



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 5, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Carolina Hurricanes' Waddell feeling the time crunch in NHL offseason

By Chip Alexander

With a lot to do and little time to do it, Don Waddell has been a busy man for the Carolina Hurricanes.

The 2020 NHL Draft is next week. A few days later, NHL free agency begins. There are team needs to be assessed, perhaps trades to be contemplated. There are contracts to be negotiated by Waddell, the Canes' president and general manager.

All of this with the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, with much uncertainty about the 2020-21 season other than the NHL salary cap remaining flat at \$81.5 million per team.

Andrei Svechnikov, fast emerging as one of the NHL's best young power forwards, has a year left on his entry-level contract but could sign another deal with Carolina in the brief offseason. But it might be shorter rather than long-term.

"Our goal is to keep Andrei here for a very long time," Waddell said Thursday on a media call. "Saying that, with the economics the way they are around the league it might make sense to do a bridge deal. You do a short-term deal. The ideal is you do a couple-year deal and then set yourself up for an eight-year deal, which then locks the player up for 10 years.

"We're keeping open-minded. There's no timetable."

Or for forward Justin Williams. The former Canes captain, who turns 39 on Sunday, is a unrestricted free agent and has not revealed his plans for next season, Waddell said Thursday.

As for the starting date for the 2020-21 season, Waddell said the NHL owners are having a conference call Monday and might provide some clarity on scheduling.

"I think everybody sees it happening, if and when it happens, toward the end of December versus the first of December, but who knows?" Waddell said.

Regardless of the start date, Waddell said the Stadium Series outdoor game, set for Feb. 20, 2021 in Carter-Finley Stadium, is not a "realistic option" for that date and likely will be moved to either later in the 2020-21 season or 2021-22.

The Canes, in the Stanley Cup playoffs the past two seasons, could have a different look on the back end. Carolina traded defenseman Joel Edmundson, who was a pending unrestricted free agent, to Montreal. Two other UFA defensemen, Trevor van Riemsdyk and Sami Vatanen, remain unsigned and will test the open market in free agency, Waddell said.

"We made it clear we like both guys but also understand we're under a little more scrutiny with our salary cap. ... It might be something they come back to us and it's something we can talk about," he said.

Defenseman Dougie Hamilton has a year left on his contract — with a \$5.75 million cap hit — before becoming a UFA. Waddell said no contract conversations have yet to be held with a player who was an NHL All-Star before being injured this past season.

"We know we're dealing with a flat (salary) cap in the next few years so that's always going to be a challenge," he said. "It's my feeling he wants to stay here. It's a matter of finding what's the value for a player pre-COVID and now post-COVID with the revenue and salary cap being where they are. That's something we have to figure out."

Waddell said he expects new contracts to be completed with two restricted free agents, forward Warren Foegele and defenseman Haydn Fleury.

Hurricanes zeroed in on what, if not who, they will take in NHL Draft's first round

By Chip Alexander

Many an NHL player has mentioned it as one of their top hockey thrills.

Hearing their name called at the NHL Draft. The emotional hugs with parents and siblings at the arena. The walk up to the stage, the handshake with Commissioner Gary Bettman, slapping on the sweater and cap of his new team, posing for photos, smiles all around.

Think Andrei Svechnikov hugging his older brother, Evgeny, in 2018.

Not this year. Not during a pandemic. Everything will be handled differently, remotely, virtually, when the 2020 NHL Entry Draft is held Tuesday and Wednesday.

The 2020 draft was scheduled for the Bell Centre in Montreal in June but then postponed because of coronavirus concerns. It now will be conducted from the NHL Network Studios in Secaucus, N.J. Some change, eh?

The Carolina Hurricanes have the 13th pick of the first round and eight draft picks in all. They also appear to have their sights firmly set, president and general manager Don Waddell said in an interview this week.

"Offense. I think you're always looking for more offense," Waddell said. "You've got to look at who's going to be available at 13 but we emptied the cupboard a little bit last year with a couple of trades and we think we've got lots of good young D coming, so if we can find that offensive player it certainly would be something that's a need for the organization."



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Someone like, say, Jack Quinn, Seth Jarvis or Connor Zary. That is, if those forwards are still on the board.

Quinn scored 52 goals in 62 games for the Ottawa 67's in the Ontario Hockey League. Jarvis had 42 goals and 98 points for the Portland Winterhawks of the Western Hockey League and Zary 38 goals and 86 points for Kamloops in the WHL.

Those numbers can't be overlooked even if size — Quinn is listed at 5-11 and 176 pounds and Jarvis at 5-10, 172 — might cause concerns.

Maybe not for Canes owner Tom Dundon, who is a student of the game and can appreciate smaller players with big games. Sebastian Aho has developed into an accomplished scorer in the NHL for Carolina and Tampa Bay's Brayden Point is 5-10 and 166 pounds and handles himself quite well.

One no-no for Dundon has been drafting a defenseman in the first round. The Canes took defenseman Jake Bean with the 13th pick in the 2016 draft, before Dundon bought majority interest in the team, and that may not happen again. The boss prefers guys who can put the puck in the net.

Or keep it out. A lot of the mock draft guesstimates have the Canes considering Russian goalie Yaroslav Askarov of SKA-Neva St. Petersburg. If so, that would come after Carolina used a second-round pick last year — No. 36 overall — on another Russian goalie, Pyotr Kochetkov, who played sparingly last season for HC Vityaz in the KHL.

"We're going to be open-minded," Waddell said on a media call Thursday. "But up front looks like a need."

The Canes, after their playoff run to the 2019 Eastern Conference finals, had the 28th pick in the first round in 2019 and drafted forward Ryan Suzuki. Splitting time between the OHL's Barrie Colts and Saginaw Spirit, Suzuki had 18 goals and 58 points in 44 games despite missing some time with an eye injury.

Bean, after a couple of seasons in the American Hockey League, may be ready for an NHL roster spot in 2020-21. For Suzuki, it figures to be longer.

"I always say don't measure the draft in the next couple of years. Measure three to five years out and see how you did," Waddell said. "Every player is different and every player returns differently, not only as a person but as a player. Some guys need to soak in the experience of playing pro hockey and other guys really need to work on getting bigger and stronger."

In 2018, the Canes went to Dallas for the draft with the No. 2 pick and already had made Andrei Svechnikov their chosen guy — older brother Evgeny was drafted by Detroit in 2015.

"My dream came true. It was the best moment of my life," Andrei said in 2018.

Svechnikov was ready for the NHL and in the Canes lineup at 18. Suzuki, who played with Andrei with Barrie, was more a "best player available" pick last year.

Settling on the No. 13 pick

The Canes arrived at the No. 13 pick this year circuitously.

Carolina traded a 2020 first-round pick to the New York Rangers in the deal that got them defenseman Brady Skjei. Earlier, the Canes had gotten the Toronto Maple Leafs' 2020 first-round pick, conditionally, via the trade in which Carolina acquired veteran forward Patrick Marleau.

The condition: if the Maple Leafs had a top-10 pick for 2020, the Canes would have had Toronto's first-round choice in 2021. Had that happened, Carolina would not have had a first-rounder this year, surrendering it to the Rangers. But the Canes were able to secure the No. 13 selection this year from the Leafs trade.

As for the Rangers ... New York was swept by Carolina in a qualifying round of the 2020 NHL postseason in Toronto, only to then win the draft lottery and the No. 1 overall pick. They also have the 22nd pick from the Canes.

Come Tuesday night, the Rangers are expected to make forward Alex Lafreniere the No. 1 choice. Virtually. In 2020.

2020 NHL Entry Draft

First round

Tuesday, 7 pm, NBC Sports Network

He's been with the Carolina Hurricanes' franchise since 1972. Now he plans to retire.

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes could soon be losing their longest tenured employee.

Equipment manager Skip Cunningham, who has been with the hockey franchise since 1972, plans to retire, Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in an interview with The News & Observer Monday.

Cunningham, a Boston native, has been a fixture in the team's locker room and behind the bench during games, always quick to spot with his silver hair and bushy mustache. He was a part of Hartford Whalers teams that included Gordie Howe and a young Ron Francis, and then Hurricanes teams that had such stars as Francis, Rod Brind'Amour and Eric Staal.

"Skip is very well-respected, very well-liked by everybody throughout the organization," Waddell said. "What I feel bad about is that Skip never got to work what you would call your normal last games. We're talking about it right now and our plan will be whenever we do return, he's had a great career, not only in the National Hockey League and World Hockey League but particularly with our organization, that at the right time we will definitely pay tribute to him."

"I told him he could stay around and there's lots of work this year when we come back, and we'll figure all that out. But it's getting time where you go and enjoy your life a little bit when you still can."

Skip Cunningham with the Whalers, Stanley Cup



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Cunningham, raised off Brookline Avenue in Boston not far from Fenway Park, is a graduate of Northeastern University. He began his work with the franchise soon after graduation, in 1972 when the team was the New England Whalers and played in the World Hockey Association.

Cunningham was with the team when the NHL granted the Whalers admittance in 1979 during the merger with the WHA.

On April 13, 1997, Cunningham was one of those who collected the Whalers' jerseys for a final time after the game against Tampa Bay at the Hartford Civic Center. He prepared to make the move to North Carolina, to a new city.

John Forslund, the Canes' former television play-by-play announcer, first met Cunningham in the summer of 1991 and calls him "one of the greatest people I've come across in my career."

"He cared about the game, he treated the players like sons, he had the utmost respect of the coaches," Forslund said. "I consider myself lucky to work in the same organization for all

those years with someone like Skip. I miss dearly our conversations on long plane rides, the best."

When the Canes won the Stanley Cup in 2006, Cunningham spent his "day with the Cup" in Boston. He carried it up to the Green Monster at Fenway Park. He carried it to three of the arenas in which the Whalers once played — the Boston Garden, Springfield Civic Center and the Hartford Civic Center.

More than 1,400 straight games

Cunningham worked 1,412 consecutive games from 1972 to 1990 before being sidelined following surgery in January 1990. In 1989, the Connecticut Sports Writers Alliance presented him with the Good Guy Award for unselfish dedication to Connecticut sports.

