That brought his career WJC line to 10 goals and 15 points in 14 contests.

White played his first two NHL games in April of 2017 after exiting Boston College, but the following year saw him spend more time in the American League than 'The Show.' While that's standard practice for prospects who aren't at Chabot's elite level, White's trajectory flattened out a bit at the minor-pro level.

Last year, however, he re-established his exciting-entity status with 41 points in 71 games in his first full NHL campaign. After Ottawa shed some key players at the 2019 trade deadline, White's average ice time spiked from 15:48 per night to 17:40 over his final 15 contests of the season (he missed five games in March with a neck injury). Overall, only six Sens forwards saw more average ice time than White's 16:12 last season and four of them — Stone, Matt Duchene, Zack Smith and Ryan Dzingel — play for other teams now.

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

That means there will be ice-a-plenty for a young man who, in August, inked a six-year deal worth \$4.75 million annually against the cap. If he lives up to his potential, the pact will look like a coup for the Sens. And according to those around him, he's anxious to prove his worth.

"He's the No. 1 centre right now," says Chabot. "I think he's looking forward to that challenge."

Part of the reason he appears ready to meet it is because, at his best, White brings more to the table than offence. Chabot praised White's two-way game, as did the guy who rides shotgun on the top line's left side.

"A little under the radar, he's a great defensive player too," Tkachuk says.

That ability to do both the quiet and loud things well makes White a critical part of everything happening in Ottawa.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why goals are rising in the NHL • — and can we expect more in 2019-20?

Andrew Berkshire

October 4, 2019, 12:02 PM

Coming out of the 2004-05 lockout, the NHL made a concerted effort to crack down on obstruction, which immediately led to more goals in



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that first season. But this didn't last and the NHL went from a league that dramatically increased its goal total to one that was losing offence every year.

From 2005-06 to 2015-16, the league saw goals per game drop from 6.16 to 5.42, which doesn't sound like a lot in a single game, but over a full season that's 910 goals that disappeared.

Since 2015-16, though, there's been a silent offensive renaissance. Goals per game inched up over 6.00 last season for only the second time since 1996.

Last season wasn't an isolated change either. Goal scoring has increased each of the past three seasons, but is it something we should expect to continue in 2019-20?

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To find out, the first thing we have to look at is where shots are coming from. After all, it's not simply that shots have increased — the NHL's average save percentage has dropped three years in a row. That's something that hasn't happened since the late-1970s according to Hockey Reference, when the NHL saw average save percentages decrease from .891 in the 1976-77 season for five years in a row to .873 in 1981-82.

The current trend isn't nearly that extreme, dropping from a high of .915 in 2015-16 to .910 last season, but this is a rare thing as goalies continue to get better, especially now.

So what's driving this change most? Let's look at those shot locations when the game is at 5-on-5.

In 2015-16, 15.9 per cent of all shots on goal in the NHL came from the inner slot, where expected shooting percentage is around 21 per cent. Those high value shots have risen each of the past three seasons, and made up 20.9 per cent of all 5-on-5 shots in 2018-19.

Similarly, shots from the high slot — the next-best area to shoot from — have increased from 17.1 per cent of all shots to 21 per cent last season. This of course means that shots from the perimeter have dropped from nearly 67 per cent four seasons ago to just 58.1 per cent last season.

The combination of teams taking shots from in closer to the net and adding a whole new franchise in the Vegas Golden Knights resulted in an increase of over 4,700 shots on goal from the inner slot from 2015-16 to last season, and 4,214 shots from the high slot. The game is getting a bit more difficult for goaltenders.

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Beyond simply shot locations, though, it sure feels like the game has changed to be more about speed, doesn't it? I talk about it all the time, and pundits do too. Speed is definitely a big component to what makes players successful today, but are teams attacking differently outside of just getting the puck closer to the net?

In order to test that, we can look at the types of scoring chances teams are creating, although we only have that data for the past three seasons so it's a bit more limited than the larger sample.