Cunningham was the assistant trainer for Team USA at the World Ice Hockey Championships in 1985 and 1989. He has been selected to work at four All-Star Games: The 1974 and 1976 WHA All-Star Games as well as the 1986 and 2011 NHL All-Star Games.



Who Could the Canes Draft With the 13th Pick?

by Michael Smith

With the 13th overall pick in the 2020 NHL Draft, the Carolina Hurricanes select ..."

Who might it be?

In alphabetical order, here are 10 names to watch, with expert input and analysis on each prospect.

Rodion Amirov, LW (Russia)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Speedy two-way winger with attitude, fine stickhandling, smooth hands and a good shot. Quick and mobile with a great work ethic. Reliable team player."

Craig Button's analysis: "Strong winger who gets in and around the net to score. Creates space for others and establishes himself in the areas that produce rewards. He is very adept at finishing off plays."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "Amirov is easy to spot on the ice when he has the puck because he's very quick and skilled. He has quick-twitch hands and can inside-out defenders while skating at full speed. He has the ability to pull off a highlight reel play. He can set up and finish plays well."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "The strength of Amirov's game is in his ability to protect the puck and change directions with control. This makes him particularly effective within the offensive zone."

Iaroslav Askarov, G (Russia)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Tall, athletic goaltender who likes to stay upright. High hockey IQ. Quick, involved, active and very mobile. Communicates loudly with his skaters."

Bob McKenzie's analysis: "A gifted and athletic Russian goaltender who's been labeled by some as the most exciting goaltending prospect since Carey Price. ... The right-handed catching Askarov is supremely confident and has a marvelous international resume and reputation for stealing games and winning medals."

Craig Button's analysis: "His physical attributes and ability to read the play puts him in a category of excellent prospect. He has composure, an assuredness and a defiance in the face of challenges."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "He has elite attributes in terms of his athleticism, in how he reads the game and how aggressive he is. His quickness allows him to make the tough saves, although I don't find him scrambling and diving around the net a lot given how well he anticipates the play. He's a little jumpy in the net just due to how quick he is, but he's in control most of the time, staying with the play even when the puck is moving quickly. Askarov is often challenging shooters even in unorthodox situations, but he isn't often beat when he is aggressive, which speaks to his hockey IQ."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "Askarov has pretty much everything teams look for in a goalie. He's one of those rare prospects who is worth taking in the first round. He's big, he's athletic, he swallows rebounds, he can make those tough second-chance recovery saves and he does a good job staying center."

Kaiden Guhle, D (WHL)

NHL Central Scouting report: "An excellent skater with quick acceleration who is mobile and elusive when defending. Can be very physical with big open ice hits. Likes to join the play



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for odd man rushes. The go-to guy on the blueline for his team. Possesses a solid one-time shot."

Craig Button's analysis: "Excellent skater with the balance, power and leverage to be forceful defensively and with the speed and quickness to move the puck up the ice. Physical, territorial and competitive in his approach."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "Guhle is appealing because of his physical attributes. He's 6-foot-2, he skates quite well and he knocks opponents off the puck with high frequency. His gap control is excellent, closing on checks with force and showing a preference for playing the body."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "He's one of the smoothest-skating defensemen in the class, and he's pushes opposing players around along the wall (and occasionally the rush). ... His defensive game is already pretty refined. Guhle's skating is going to be an asset at the NHL level."

Dylan Holloway, C (NCAA)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Power forward who can get to the net effectively. Very hard to contain with and without the puck. Will be physical to gain possession of the puck. High hockey IQ and great competitiveness."

Craig Button's analysis: "Dylan combines his skill with a physical presence that allows him to impose himself on the game. Determined and finds ways to contribute. Compliments the games of others and is versatile."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "Holloway is a good skater who has a lot of energy to his game. When he gets a full head of steam, his frame he can be a handful to stop. He's hard on pucks and isn't afraid to get his nose dirty."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "He's a unique athlete in this class, an outstanding skater, a physical presence and a talented scorer and creator."

Seth Jarvis, C (WHL)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Smart player that does everything at high speed. Elusive and creative with the puck. Can impact a game in all zones."

Craig Button's analysis: "Very skilled, smart center who uses deception and guile to gain advantages and produce offensively. He has the ability to take advantage of the slightest opportunity. Don't underestimate him."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "Jarvis is a dynamic player who ticks a lot of boxes. He is highly skilled and intelligent with a lot of quickness. He has the skill to beat defenders 1-on-1, but more importantly, he does so with speed. The high-end pace of his game is what makes him so dangerous and will translate to the higher levels."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "I don't tend to like to make comparisons to other players, but he's a slick playmaker who reminds me a little of a blend between Nick and Ryan Suzuki. He's got the well-roundedness across his toolbox and the three-zone work ethic that Nick possesses, with some of Ryan's knack for the dramatic."

Hendrix Lapierre, C (QMJHL)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Great skater with powerful strides. Excellent puck skills and hockey IQ. Able to execute plays at high speed. Creates time and space with his puck skills and has the creativity to make plays. Strong two-way game. A complete player who brings a strong work ethic."

Craig Button's analysis: "A complete two-way center who can play in every square inch of the ice and be very productive."

Outstanding sense and feel for all situations, with the ability to process quickly."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "He's a highly skilled and intelligent player. He makes a lot of tough plays, projects to run a pro power play due to very high hockey IQ and has the great individual skill to be slippery in open ice."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "He's a puck-dominant carrier who can transport the puck up the ice (or across it) with a sharp pass through a seam or his feet and hands. He's the kind of player every team wants running their power play. And when he doesn't have the puck, he'll chase it down to get it back and keep offensive zone sequences aside."

Anton Lundell, C (Finland)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Mature two-way center with a very good understanding of the game. Playmaker who makes smart decisions in all three zones. Reliable, solid team player who is trusted by coaches."

Craig Button's analysis: "Very solid two-way center who can be the conscience defensively for a line but also capable of getting the puck into the right places and on the right sticks to create offense."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "He competes well, he's strong on pucks and is responsible defensively with the ability to play on both special teams."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "He's a better passer than he normally gets credit for, he's heavier on the cycle than most of his peers, he can play through the middle of the ice and he makes decisions and reads quickly, which is just as important (if not more important) as his actual foot speed. It always feels like Lundell is involved and impacting a game (with and without the puck). Over the course of a game, that drives results."

Dawson Mercer, C (QMJHL)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Smart and skilled forward with a strong desire to make a difference every shift. Uses his speed and quickness to his advantage. Slippery and tough to contain. Plays in all situations - a responsible two-hundred-foot player. Very good hockey sense."

Craig Button's analysis: "Dawson is a plug-and-play player. He can play center or wing, and that adaptability allows him to move around the lineup and contribute. Competitive with very good skills."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "Mercer is a versatile player. Offensively, he's an exciting player. He has high-end skill with the soft hands and creativity to beat a lot of defenders. He has the quick-twitch in his hands to be unpredictable and make a lot of great plays in tight areas. He's a very smart player who moves the puck well inside the zone, finding seams and looking off defenders like a pro."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "Mercer's effective all over the ice by making a lot of little plays with pace and aggression. He attacks defenders when he has the puck. He attacks opposing carriers when he doesn't. He wins more 50/50 battles than he should by getting underneath his man and keeping his feet moving. And then he has enough skill to escape pressure, beat the first defender and make a play."

Jack Quinn, RW (OHL)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Dynamic skater that can fly with the puck on his stick. Lethal shot with an exceptional release. Strong two-way game. Plays in all situations. Sniper with highlight reel goal-scoring ability."



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Bob McKenzie's analysis: "Scouts like his natural sniping ability but are also impressed with his high-energy two-way game and project that he could be a top NHL scoring forward who can play on the PP and the PK."

Craig Button's analysis: "Best goal-scorer in the draft. Is not a one-trick scorer, which makes him difficult to defend. His entire game has progressed to the point where he is a well-rounded player."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "He has very quick twitch hands and the ability to embarrass defenders 1-on-1. He sees the ice at a top-end level even though he didn't have nearly as many assists as goals. It's not just his vision, but his overall creativity and patience. He often saw plays on the ice that I couldn't see materialize."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "There's nothing in Quinn's game to dislike. Add in dynamic ability as a mid-range shooter, impressive athleticism and a late-blooming career arc and it's no wonder he broke the 50-goal plateau."

Lukas Reichel, LW (Germany)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Talented playmaker. Excellent skater who likes to go to the net. Good work ethic and attitude. Effective checker. Smart passer with good puck skills."

Craig Button's analysis: "Skilled, smart winger who can skate and make plays. In the offensive zone, he can create opportunities with his quickness and is equally good at making a pass for a goal or shooting for the net."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "I always saw some skill and speed in his game, but this season I saw a high level of creativity with the puck, making difficult plays through

defenders and to his teammates. He has the skill and the pace to score in the NHL."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "Reichel has a finesse and touch to his game that makes him dangerous both off the rush and from the offensive zone in. The more I watched him, the more I appreciated the way his heads-up style allows him to impact the game as both a scoring threat and a creator for his linemates."

Braden Schneider, D (WHL)

NHL Central Scouting report: "Displays a strong presence on the ice. Makes big hits in all three zones. Strong on his skates and hard to knock off the puck. Used in all situations. Likes to join the rush using deceptive speed. A complete package on the blueline who can control a game."

Craig Button's analysis: "A fiercely competitive, in-your-face player with a take-no-prisoners approach. He is a player that opponents will have no joy facing. Has progressed significantly over three seasons in all areas."

Corey Pronman's analysis: "He's a 6-foot-2, right-handed defenseman who can skate well. He can rush pucks and close gaps well. Schneider moves the puck very well out of the defensive zone, showing great vision and patience on his outlets. He defends well due to his feet, but also doesn't shy away from playing the body and knocking players off pucks."

Scott Wheeler's analysis: "In his own zone, Schneider's one of the better defensive defensemen in this draft. He uses his length and strength well off the rush, too, but his biggest asset is his ability to take away time and space in the defensive zone, close out the wall, win puck battles and advance the play back up ice with a quick outlet."

History of the 13th Overall Pick

By Michael Smith

Lucky number 13.

For the second time in five years, the Carolina Hurricanes are set to make the 13th overall pick in the NHL Draft, a slot that could yield the team a high-end prospect they didn't originally envision having an opportunity to select.

"We can be excited that there's going to be a player who has high impact," Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke said. "I think the top 15 picks or so are very tight. Somebody that we're going to get is going to be able to have an impact for our organization for a long time."

The franchise has twice made the 13th overall selection, two picks separated by 21 years.

Jake Bean (2016)

Bean was one of two players the Canes selected in the first round of the 2016 NHL Draft. The defenseman has since completed two full professional seasons with the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League and played in two games with the Canes. In the 2019-20 campaign, Bean led all AHL defensemen with 48 points in 59 games. He ranked tied for fourth overall in the AHL in assists (38) and led the Checkers in both points and assists. In addition to representing the Checkers at the 2020 All-Star Classic, Bean received the Eddie Shore Award as the AHL's defenseman of the year and was named an AHL First Team All-Star.

Jean-Sebastien Giguere (1995)

Giguere, the first goaltender off the board in the 1995 NHL Entry Draft, compiled a 16-year NHL career during which he won 262 regular-season games, the Conn Smythe Trophy and the Stanley Cup. Giguere's career began in Hartford and ended in Colorado, with waypoints in Calgary and Toronto, as well. But, "Jiggy" had the most success during his nine seasons in Anaheim, where he led the Ducks to two appearances in the Stanley Cup Final. In 2003, he became just the fifth player in NHL history to win the Conn Smythe Trophy while playing for the losing squad. In that playoff run, Giguere posted 15 wins, five of which were shutouts, and just six losses, and he boasted a 1.62 goals-against average and a .945 save percentage. Four years later, he helped the Ducks hoist the Stanley Cup with 13 wins in 18 playoff games, a 1.97 goals-against average and a .922 save percentage. Giguere finished his career with an all-time 2.53 goals-against average and a .913 save percentage and 38 shutouts in 597 regular-season games.

There's a familiar name behind the Canes' bench that was a 13th overall draft pick, too.

Dean Chynoweth (NYI, 1987)

Chynoweth logged 22 points (4g, 18a) in 241 career NHL games over nine seasons with the New York Islanders, who drafted him in 1987, and the Boston Bruins. He also earned



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40 points (10g, 30a) in 209 AHL games before making his way behind the bench. Chynoweth served as a head coach in the Western Hockey League and the AHL in various stints between 2000 and 2016. He also served as an assistant coach for the Islanders from 2009-12 and has completed two seasons behind the bench on Rod Brind'Amour's coaching staff.

These former Canes were 13th overall picks, as well.

Ron Hainsey (MTL, 2000)

Now 39 years old, Hainsey has played 1,132 games with seven teams over 17 seasons in the NHL. The veteran blueliner began his career in Montreal before playing with Columbus and Atlanta/Winnipeg before signing a one-year deal with the Canes in Sept. 2013. He parlayed that into a new three-year contract the following June before hitting the open market. Hainsey played exactly 300 games with the Canes, totaling 58 points (15g, 43a) from 2013-17. He was dealt to the Pittsburgh Penguins at the trade deadline in Feb. 2017, and after playing an NHL record 907 regular-season games, he finally appeared in the playoffs for the first time in his career. Two months later, Sidney Crosby handed him the Stanley Cup. Hainsey, who played for the Ottawa Senators in 2019-20, is now an unrestricted free agent.

Alexander Semin (WSH, 2002)

Semin's NHL career was at times scintillating and at others baffling and tumultuous, but when he was on, there was no denying his innate talent. Semin, who now plays for HC Vityaz in the KHL, logged 650 games in the NHL with three teams and totaled 517 points over 11 seasons. Of all players in the 2002 NHL Entry Draft class, Semin ranks third in goals (239), fourth in points (517) and eighth in assists (278). Semin recorded 105 points (41g, 64a) in 166 games with the Canes from 2012-2015 and was a point-per-game player in the shortened 2012-13 campaign with 44 points (13g, 31a) in as many games. In July 2015, the Canes bought out the last three years on Semin's five-year contract, which finally falls off the books after the 2020-21 season.

Tweetmail No. 244: Draft Bonanza

By Michael Smith

Hello and welcome to Tweetmail, a regular feature on Hurricanes.com in which I take your Twitter questions about the Carolina Hurricanes or other assorted topics and answer them in mailbag form. Hopefully the final product is insightful to some degree, and maybe we have some fun along the way.

We're less than a week away from the 2020 NHL Draft, so that's the focus for this week's installment. Let's get to it.

What are the chances of Iaroslav Askarov still being available by the 13th pick? Do you think another team will snap him up considering the great start he's had to his season? - @webbo_26

The prevailing draft questions for the Hurricanes seem to center around two subjects: Russian goaltender Iaroslav Askarov and potential trades.

Jiri Tlustý (TOR, 2006)

The Canes acquired Tlustý from the Toronto Maple Leafs, who drafted the Czech forward in 2006, in exchange for the rights to Philippe Paradis, and one-for-one swap of previous first-round picks. Tlustý found his NHL footing with the Canes and put up career numbers in the shortened 2012-13 season when he was featured on the first line alongside Eric Staal and Semin. In 48 games that season, Tlustý set career highs in goals (23) and points (38). In the summer of 2018, Tlustý retired from professional hockey at age 30 after totaling 177 points (89g, 88a) in 446 NHL games.

Who else has been selected 13th overall? Here are a couple of names you'll probably recognize.

Ales Hemsky (EDM, 2001)

Hemsky assembled an NHL career that spanned 845 games over 15 seasons. The Czech forward spent the majority of his career - 11 seasons and 652 games - with the team that drafted him, the Edmonton Oilers. There, he recorded 477 points (142g, 335a), putting up career numbers in 2005-06 with personal bests in assists (58) and points (77). Hemsky then posted 17 points (6g, 11a) in 24 games in the Oilers' run to the Stanley Cup Final that season. Hemsky finished his NHL career with 174 goals and 398 assists, totaling 572 points.

Dustin Brown (LAK, 2003)

Brown completed his 16th career NHL season in 2019-20. Among active players, he ranks eighth in games played with 1,183 regular-season games, all with the Los Angeles Kings, who selected him 13th overall in the stacked Entry Draft of 2003. Among that class, Brown ranks eighth in goals (354), 10th in points (653) and 12th in assists (354). He was an All Star in 2009 and has helped the Kings capture two Stanley Cup championships (2012 and 2014).

... And more: **Daniel Cleary** (CHI, 1997), **Drew Stafford** (BUF, 2004), **Lars Eller** (WHS, 2007), **Radek Faksa** (DAL, 2012), **Josh Morrissey** (WPG, 2013), **Jakub Vrana** (WSH, 2014), **Nick Suzuki** (VGK, 2017)

Askarov is NHL Central Scouting's top-ranked goaltending prospect, considered one of the best available in the draft in quite some time, and many mock drafts have him pegged as the Canes' selection at 13th overall.

Here's the thing, though. Askarov has been heralded as the "best goaltending prospect since Carey Price." Price was a fifth overall pick in 2005, so it's conceivable that Askarov doesn't even make it out of the top 10.

Spencer Knight, the top-ranked goaltending prospect of the 2019 Draft class, was selected by the Florida Panthers where? Yep, you guessed it: 13th overall. Knight was the highest drafted goalie since Jack Campbell was selected 11th overall by the Dallas Stars in 2010 and the first picked inside the top 20 since Andrei Vasilevskiy was drafted 19th overall by the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2012.



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Askarov, though, seems to project on a higher level. He posted a 2.45 goals-against average and a .920 save percentage in 18 games in Russia's VHL (second highest league) in 2019-20, and he's had an eye-catching start to his 2020-21 campaign. Askarov was called up to SKA St. Petersburg of the KHL and notched a 2-1-0 record, a 0.74 goals-against average and a .947 save percentage in his first three games, earning KHL player of the week honors on Sept. 23.

One benefit of the draft being moved back from June to October is having additional game film to analyze on some European draft-eligible prospects. Askarov is one of those players.

"We've probably had the opportunity to see more video on players than ever before," Canes President and General Manager Don Waddell said.

At the same time, the Canes' scouting staff is cognizant of small sample sizes and recency bias.

"You don't want to bump a player up based off a small sample size, and with North American players not playing, you don't want their spot on the draft list impacted because they can't play," Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke said. "You're always trying to gather information about these players that you put into your decision-making process. No one game should impact how you view a player, no differently than if a player had one bad game or great game in the middle of a season."

In any case, Askarov appears to be the real deal, a goaltending prospect very close to being NHL-ready. Maybe he's available at 13, but that also may be a bit unlikely.

With that in mind ...

Apart from Askarov, which prospects do you see the Canes eying? If they are gone, do you see a decent trade occurring? - @T_Mann30

If Askarov is indeed off the board by the time the Canes are set to pick at 13, there are a number of prospects who could potentially be available. We'll dive deeper into some of these names later in the week, but just to give you an idea of some possibilities ...

Up front there are players such as Jack Quinn, Anton Lundell, Dawson Mercer, Seth Jarvis and Hendrix Lapierre, who's rocking one of the best names on the draft board. On defense, there are a couple names in Kaiden Guhle and Braden Schneider who could also be available.

"We all know who is probably going 1-2-3. After that, the next five guys or so. Then you have a group of another seven or eight guys that we didn't think we'd ever be in the mix for. We feel good about it," Waddell said. "We've done our homework on all those players. You don't know who's going to be there, but if we do keep our pick, we know we're going to get a good player." And then again there is the question of a trade, which is certainly a possibility. Let's dig into that next.

Any chance the Canes try to package picks to either move up in the draft or trade for a current player? - @that_other_kdog

In the case that the Canes opt to move the 13th overall pick, I think it's more likely the team uses it to acquire a player already established in the league rather than trading up to snag a prospect who is a couple seasons away from being able to make an impact.