Over the past three years there has been a mild increase in scoring chances off the rush, but not nearly what you would expect given all the talk about hockey turning into a speed game. Rush chances

have gone from accounting for 29.1 per cent of all scoring chances, to 29.7 per cent. Hardly something to write home about.

In fact, the biggest emphasis here, especially last season, has been an increase in cycle chances. This means there's been a focus on passing plays in the offensive zone to break down defensive schemes. Still, the increase in cycle chances as a total of all scoring chances has only gone from 32.2 per cent in 2016-17 to 34 per cent last season — not a gigantic change in how teams attack.

Forechecking, meanwhile, has been responsible for fewer chances over time, dropping from 17.3 per cent of the total chances in 2016-17 to 15.9 per cent last season.

Uncategorized scoring chances seem to be a bit more variable with no consistent trend, but the changes teams are making in how they approach offence stylistically don't appear to be that large.

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We can say that forechecking is becoming slightly less emphasized and that passing or playmaking is more important, but that's about it.

So where does the narrative — which I have contributed to — that speed is king come from? Speed impacts the game in more ways than simply attacking off the rush, but even if we only focus on that it's easy to find where this focus on speed comes from.

The increase in overall scoring chances, along with a slight uptick in chances off the rush as a percentage of them, accounted for about one extra rush chance in every game that was played last season. Chances off the rush are very noticeable. They're also extremely dangerous and more likely to produce goals. An extra one of those every game is going to catch eyes.

Just because the game hasn't drastically shifted to scoring off the rush doesn't mean that speed isn't a bigger factor than ever before. You can get into better position, beat opponents to loose pucks, and more, with superior speed. But the typical expectation of hockey becoming a rush game with all these speedy young kids isn't true.

Despite that, shot quality at 5-on-5 has drastically increased over a four-year period, and it seems like that trend is going to continue. The game is becoming more about offence and for everyone watching that means more excitement.

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TSN.CA / Creativity key as Auston Matthews starts strong again

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Leafs (optional) and Blue Jackets (optional) skated at Nationwide Arena on Friday.

In each of his three previous NHL seasons, Auston Matthews has started strong. He scored 10 goals in the first six games last season.



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The year before that, he racked up 12 points in the first eight games. As a rookie, he posted 10 points in the first six games.

It's not a coincidence.

Matthews, who scored twice in Toronto's season opener this year, isn't just grinding in the gym and getting stronger in the summer, he's also trying to develop new moves to keep him ahead of the game.

On Wednesday night, a couple of his new tricks were on display. Matthews had worked on developing his one-timer into more of a weapon and immediately used it to score a power-play goal against the Senators.

"No one can shoot the puck like that," said captain John Tavares, who scored 47 goals last year. "It's so rare and unique and he continues just to kind of tweak and change it up just enough to keep everyone guessing and continue to improve. His second one the other night was really impressive, just taking it clean right off the pass, one timed and, you know, no one's stopping that."

Matthews, a perfectionist in many ways, downplayed the progress he's made.

"Just one shot so obviously still some work to do on it," he said.

It seems to be familiar territory for Auston Matthews in season openers but his two-goal haul in the Maple Leafs' win over the Senators definitely turned some heads. His teammates lauded his ability to continually add to his game while the Islanders explained what they will need to do to try and contain Matthews.

That top-shelf blast was only part of the Matthews' magic. Late in the second period, the 22-year-old circled the Ottawa net, put the puck on his blade and contemplated doing the lacrosse move before passing to a teammate. A subtle sign of things to come that didn't go unnoticed.

"We were watching the game the other night and we saw him try to pick it up and we're like, 'Oh my gosh. Wow,'" said Blue Jackets defenceman Seth Jones. "I think he had already scored at that point and he was feeling it."

"It's something I wouldn't think to do," said Jackets defenceman Zach Werenski, "but I guess when you're playing with that much confidence and you have that much skill it's something that crosses your mind. So as a team, defensively, we have to be aware of stuff like that."

The mere fact Matthews, who has more even-strength goals than everyone except Connor McDavid since breaking into the league, has that type of move on his radar is a warning sign to opponents.