And, there might be a market to make a move.

"It's the busiest time after a season I've ever had in the history of being a general manager," Waddell said. "There haven't been any days that have gone by where I haven't talked to some GMs. There's a flat cap, and a lot of teams are up against the cap. We've got a little space, but not a lot of space. Then there's the economics. Let's face it. What happened this past year and the unknown going forward, there are a lot of teams looking to move money off their books. It's been an interesting time."

The Canes are in a position to compete now. It was a different landscape five years ago, and maybe the club would have seriously considered moving up if the option was there. Coming off back-to-back playoff appearances, though, the time is now for the Canes. If they so choose, that 13th overall pick could be quite the carrot to dangle on the open market.

When talking about the 13th overall pick, Waddell said it's a "huge asset, whether it's a player we take right now or perhaps even looking at trading the pick." Doing so could help the Canes bolster their roster in the immediate versus a few seasons down the line.

"Draft picks are becoming even more of a big chip because of the cap. It's turned that way the last few years," Waddell explained. "This year, even more so, we all know what the cap is going to be this year, next year and the next few years. Those draft picks become even bigger assets for you."

Even though general managers around the league will have to be pounding the phone lines as opposed to drafts of the past that allowed them to simply wander up to a table, it still could be a busy couple of days for the Canes.

Following the draft there is typically a prospect camp for the new picks to meet with the coaching staff and get on the ice. Given the current environment, is that still the plan? - @CaniacZach

Like most things in 2020, the Canes' annual Prospect Development Camp has been derailed by the global health crisis. There is a laundry list of hurdles making an in-person camp unfeasible, but the three chief issues are:

- League guidelines: I'm not even certain an in-person development camp would be permissible at the moment, given workout size restrictions and testing stipulations
- International travel: This could be a lasting issue that has ramifications into the 2020-21 NHL season



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- Timing: School is back in session, virtually or otherwise, and some European leagues have already begun their seasons

In lieu of Prospect Development Camp, the Canes plan to link up individually with their draft picks to introduce them to the organization. From a development standpoint, Bill

Burniston, the head of strength and conditioning, will connect with each prospect and their strength coaches.

Will the Hurricanes draft any prospects yes or no - @CanesProspects

I worked hard to confirm this and am confident to report that, yes, the Hurricanes will draft some prospects.

Draft Preview: Canes Prepared for Unique Virtual Experience

By Michael Smith

When the Carolina Hurricanes announce their 13th overall selection in the 2020 NHL Draft, there won't be a stage.

There won't be an arena.

There won't be a crowd.

There won't be a contingent of draft eligible prospects and their family and friends waiting and watching with an infectious anxiety from mere rows above the draft floor.

"I think the athletes being able to meet their teams is something that is unique to hockey. It's a shame that the athletes lose that immediate connection to their team," said Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke. "I know from when I've been in the building, you see the athlete's excitement and the parents' enjoyment and the emotion on their faces, it's something that never gets old. It's unfortunate because of the pandemic that the players and the families are going to lose that once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Absent this year is the pomp and circumstance that typically accompanies the league's annual search for tomorrow's stars - at least, relative to the halcyon days of a pre-COVID-19 world.

The stage for the 2020 NHL Draft, which will now take place Oct. 6-7, is a virtual peek inside each team's war room, of sorts.

The arena is a cyber collective, a "draft floor" connected via telecommunication lines.

The crowd will be tuned in from the couch.

The contingent of draft eligible prospects and their family and friends will be waiting and watching from around the globe, the anxious moments still very palpable.

In many respects, the 2020 NHL Draft will be (and already has been in the lead up to it) different, a familiar refrain for this calendar year.

But there is familiarity with the process, no matter the venue, no matter the method, no matter the circumstance.

Draft day, now a little more than three months later than expected, is years in the making for scouting departments and largely a lifetime in the making for those who hope to hear their names called.

That moment, even if it happens a little differently than anyone could have imagined even eight months prior, makes everything that came before all worth it.

"One of the things we've done right from the get-go was work with our marketing and PR department to find unique ways to build a connection right away with the athletes," Yorke said. "We want to ensure they're not losing out on the experience of being drafted had they been able to be in Montreal."

Yorke and the Canes' amateur scouting staff have been nimble in their planning process for months. When the 2019-20 season pause began on March 12, there were more questions than answers, so they had to be ready for any possible draft scenario.

"In the event the draft would change, whether it moved up or moved back, we just adjusted our calendars," Yorke said. "We built up a pretty big infrastructure in terms of utilizing technology, and I think it allowed us to run pretty seamlessly given the circumstances."

At all levels, sports and the world at large halted in mid-March. There were no in-person draft meetings. There was no Scouting Combine. Junior-league playoffs and the IIHF U18 World Championship, typically one of the last waypoints of player evaluation prior to the draft, were canceled.

So, the Canes had to scale an evaluation process typically reserved for injured players for the entire draft pool. They utilized Microsoft Teams to remain in constant communication. They sifted through video. They asked questions. They finalized a list.

"The one benefit from the pandemic in terms of the draft process is that it gave us more time. It gave us opportunities to take a breath, allow some of the emotions to subside and make better decisions," Yorke said. "When you're able to get more information and slow things down, you're able to make better decisions. I think our group did an excellent job with the circumstances. From a meetings and information-gathering perspective, we're as prepared if not more than any other draft year."

The Canes scouting staff sought to avoid paralysis by analysis as they delved into deeper conversations about prospects during the extra months of draft prep. Now, they're guarding against recency bias as they observe some draft-eligible players already back in action overseas.



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"That's the one advantage of having a draft late," President and General Manager Don Waddell said. "We've probably had the opportunity to see more video on players than ever before."

But just because there is added game film to analyze doesn't mean the Canes' master draft list is going to undergo a massive overhaul as the first round draws near.

"You don't want to bump a player up based off a small sample size, and with North American players not playing, you don't want their spot on the draft list impacted because they can't play," Yorke said. "You're always trying to gather information about these players that you put into your decision-making process. No one game should impact how you view a player, no differently than if a player had one bad game or great game in the middle of a season."

The Canes are set to select 13th overall in the first round, the slot that landed them defenseman Jake Bean in the 2016 NHL Draft. A wide swath of names could be available at No. 13 this year: forwards Jack Quinn, Anton Lundell, Dawson Mercer or Seth Jarvis, defensemen Kaiden Guhle or Braden Schneider or goaltender Iaroslav Askarov are a sampling of names in the mix.

The Canes could dangle the carrot of lucky number 13 on the open market, as well.

"We all know who is probably going 1-2-3. After that, the next five guys or so. Then you have a group of another seven or eight guys that we didn't think we'd ever be in the mix for. We feel good about it," Waddell said. "We've done our homework on all those players. You don't know who's going to be there, but if we do keep our pick, we know we're going to get a good player."

The Canes are then set to make seven additional picks in the following six rounds, but that's very much subject to change. Recall last year when the Canes took a league-high 10 picks to Vancouver and left with 12 prospects.

Hurricanes pick 13th in 2020 NHL Draft

By Cory Lavalette

The 2019-20 NHL season finally ended Monday night — more than three months after it was initially supposed to conclude — with the Tampa Bay Lightning claiming their second Stanley Cup. While next season's start is still not set in stone, the league will begin its 2020-21 calendar with the NHL Draft on Oct. 6-7.

Initially planned to be held in Montreal, the draft will be done virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic. That could minimize the usual wheeling and dealing, which usually takes place on the draft floor in plain view, though several teams have had more than six months to map out their offseason and others have salary cap issues to figure out.

The Carolina Hurricanes will enter the draft — which will begin on Tuesday, Oct. 6 at 7 p.m. with the first round and have Rounds 2-7 the following day — armed with eight draft

But, speaking of trades, will there be as much wheeling and dealing this year when general managers are stationed in 31 different cities instead of all packed onto the arena floor? Maybe. Maybe not.

"I've thought a lot about it. It's going to be way different. I like to work in person. I've made a lot of deals on draft day over my years," Waddell said. "You like to be able to read people and see what they're thinking. It's still going to be busy on draft day. We'll have multiple phone lines, your cell phone, obviously. But it is going to be way different. Just last year even, we moved a lot of picks around. It's easier to do if somebody comes says, 'Hey, I'll give you pick 48 and 58 for 32.' Now, you're going to be managing that on the phone. I'm anticipating still a lot of things to happen, but I think some things may go by without being able to be done because of not being in the same room."

The NHL Draft is unique in that every team is stationed in a centralized location. There's something to be said about the ease of being within earshot of other teams. General managers can wander from table to table or maybe even bump into each other in the hallway. Communication is rather simple and straightforward and sneaky all the same. "When you're on the draft floor, you have teams pretty close to one another, so you're trying to whisper, but there's crowd noise, and you may not have the clearest conversation," Yorke said. "Without those factors, we may be able to have deeper conversations and speak a little more freely."

The Canes' locker room at PNC Arena will serve as the team's draft headquarters, a fitting stage for a one-of-a-kind event. A U-shape of tables will line the room in front of decorated locker stalls. An empty nameplate slot awaits the Hurricane of tomorrow. Who will it be?

"We can be excited that there's going to be a player who has high impact," Yorke said. "I think the top 15 picks or so are very tight. Somebody that we're going to get is going to be able to have an impact for our organization for a long time."

picks, including the 13th overall pick and two selections in the second round.

While Carolina shipped out its own first (22nd overall) to the Rangers — who landed the first overall pick as well — in the trade that brought defenseman Brady Skjei to Raleigh, it will pick 13th thanks to the deal with cap-strapped Toronto during last year's draft that sent Patrick Marleau — who was subsequently bought out — and 2020 first- and seventh-round picks to the Hurricanes in exchange for a sixth-round pick.

Carolina also has the Rangers' second-round pick — 41st overall, from the Adam Fox trade — to go with their 53rd overall pick, along with one in the third (69th), fourth (115th) and fifth (140th) and two in the seventh (199th, 208th).



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Last year, the Hurricanes selected 12 players, led by first-round pick Ryan Suzuki and goaltender Pyotr Kochetkov and forward Jamieson Rees in the second round.

The name most tied to Carolina leading into the draft is another Russian goalie, Yaroslav Askarov. While Alexis Lafreniere of the QMJHL's Rimouski Oceanic — the same junior team that once featured Sidney Crosby — is the clear-cut No. 1 overall pick, no player has created more of a buzz than Askarov.

The 6-foot-3 Omsk native is the consensus top goalie in the draft and ranked the 10th-best player overall in the NSJ Top 100 NHL Draft Rankings.

Would Carolina try and solidify its uncertainties in net by picking Askarov at 13th overall?

Just one goalie was taken in the first round a year ago — Florida selected Spencer Knight, also with the No. 13 pick — and only six goalies total have gone in the opening round since 2009. Of those six, only Jack Campbell (11th overall in 2010) has gone higher than the 13th slot the Hurricanes will select in, and you have to go back to 2005 — when Montreal selected Carey Price fifth overall — for a goalie to go in the top 10.

Askarov might be worth it. The last two Russian goalies to go in the first round have proven to be worth the risk, with Tampa Bay taking Andrei Vasilevskiy with the 19th pick in 2012 and Washington choosing Ilya Samsonov at No. 22 in 2015.

While an 18-year-old goalie would still be years away from contributing at the NHL level, Askarov is already proving he can hold his own against men — in his first three KHL games this season, he boasts a 0.74 goals-against average and .974 save percentage with SKA St. Petersburg.

Of course, it's possible Askarov won't be there when Carolina picks at 13. So where could the Hurricanes go from there?

Owner Tom Dundon has said on the record that the team will not be selecting defensemen in the first round under his watch, so that means Carolina would be looking at forwards with their pick.

The Hurricanes could certainly use more help at right wing, and Jack Quinn (NSJ No. 11) fits the mold of a Carolina pick — an ultra-skilled and smart player who is competitive, though there are some concerns about his skating. Quinn had 89 points for the Ontario Hockey League's Ottawa 67's last season, including 52 goals, which ranked second in the OHL.

There's also Seth Jarvis (NSJ No. 15), who piled up 98 points — including 42 goals — in just 58 games for the

Western Hockey League's Portland Winterhawks last season. Like Quinn, he's skilled and smart, but he also adds high-end skating to his repertoire. Another hard-working player, Jarvis makes up for his 5-foot-10 frame with his compete level.

And just in case Dundon was throwing up a smokescreen, there's defenseman Jake Sanderson (NSJ No. 9), whose father, Geoff, starred for the Hartford Whalers in the 1990s. Sanderson, who played for the U.S. National Team Development Program, is a smooth-skating and rangy defender who fits the mold of a Carolina defenseman.

Draft Prospect spotlight Yaroslav Askarov, G

6'3, 176 pounds • SKA St. Petersburg (KHL)

The clear-cut top goalie in the draft, Askarov combines size and athleticism with the confidence needed to become a No. 1 goalie.

NSJ Rank: 10 (No. 1 goalie)

What they're saying

The Hockey News: "One of the best goaltending prospects in years."

Corey Pronman, The Athletic: "I think he will become an upper-echelon goalie in the NHL."

Craig Button, TSN: "He has completely dominated his age group time and time again."

Jack Quinn, RW

6', 179 pounds • Ottawa 67's (OHL)

Quinn's big numbers could be skewed by the fact he's the oldest player in this year's draft who is eligible for the first time. Still, scoring 50-plus goals as an 18-year-old is impressive.

NSJ Rank: 11

What they're saying

The Hockey News: "Quinn evolved into one of the OHL's deadliest attackers."

Corey Pronman, The Athletic: "A super skilled and smart player who scored a lot of goals around the net."

Craig Button, TSN: "I think he's the best goal scorer available in the 2020 NHL Draft."

Seth Jarvis, C/RW

5'9½, 179 pounds • Portland Winterhawks (WHL)

A hard-working and intelligent player, Jarvis is small by old NHL standards but fits the current era by being elusive and hard to hit — and scoring a ton.

NSJ Rank: 15

What they're saying

The Hockey News: "He uses his smarts to avoid putting himself in a position to take a beating."

Corey Pronman, The Athletic: "The high-end pace of his game is what makes him so dangerous and will translate to higher levels."

Craig Button, TSN: "I think he's going to be a real top-end producer in the National Hockey League."



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THE ATHLETIC

Bag of Jerks: Goaltending decisions and favorite Dougie Hamilton interaction

By Sara Civian

Who are the Hurricanes going to target with their first-round draft pick? Which free agency rumor makes the most sense? How should you, as a fan, feel about the John Forslund situation?

October's Bag of Jerks has a little something for everyone.

Note: Questions edited for clarity and style.

Any goalies that the Canes are looking at acquiring for next season or will they stay with the same duo as this past season? — DJ N.

It could go either way. They're certainly listening to the calls they're getting about James Reimer, whose bonus is now off the books. There are tons of options on this goalie market whether it's via trade or signing. I detailed the ones that would make the most sense for the Canes last week. It's tough to say if anything will *actually* happen, though, as is the nature of this time of year. All we know is the Canes have options and they're listening.

You do an amazing job covering the team. Any way the team trades Dougie Hamilton? — T R.

Thank you, T R! The only way I could see the team trading Hamilton is if it's months and months down the line and the two sides can't agree on an extension, and I seriously doubt that will happen. The Canes have some time, as his contract isn't up until the end of the 2020-21 season, so they're scoping out the unique, post-COVID-19 market as much as they can before they start talking to Hamilton. I'm sure Hamilton's camp is doing the same thing.

Keep your eye on Alex Pietrangelo's upcoming negotiations. "We haven't had any talks yet, we're trying to see what happens with the marketplace this summer," Don Waddell said Thursday. "Free agency is just over a week away, we'll see how things play out. We know we are dealing with a flat cap for the next few years, which is always going to be a challenge. My belief is that Dougie wants to stay here and be here, it's just a matter of finding what is the value of a player post-COVID — we knew what the value was maybe pre-COVID — but now with revenues and salary cap being the way they are, that's something we'll just have to figure out." The Canes have a reputation for trading players in contract years instead of letting them walk (do Jeff Skinner and/or Justin Faulk ring a bell?) but I don't think this applies to Hamilton. The Hurricanes are now in a Cup window and he's a gigantic reason for that.

Number one piece of dating advice for guys that are ugly? — Alex H.

Be funny. And lower your expectations. Unfortunately, life isn't an Adam Sandler movie.

If J. Staal's offensive contributions continue to decline/he continues to have so many slumps, doesn't it make sense to keep him off the PP going forward? — Pat C.

Yes, Pat. It does.

Who do you see as a key veteran addition if J Willy decides to hang it up and why is it a Patrick Marleau? — Howard H.

Haha, tip of the hat to Hurricanes legend Patrick Marleau. I think Jordan Staal is considered a veteran at this point, no? Perhaps his old friend Marc-Andre Fleury could provide some of that wisdom and contribute in net at the same time.

A lot of chatter on top line scorers and a goalie, but production from the bottom six typically is key to a title run. What's your opinion on who stays and who they need to add to those spots to get more goals from this area of the roster? — Todd H.

You're absolutely right, Todd, and I was thinking about this a few days ago when the Lightning won the Cup. I feel like this is a Catch-22 in a way, though. If you stack your team with a solid core, those players that are on the fringe of a top six role become productive bottom six players. This is why it felt like puzzle pieces falling into place when the Canes acquired Vincent Trocheck. He and his line were super snakebitten throughout Round 1, but based on the way they played I am willing to believe it was a fluke. I would say the Canes need to stay focused on the big picture right now and the rest will fall into place.

Favorite Dougie interaction? — Kevin C.

There are quite a few — I've really enjoyed covering Dougie Hamilton. One interaction stands out for how thoughtful it was.

Dougie came up to me with a tray of like 4,000 mini cannolis after a game in Boston.

He said, "Hey, do you want a cannoli?"

I'm like, "Man, I don't know, gotta watch the sugar on the weekdays."

He's like, "Are you sure? It's from Mike's!"

I remembered how we'd talked about how much we both love Mike's Pastry a few weeks prior.

I accepted the cannoli.

I know I'm stealing this question from Alex (@FutureCanes), but WHEN THE HECK ARE THE CANES GONNA RE-SIGN (HAYDN) FLEURY?! — Matthew N.

I do enjoy Alex's daily posts about this. Lucky for you two we finally have an update on both Hurricanes RFAs, Haydn Fleury and Warren Foegele, after talking to Waddell on Thursday.

"We're in discussions with their representation on a daily basis," he said. "I totally feel that one way or another we'll get those both done."



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If next season still has a lot of questions, how might that affect the Canes' approach to the offseason? I would think caution and adding no significant new contracts.

— Peter W.

That's basically it.

"The last 10 days, everybody is out there, very actively trying to see what's available, where they can exchange pieces for their teams," Waddell said. "I really expect it to continue to be busy. I've always said if there's something we can do to upgrade our hockey club to give us a better chance of taking that next step, we've got to look at that ... you look at what the cap is, but now you're looking at the cash. We'll get our restricted guys sign then we're within \$3 or \$4 million of the cap already. I can tell you, as much as we want to upgrade certain positions, we don't have that much cap space, then coinciding with cash, if we can find a way to save some of that cash I know my owner Tom Dundon will be very appreciative of that."

So expect Foegele and Fleury signings, then expect any major upgrades to come via trade, if at all.

Which goalie should the Canes target this offseason and why is it Kuemper or Markstrom? — Jack H.

As I wrote last week, I'd agree Arizona's Darcy Kuemper is the best option for the Hurricanes, all things considered. The Coyotes need cheap players, Reimer probably has the best cost-to-ability ratio on the current market (mind you, this market revolves around cash more than ever, and his bonus was just paid). The Canes could very feasibly trade Reimer and someone like Niederreiter or Dzingel to shed some cap space in return for Kuemper, a top 10 goalie if you ask me. After Waddell's remarks, Markstrom makes less sense.