"That just shows the confidence he has," said Jones. "I'm sure if you ask him he wants to be the best player on the ice every night ... When it comes to Auston the degree of difficulty is usually high and he usually executes it."

"Everything's gotta go right to execute a play like that," Matthews said with a grin, "but, I don't know, just trying to be creative out there."

'Oh my gosh, wow!': Blue Jackets' reaction to Matthews' highlight goal attempt

Auston Matthews was feeling it in the Maple Leafs' home opening victory over the Senators but as much as as his two-goal performance stood out, it was the play that he almost pulled off that left his teammates and opponents speechless.

While the hockey world is going gaga over how Matthews can put the puck in the net, Mike Babcock is more impressed with the

evolution he's making in the defensive zone, neutral zone and without the puck.

"None of those things talk about what you guys talk about, the shot and all that, he has all those things," the coach said, "but what you're trying to do is you're trying to build out your program so you're an absolute complete player. I think he has the chance to be the best two-way centre in hockey and so, to me, that's our focus. In the end, you win championships like that and that's what he wants to do."

Asked where the Leafs can improve this season, Matthews struck a similar tone.

"Defensively," he said. "We put up a number of things we need to improve on and you look at the guys, the other teams that were in the final four, and those were the teams that did that stuff that we needed to improve on, they did it the best. They were at the top of the list. So you put that in perspective and try and work on that systematically and personally as well."

With so much excitement surrounding Matthews, your humble correspondent had to at least try and get the perspective of Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella, who usually doesn't like to talk about opposing players that much.

"I'm concerned about our guys," he said echoing a familiar refrain.

Okay, well, how do the Jackets stop Matthews tonight?

"Well, I mean, he's a really good player," Tortorella said. "I'm not going to sit here and talk about him, but he's a helluva player ... I think when you're talking about that talent level, you don't shut him down, you just try and contain him ... he's a helluva player, but I'm not going to sit here and talk about the Maple Leafs on

Mitch Marner used the platform provided by Uninterrupted, an athlete empowerment brand co-founded by LeBron James, to post a video message to Leafs fans thanking them for their support in the wake of his at-times difficult contact negotiations.

"That brand, what it's doing for athletes, it's blowing up, it's unbelievable," Marner said this morning. "It's what every athlete, I think, always wanted to do, but never really could get it down. I mean, the most influential athlete in the world I would say right now is the one leading it all and when the opportunity came I jumped at it as quick as I could. It's a brand that means a lot to athletes around the world, but there's not too many hockey players in it now and a thing that's great is they want to get all sports involved and I jumped at the opportunity when it came. It was another thing to give back to the city."

Marner thrilled to do video for Uninterrupted: 'It's blowing up'

Mitch Marner as able to use LeBron James' 'Uninterrupted' as a platform to express his love for the city of Toronto and Maple Leafs fans and he spoke about what an incredible opportunity it represents for an athlete to connect with their fans.

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TSN.CA / Frank Seravalli: Curtain rises on New Jersey Devils top pick Jack Hughes' NHL career



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Frank Seravalli

NEWARK, N.J. — On the night before his National Hockey League debut, Jack Hughes went to dinner with his proud parents, Jim and Ellen.

But like most teenagers, Hughes wanted to be left alone on game day.

"I'm going to dial it in," Hughes said. "My normal routine."

For the No. 1 overall pick, that involves sleep — and lots of it.

Hughes, 18, left the Prudential Center and planned for three-hour nap before taking the ice against the Winnipeg Jets on Friday night (7 p.m. ET on TSN3).

Call him Jack Snooze.

"Maybe three and a half hours," Hughes said, smiling. "It just depends on the

For Hughes, this is not a day like any other. You only get one NHL debut, he said. It's a day that he's admittedly "looked forward to for a lot of years."

"This is the real deal now," Hughes said. "It's more exciting, but for me, it's the same mindset."

New Jersey is buzzing with anticipation for Hughes and the rest of the new-look Devils, who are expected to be back in the playoff hunt. It's a big night for the retooled Devils, with P.K. Subban and Wayne Simmonds also making their team debuts alongside a healthy Taylor Hall.