Do you think the Hurricanes will pursue Markstrom? — Jim B.

No, Jim Beam.

I am not advocating for this, but what would it take for the team to trade Jaccob Slavin? — David D.

This is a fun little exercise, just because Slavin is so extremely off limits. The only thing I could think of isn't even about the return — it's Slavin being involved in some sort of scandal. I'm laughing so hard because that would literally never happen.

If you were a Hurricanes fan, Sara, how would you feel about the state of the hockey team both now and moving forward? — Spencer P.

This is a great question, because I've noticed how some recent on-ice accomplishments have been at times overshadowed by off-ice franchise politics. The entire narrative of the Carolina Hurricanes and how the team is perceived by outside media, NHL employees and fans has been fascinating to me from Day 1 on the job.

I have learned that lazy and/or uninformed journalists tend to parrot this narrative because it's so easy to do without getting caught, but I've also learned a lot about the reality of running a small-market franchise. There are some sacrifices you have to make. Everything is harder.

In a way, the upcoming free agency period will be an equalizer because cash will matter. You might realize how impressive some moves the Canes have made in the past are now when more franchises have to start thinking like them.

Overall, if I were a fan of this team with the internal knowledge that I have, I would feel confident that as a whole, they're doing the best they can with what they have. No one wanted to see John Forslund go, but the truth is the Hurricanes cannot simultaneously afford to be a Stanley Cup contender and employ the best play-by-play guy on the market right now. Which would you prefer?

Can you please give us the full history of the Svech brothers going boating with Tripp? Nothing else in hockey matters anymore in comparison. — David Z.

I sure can. How would y'all feel about a Round 2?

Hurricanes 2020-21 depth chart 1.0: Pre-free agency

By Sara Civian

It's highly unlikely that the Hurricanes' upcoming free agency period will be anywhere near as hectic as last season. But between The Offer Sheet, relatively coveted free agent signings then the eventful midseason trade deadline, the Hurricanes have proved they are no longer afraid to spend money to improve the roster.

Turning possibilities into reality meant actually spending money, though, so the Canes are cutting it closer than usual on the cap these days. Ahead of 2020 free agency, they've committed to a 17-man roster of 10 forwards, five defensemen and two goalies. CapFriendly has their projected cap space at \$7,782,261.

GM and president Don Waddell has said he and the front office want to avoid making changes for the sake of change, and the Lightning just reminded us why patience is key. But if

there is potential to improve the roster without putting future negotiations with Andrei Svechnikov and/or Dougie Hamilton in danger, the Canes just might go for it, especially in net.

So it's time for a refresher of the depth chart as it currently stands, before an offseason that'll favor mostly minor tweaks over wholesale change. Maybe predicting the lines as we go will help us realize what needs the most tweaking, so let's think out loud a little bit and find the intersection of depth chart and complete roster prediction.

First line

Andrei Svechnikov (\$925,000) – **Sebastian Aho** (\$8.45 million) – **Teuvo Teravainen** (\$5.4 million)

All good here and I'd be shocked if the Canes trade any of these three. First-line Svech finally became a consistent reality in the middle of last season and this line dominated.



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Head coach Rod Brind'Amour broke up the band ahead of Game 3 in Round 1 in an attempt to create some depth scoring against the Bruins, but I'd assume from here on out we'll see the SAT line more often than not.

Second line

Nino Niederreiter (\$5.25 million) / **Ryan Dzingel** (\$3.37 million) / **Potential trade acquisition or free agent – Vincent Trocheck** (\$4.75 million) – **Martin Necas** (\$863,333)

Here's where you wonder if the Canes will shop Niederreiter around to save some money or as part of a package for a goaltender and insert Dzingel in his place. Niederreiter has been awesome at times in his Canes tenure, is still a huge upgrade from Victor Rask, and factored in significantly to their return to the playoffs in 2018-19. But this season he regressed a bit (understandably) to a 11-18-29 statline and a minus-3 in 67 games. Dzingel had some rough patches but ended up with 8-21-29 and a plus-3 in three fewer games.

We'll also recall Niederreiter's tendency to rack up stick penalties. He was second on the Canes with 42 PIMs. Niederreiter is still a solid player and can provide secondary goal-scoring when he's hot — that's exactly why he was so important to the Canes when they were breaking the curse of the snakebites in 2019. You know what team currently has a mean curse of the snakebites? The same team that could be looking to trade a certain goalie.

It's just as possible the Canes will look to include Dzingel in a package, and either player could add something to the right team.

Third line

Brock McGinn (\$2.1 million) – **Jordan Staal** (\$6 million) – **Dzingel / Jordan Martinook** (\$2 million)

In retrospect, Brind'Amour sending Martinook to the first line after Svechnikov got hurt in the playoffs might've been one of his best moves so far as a head coach. He provided a spark, and ended up with two goals and an assist in eight playoff games — only Svechnikov, Aho and Teravainen scored more goals than him. He proved he can thrive anywhere in the lineup when healthy. You don't want to test the limits on that too much, but if the Canes were to trade either Niederreiter or Dzingel they know Martinook can slot in wherever. It almost makes more sense to put him on this checking line if the Canes want it to be a true checking line, anyway.

(Disclaimer: Yes, I'm assuming Justin Williams will retire, or at least he won't be on the Hurricanes opening night roster. I doubt he has even made a decision about his future at this point, but he's a free agent regardless. It makes more sense to consider a depth chart without him at this the time.)

Fourth line

Warren Foegele (RFA) – **Morgan Geekie** (\$763,333)/**Martinook/Mystery man** – **Niederreiter/Martinook/Dzingel/Geekie/Mystery man**

There's a case to be made for the Canes just standing pat with their forward group, especially if Williams doesn't return.

It gives them options instead of forcing a hand. They don't have many forward prospects suitable to jump on an NHL first line in a matter of a few months. Ryan Suzuki and Dominik Bokk are too young and talented to be thrust into a situation like this, and the Canes don't have the abundance of folks like Patrick Brown, Greg McKegg, Aleksii Saarela, Julien Gauthier and Lucas Wallmark ready to jump into the NHL like they once did. That's part of turning potential into reality.

That said, Clark Bishop (RFA) still exists. He, David Cotton and Steven Lorentz (RFA) are a few Hurricanes prospects in the AHL that could make sense on an NHL fourth line. But you look at a contending team like the Lightning and you'll find Patrick Maroon on the fourth line — and that's without Steven Stamkos. It happens, but you never want to bank on fringe prospects just working out if you're trying to win the Cup.

Defense

First pairing

Jacob Slavin (\$5.3 million) – **Dougie Hamilton** (\$5.75 million)

Slavin isn't going anywhere period, and it is extremely unlikely the Hurricanes would deal Hamilton before the start of next season. And I'm not saying that to imply they're going to be trading him eventually — both sides want to get a deal done.

Second pairing

Jake Gardiner (\$4.05 million)/**Brady Skjei** (\$5.25 million)/**Brett Pesce** (\$4.025 million)

I could totally see the Hurricanes moving either Gardiner or Skjei to make some room for future contracts or in a package for a goalie/a little sumptin' sumptin' up front. One of them will probably stay and end up in the 2L slot, though.

Third pairing

Haydn Fleury (RFA)/**Gardiner/Skjei** – **Jake Bean** (\$863,333) /**Fleury**

The Hurricanes finally bet on Fleury as this season went on and look what happened: one of the strongest postseason performances of any Hurricane on both sides of the ice. Maybe that'll set a precedent and they'll loosen the reins on much-anticipated prospect Bean, or maybe they'll keep both Gardiner and Skjei. Either way, the Canes continue to deal from a position of power when it comes to their blue line.

Goaltending

Petr Mrazek (\$3.125 million)

Mystery man (?)

If you'd like a full rundown of potential goalie targets and how the Hurricanes might snag them, [click here](#). But the number of suitors calling the Hurricanes for James Reimer based on his salary/ability ratio is high enough for me to believe there's a real chance the Hurricanes could send him in a package to a cap-troubled team for a stellar return. Reimer's bonus being off the books is one of the biggest (and only) flexes of this offseason, so I'm even more inclined to believe the Canes will use it to their advantage.



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AP ASSOCIATED PRESS

Carolina Hurricanes discuss extension with Andrei Svechnikov

RALEIGH, N.C. -- The Carolina Hurricanes are in contract extension talks with 20-year-old winger Andrei Svechnikov, president and general manager Don Waddell said Thursday.

The No. 2 overall draft pick from 2018 has one year left on his entry-level deal before becoming a restricted free agent. Waddell said Thursday the team is "open-minded" about the potential structure of an extension, possibly including a short-term "bridge" deal due to economic uncertainty from the coronavirus pandemic, before pursuing a longer-term agreement later.

Waddell said there is no timetable, though he has "no doubt" the Hurricanes will sign Svechnikov "at some point to some kind of extension."

Svechnikov played alongside Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen on Carolina's top line, scoring 24 goals and 37 assists in the pandemic-shortened regular season. He also had the first postseason hat trick in franchise history during the Hurricanes' win against the New York Rangers in a Stanley Cup qualifier series.

"We obviously want Andrei here," Waddell said.

Waddell also said he expects the team eventually will reach deals with forward Warren Foegele and defenseman Haydn Fleury. Both are restricted free agents.

SportScan

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

The Athletic / The top 10 players NHL teams should target with an offer sheet this offseason

By Dom Luszczyszyn and James Mirtle Oct 4, 2020

Yes, we know offer sheets are rare.

We also know they're usually matched by the team that has the player who signs one.

But 2020 is not a normal year. And this won't be a normal offseason.

If ever there was a free-agency period to get creative and throw around some outsized offers to restricted free agents, this is the one, according to executives around the NHL. As much as a third of the league is in cap hell, and another large group of teams will be cutting payroll.

With the likelihood of fans being in buildings next season uncertain (at best), which will dramatically affect revenue projections, it's possible skittish owners are nervous about matching large offers to young players.

For an in-depth primer on the value of players versus the picks you have to give up in an offer sheet, see Dom's story on offer sheets from last year.

And, as a reminder, this is the updated offer-sheet compensation this year:

Mirtle: So I'll be gracious, Dom, and give you the first choice. Assuming you're a team with all of your picks and a lot of cap space, whom do you target with an offer sheet and how high do you go?

The goal here, obviously, will be to get the player, so we have to at least make the other team uncomfortable with keeping its player.

Luszczyszyn: I think before even making a team uncomfortable with a price, it's best to find a team that's already very uncomfortable due to its lack of space. There are two very vulnerable teams right now, both of which have a trio of options worth looking into.

I'll start with the team tighter to the cap and go after Tampa Bay's Anthony Cirelli. The Lightning have very limited space at just \$5.33 million and also have to find a way to sign Mikhail Sergachev and Erik Cernak. Squeezing everyone in will be very difficult, and throwing a lucrative offer sheet in the mix feels like a great way to put pressure on the team and make it vulnerable to at least losing one of those three.

I'm going after Cirelli because he's arguably the most valuable of the three, a future Selke winner who plays a complete 200-foot game and still has room to grow at age 22. Over the next five seasons, he should be able to play at a top-line rate worth between 2 and 2.5 wins per season, a valuation that would be worth over \$8 million on the open market.

I don't think it'll take that much to get him, and I imagine Tampa Bay doesn't want to pay him more than Brayden Point's \$6.75 million cap hit. An offer sheet of \$6.5 million per for five years might be enough and costs only a first-round and a third-round pick, and I'd probably be comfortable pushing that to as high as \$7.5 million. It would be below Cirelli's total projected value, and in terms of draft pick capital, a first, second and third only equate to 8.3 wins on average over the next seven seasons — about half of Cirelli's projected value over the same time.

1. Anthony Cirelli: \$7.25 million times five years

Mirtle: The Lightning RFAs are all going to be popular choices here. They really don't have a lot of bad money to move out, but at least they can recoup assets for whoever has to go. But maybe their decisions on that front get even harder if a team bumps up what those RFAs are going to get.



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Certainly, a lot of executives had good looks at their young players during the playoff run.

I'm going to pivot to another team and another position. One player I've really grown to admire the past couple of years is Ryan Pullock, who has been a big part of the Islanders turning things around under Barry Trotz.

He turns 26 years old Tuesday, plays huge minutes and is that coveted (and rare) right shot on the back end. If he was a UFA instead of an RFA, he would be right at the top of the board with Alex Pietrangelo as someone about to get paid big — likely up in the \$7 million range.

I feel like the Islanders are going to do everything in their power to keep him, but unlike the Lightning, they have a lot of bad money that is going to be hard to move in this environment. If they can push out Andrew Ladd and Johnny Boychuk's contracts, maybe they're OK, but the kind of offer I'm about to throw at Pullock at least makes them uncomfortable.

Giving up a first and a third for him is a no-brainer. And if the Islanders match it, you have two other desirable offer sheet candidates to go after on that roster.

2. Ryan Pullock: \$6.54 million times five years

Luszczyszyn: The Islanders were the other team I was thinking about, and Pullock would've been my top target. The Islanders have about \$9 million to play with, and you have to figure a lot of that will be reserved for Mathew Barzal, who is probably the team's top priority. I imagine getting him with an offer sheet would be unlikely, but that's what makes an offer sheet on Pullock so enticing. And it's why my third choice is another player on the team's blue line, Devon Toews.

Toews is probably the Islanders' best puck mover on the back end, a player who has done well in secondary matchups and drives play at both ends of the ice. His entry and exit numbers are solid, and he doesn't give up the blue line easily. My model is really high on him, projecting him to provide top-pairing value for the foreseeable future. Whether he can play the toughs remains to be seen, but there's value for a guy who can crush second-pairing minutes in the Jake Gardiner, Jeff Petry, Torey Krug mould. I imagine Pullock and Barzal will be big priorities, allowing Toews to potentially slip through the cracks.

The question is whether the third-tier offer sheet, the one where a second-round pick is the only compensation, will be enough. A second-round pick is nothing for a player like Toews, but I wonder if \$4.36 million is enough to get it done. With the team's space, it's probably enough to make the Islanders sweat a little, but if we want the player, we might have to go a little higher. Toews should out-perform average first- and third-round picks, and that might make the Islanders think a little harder about taking the draft picks.

3. Devon Toews: \$5 million times five years

Mirtle: OK, Islanders fans are likely losing it at this point. So I'll go with a player from their second-favorite team ... the Maple Leafs.

Toronto has around \$3.5 million in cap space after signing their RFAs to relatively cheap contracts. I have their top two key ones penciled in for a combined \$3 million at this point.

The money beyond that they desperately want to spend on the blue line.

But what if a team that desperately needs an infusion of talent and has a lot of cap space throws that much at someone like Ilya Mikheyev alone? To match an offer like that, the Leafs would have to give up on a strong addition on the blue line or move out another salary elsewhere.

Given how much money they have tied up in their top four forwards, there aren't exactly a ton of options. You might have a decent chance of getting someone like Mikheyev if you gamble on his strong 39-game audition as a rookie as a sign that he can regularly contribute to a good team's top six.

It's not a bad bet. And it might cost you only a second-round pick.

4. Ilya Mikheyev: \$3.2 million times three years

Luszczyszyn: Similar to the Toews situation on Long Island, Erik Cernak looks like he has the potential to slip through the cracks in Tampa Bay with Cirelli and Sergechev being top priorities. Cernak is a solid and dependable top-four defender, a right shot with some edge. He's what front offices dream of, and it doesn't seem like Tampa Bay can reasonably afford his worth.

Cernak took a step back in his sophomore season, but the 23-year-old was extremely impressive in his rookie season, playing tough minutes on the team's shutdown pair. He has room to grow, and his best asset is his defensive acumen, which is usually not something teams pony up big money to acquire. He's a solid top-four defender, and on the open market, a player of his calibre is worth around \$4.5 million. We can give him something close to that and have to give up only a second-round pick in the process. That's an easy trade to make.

5. Erik Cernak: \$4.36 million times four years

Mirtle: We're heavy on top performers from the playoffs here, although they're mostly coming from the Lightning and Islanders.

I'm going to pick on the Stars now. Dallas has a tough combination of some uncertain finances for ownership, a tight cap situation and three good young forwards hitting restricted free agency at the same time: Radek Faksa, Roope Hintz and Denis Gurianov.

All three are fine choices for this exercise, but I'll go with Hintz, who was on pace for a 26-goal sophomore season over 82 games and was extremely impressive at both ends of the ice in the playoffs.

The fact he is only 23 and has a lot of room to improve means he should be able to live up to this offer, too. And if you whiff on Hintz, you have two other Stars to think about offering similar money. There's no way Dallas can pay them all this well.

6. Roope Hintz: \$4.36 million times three years

Luszczyszyn: He's the best player on this list, but those guys are generally very hard to pry away. No matter how tight the Islanders are, they'll do whatever it takes to keep their franchise center. Having said that, you have to at least try, right?

Mathew Barzal is 100 percent worth a big-money deal, a deal richer than the Islanders' current cap space allows, and the key to any offer sheet is putting pressure on that number, especially with the Islanders having two other key RFAs to sign.

Barzal is as dynamic as they come in this league, an absolutely elite puck handler with game-breaking speed. Those types are hard to come by, and my model believes he'll be worth \$9 million over his next seven seasons. That might be conservative, too, as it projects Barzal as he is on a low-scoring Islanders team. On a team with more offensive freedom and weapons, he could really explode and be the type of player worth eight figures. We saw that exact player in his rookie season.

Given Brayden Point, Sebastian Aho, Mikko Rantanen, Matthew Tkachuk and Patrik Laine all went for under \$9 million, offering Barzal that number might entice him and might be too much for the Islanders to handle given their precarious situation. Given that puts a team in the sixth compensation tier, you can also add an extra year (offer sheet compensation is decided by annual average over five years or fewer) to the offer sheet all the way up to \$9.09 million.

Barzal projects to provide 17 wins over the next seven seasons, a little more than the 14 wins expected on average from a first, first, second and third, so the large pick haul isn't a huge concern, either. He's worth it.

7. Mathew Barzal: \$9.09 million times six years

Mirtle: Alex Pietrangelo gets overlooked on a stacked St. Louis team, but one of the reasons I could see the Blues feeling OK about moving on from him at a big number is that Vince Dunn is blossoming into a very good player.

But what if he's suddenly a lot more expensive than anticipated? And what if the offer sheet lands after the Blues have committed \$8.5 million to Pietrangelo long term and have to shed payroll to make things work?



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Dunn hasn't had to handle difficult assignments yet for St. Louis — he averaged only 16 minutes ice time a game this season — so you're making a bit of a bet here that he's ready for that. But maybe that makes the Blues reluctant to pay up top-four money right away when they're already committed cap-wise to a strong blueline group.

It's worth a chance, given it would cost you only a second-round pick.

8. Vince Dunn: \$4.36 million times three years

Luszczyszyn: Victor Hedman makes \$7.875 million per year, and Ryan McDonagh makes \$6.75 million. I doubt the Lightning want a third left-shot defender in that ballpark, but that's what Mikhail Sergachev is worth. With Cirelli and Cernak as other targets, it feels unlikely the team can keep all three RFAs.

Now, no one is saying Sergachev should be making that much as an RFA. As with everyone else on this list, the key to an offer sheet is knowing RFA prices are generally depressed and there's plenty of room to go over while still having a positive-value deal. Sergachev is a strong point producer with excellent possession impacts at both ends of the ice. My model believes that he already provides No. 1 defenseman value and could be borderline elite through his prime, especially as he earns bigger minutes. That's worth a big deal, and anything under \$8.5 million should be OK. That might seem insane, but that's the monetary value a two-win defenseman provides.

Now, there's one caveat here with Sergachev: whether he can handle top-of-the-lineup minutes. With the other big-ticket guys, you know they can because they already have. Not so with Sergachev, who has been buried on Tampa's depth chart. Given his elite results to date in easier minutes, he seems like a strong candidate to do well in a bigger role, especially with his ability to move the puck up ice. He's worth the bet.