Hughes will open the year centring KHL transplant Nikita Gusev and Jesper Bratt — a line that runs on jet fuel.

There is no denying Hughes is an incredible talent.

"His feet know what his hands are doing, his hands know what his feet are doing, and his eyes are able to know what everyone else is doing," Devils defenceman Connor Carrick told NHL.com during training camp.

"He's the prototypical player for today's game," Subban said.

So, what are realistic expectations for Hughes this season?

You only need to look a few stalls down in the Devils' dressing room to answer that question. Nico Hischier is just two years removed from his first game as the No. 1 overall pick. He answered all the same questions, felt the same nervous energy.

Hischier then went out and netted 20 goals and 32 assists for a stout 52 points in 82 games.

That would seem to be a reasonable bar for Hughes.

"I think he's going to be just fine," Hischier said. "He's done it in the preseason and he's already a big part of our team. I'm happy for him that's he's at this point, to finally play an NHL game."

The biggest thing standing in Hughes' way right out of the gate may simply be physical maturity, which will come over time.

"I think he's got a little ways to go, but he's hockey strong," Devils coach John Hynes said. "If you can combine these three things — his hockey sense, his ability to skate and elusiveness, and his competitiveness — those things will allow him to have success."

The Devils watched Hughes closely in training camp to make sure he was absolutely ready to make the jump to the NHL, not that there

was much question. Hughes played four preseason games and collected three goals and one assist.

"It was a chance to have some confidence, to tell myself I'm really ready to go," Hughes said. "I had a great summer and I [know I] can really do something good in the league."

Listen to Hynes describe Hughes and he agrees: "Elite competitor ... Very consistent ... Never wore down."

"He can skate all day," Hynes said. "Hard practices, exhibitions, long morning skates ... he's able to go right through that."

Now, facing a Winnipeg Jets team with a first line that dominated the Rangers on the other side of the Hudson River Thursday night, Hynes said he wouldn't necessarily feed Hughes to the wolves — nor would he make a concerted effort to shield him.

"I think it's important not to put a top on players," Hynes said.

Hughes will have to feel his way through it — and everything else that comes with an NHL debut.

"You're not going to be able to replace the nervous excitement that you're going to have," Hynes said. "But that's a good thing because it means that there is something important going on."

Hischier knows what that feels like. He said his message to Hughes would be simple.

"You worked hard to get to this point," Hischier offered. "You made it. Trust your strength. You're a great player."

Hughes has dreamed of this moment, walking the red carpet to the ice and the pregame introductions, since he was a little kid. But he didn't anticipate any trouble napping.

"Oh yeah, I just hit the pillow," Hughes said. "Once the buzzer goes, I'll be ready to play. Once the game starts, that's when I'll have my most fun."

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USA TODAY / Agent rips broadcaster for saying Stars player's injury was a 'little bit of bad hockey karma'

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

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Agent Allan Walsh took to Twitter to criticize Bruins broadcaster Jack Edwards for saying that it was a "little bit of bad hockey karma" when Stars defenseman Roman Polak was injured trying to make a hit.

Polak was stretchered off the ice during the second period of Thursday's game against the Bruins after going headfirst into the boards. He was chasing after Boston forward Chris Wagner.

On the NESN broadcast, immediately after Polak went down, analyst Andy Brickley said: "That looked self-induced, didn't it?"

Edwards replied: "Has a little bit of bad hockey karma."



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Stars coach Jim Montgomery said after the game that Polak has full use of his extremities and was feeling better at the hospital. The Stars said Friday that the defenseman had a small fracture of his sternum and would be evaluated in a week.

"As for Jack Edwards, to say Roman's injury was 'bad hockey karma' while he was laying motionless on the ice, you are truly a piece of (expletive) and an absolute disgrace, said Walsh, Polak's agent with Octagon.

Walsh, who is known for his outspoken social media comments, said he had respect for all of the Boston players who sent their best wishes to Polak. "All class," he said.

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