Sergachev projects to be worth just over 14 wins over the next seven seasons, six more than a first, second and third on average, which is the compensation tier teams should be targeting. As with Barzal, teams can add an extra year to stay in that tier, all the way up to \$7.28 million per year.

9. Mikhail Sergachev: \$7.28 million times six years

Mirtle: I originally had Tristan Jarry in this spot, but he went and signed an extension with the Penguins, missing out on the generous offer sheet we were going to throw his way to make the Penguins uncomfortable. Your loss, Tristan.

Instead, I'll go with another depth player from a cap-strapped team: Travis Dermott. The Leafs are trying to add another defenseman on the right side via trade or free agency that will push Dermott, Mikko Lehtonen and Rasmus Sandin down the depth chart, which may well make one of them expendable in a trade.

If an offer sheet like this comes through for Dermott, who doesn't have arbitration rights and is likely looking at a contract of half this value without an offer sheet, the Leafs might well be forced to just let him walk.

The jury is out on how good Dermott will be, but he's only 23 years old and, at minimum, can be a strong third-pair option. And we're not exactly making a huge commitment here. If you have cap space and a need on defense, why not make things even more difficult for Toronto?

10. Travis Dermott: \$2.5 million times two years

Honorable mentions (players not in our top 10): Dominik Kubalik, Max Domi, Jake DeBrusk, Alexandar Georgiev, Vladislav Gavrikov

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Sportsnet.ca / A question for each NHL team heading into busy draft, free agency week

Rory Boylen | October 4, 2020, 2:11 PM

Brace yourself, hockey fans. This could be one of the more wild weeks of off-season action in some time.

One year after the 2019-20 season began, the off-season is just getting started. But rather than a gradual build up to all the big events, this year the draft and free agency will all happen in the same week. Round 1 of the draft will open on Tuesday night, with Rounds 2-7 to follow Wednesday morning/afternoon. On Friday, free agency opens with Taylor Hall, Alex Pietrangelo and the like still unsigned.

The salary cap remains flat at \$81.5 million, which is creating more headaches for GMs who planned their rosters for a rising cap picture. So, while the draft and free agency are big events themselves, the trade market will energize it as all sorts of moves, big and small, are expected in the coming days.

It's gonna be a heck of a ride.

So while we prepare for what should be a wildly busy week, here is one question each team is facing in an off-season like no other.

Watch Round 1 of the NHL Draft on Sportsnet and SN NOW beginning at 7 p.m. ET/4 p.m. PT on Tuesday, Oct. 6. Then catch Rounds 2-7 on SN1 and SN NOW starting at from 11:30 a.m. ET/8:30 a.m. PT on Wednesday, Oct. 7.

Anaheim Ducks: Will they trade the sixth overall pick?

"It depends who's still there," Martin Madden, Anaheim's director of amateur scouting, told The Athletic. "That top 12 is attractive from start to finish. If we think we can maximize it by moving up or moving down, we will. I don't think we're married to six at all, actually."

The Ducks need more young players for a brighter future, but it's not as though the cupboards are bare. Youngsters Sam Steel, Max Jones and Troy Terry saw more time in the NHL this past season. Max Comtois and Isac Lundestrom will push for more of a look in 2020-21. They're all still trying to hit as permanent top-two-line forwards. But a top six pick in a deep draft that has lots of scoring forwards at the top? That's going to be hard to turn away from since the Ducks need more scoring as it is. On top of their own first-rounder, Anaheim also holds Boston's late in the round.

Arizona Coyotes: Will Oliver Ekman-Larsson get traded?

Bill Armstrong takes over in the GM chair from John Chayka, who left the team prior to the return to play, and he could start taking the Coyotes in a new direction. With little cap space to work with, Armstrong bought out Michael Grabner on Saturday, but that still leaves just \$3.6 million in wiggle room. Taylor Hall, who Chayka moved a first-rounder for, is most likely gone to free agency and since the NHL fined the Coyotes another first-rounder and a second for violating scouting combine policy, Armstrong will need to think about acquiring new picks. Oliver Ekman-Larsson's name has been heating up in the rumour mill, with Vancouver and Boston involved — two teams without first-rounders in 2020.

"You've got some really good younger players that are just coming into their own and at the same time you've got some older players who are still producing, but creeping up in age," Armstrong said on Hockey Central. "We have to decipher how to create some assets because before me the regime lost some draft picks because of some NHL fines that were levied against us. So there's a creative way we have to go and acquire assets to stay in the game and make sure we're still bringing players in, whether it's college free agents, European free agents or through the draft, there's no excuses."

Boston Bruins: Will Torey Krug leave and, if he does, who will replace him?

We'd need to see the Bruins tail off before believing a window was truly closed on this team, but questions about how much longer they can sustain their success are beginning to become real. Torey Krug can be a UFA as of Friday and indicated he wouldn't take a shorter term or less money to make it work easily in Boston. Jake DeBrusk and Matt Grzelcyk are RFAs and the Bruins still have to ink Zdeno Chara to a short-term



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extension — all with \$14.4 million in cap room. They've been connected to Ekman-Larsson, whose full cap hit is a hefty \$8.25 million for another seven years. We don't know what the cap will do in coming years, but Tuukka Rask is a year away from becoming a UFA, and Patrice Bergeron is two years away. Krug would leave a big hole that wouldn't easily be filled under budget and with longer-term considerations for their best, but ageing, players.

Buffalo Sabres: What is the plan to move forward?

It's been nine straight playoff misses in Buffalo and a few high draft picks haven't led to much of a sniff of the playoffs. Jack Eichel is locked in as the forward star, Rasmus Dahlin is making lots of progress as a defenceman picked No. 1 overall, but depth to support them is lacking. So what will new GM Kevyn Adams do to bring meaningful progress in the standings?

He's started by acquiring Eric Staal to play behind Eichel at 2C, but there's a lot more work to do here. With only 11 players signed to the pro roster, Buffalo has \$33.6 million in cap space to work with. How many of their own RFAs will even be qualified? Will they be players in UFA? How aggressive will Adams pursue trades? The ending to this season was again a miserable one for Buffalo, so it's paramount to at least be in the running late into 2020-21. If that doesn't happen, dreaded Eichel trade rumours are bound to follow.

Calgary Flames: How much does GM Brad Treliving think he needs to change?

When Treliving feels change is necessary, he's not shy to make it happen. After two straight first-round exits, the core is now being questioned and Johnny Gaudreau is the face of that. Fresh off elimination, Gaudreau was the centre of trade speculation and it'd be better to trade someone with two years left on their contract instead of one. What about Sean Monahan? Elias Lindholm? Dare we say Mark Giordano?

The Flames have a clear need on the blue line, where only four players are signed as TJ Brodie and Travis Hamonic prepare for free agency. The goalie situation must be resolved too, as Cam Talbot is also a UFA after taking the crease from David Rittich, who remains under contract. So, instead of radically changing a group that hasn't broken through in the playoffs, could Treliving instead use his \$16.9 million in cap room to add to it? Jacob Markstrom, anyone?

"The idea we're going to blow it up doesn't make sense to me," Treliving told Sportsnet's Eric Francis. "Certainly we're open to change, but what is that? You don't want to be different and worse. If you're going to be different you want to be better."

Carolina Hurricanes: Can they find an upgrade in net?

Carolina has long had one of the top blue lines in the game and with the ascension of Andrei Svechnikov and Sebastian Aho, the offence is coming along to elite levels, too. But Carolina was 26th in regular season 5-on-5 save percentage and it may be time to seek out an upgrade on Petr Mrazek and James Reimer, who are both under contract for another season. With so many goalies available (or potentially available) on the UFA market and through trade, this is a buyer's market that should help Carolina upgrade at its most needy spot.

Chicago Blackhawks: Will Corey Crawford return and, if so, will he be the clear No. 1?

Defence is a big weakness for the Hawks so it's either rebuild the blue line, or invest in goaltending (and maybe a bit of both). Long-time starter Corey Crawford is a UFA, leaving only Collin Delia under contract, and Malcolm Subban an arbitration eligible RFA. Chicago has \$7.8 million in cap space and Calder finalist Dominik Kubalik still needs a new contract. Change is inevitable, so buyouts or trades involving their defencemen is a possibility to create a bit more room on the books. Crawford, theoretically, could be a low-cost keep, but would the Hawks acquire another goalie to make a 1A/1B combination? They did it a year ago with Lehner.

Colorado Avalanche: How big do they go for an all-in push to the Stanley Cup?

The Avs are a rare breed this off-season: a contender with cap space — \$22.3 million to be exact. One year from now Gabriel Landeskog and Cale Makar will need new, and likely big-money, extensions. In a recent 31 Thoughts column, Elliotte Friedman noted this was an "all-in" year for the Avs. In such strange times to be a free agent, would a short-term, big-money offer from Colorado, and a shot at the Cup, be attractive? Taylor Hall is a candidate to add since the Avs need a scoring winger, but how big could this get? And after injuries decimated them in net in the playoffs, when Pavel Francouz and Michael Hutchinson were forced in and struggled, will Joe Sakic go after an experienced netminder (say, Henrik Lundqvist?) to support Philipp Grubauer?

Columbus Blue Jackets: Is a second line centre attainable?

It's so hard to get elite centres in the league that drafting one is the best course. That's how the Blue Jackets got Pierre-Luc Dubois, who turned a lot of heads this season. Columbus showed it had the system and pieces to hang with more skilled teams, so it's plausible they'll follow the same path as the New York Islanders. Second line centre is where a bold acquisition would help most, but that would have to be done via trade. The Jackets have \$7 million in projected cap room and Dubois still needs an extension. If a trade is in the cards, who goes? RFA Josh Anderson is one possibility, as is one of the goalies. And if a second line centre upgrade is not out there, would they target Patrik Laine for more goal scoring instead?

If #CBJ trade a goaltender — they're listening to offers for both Joonas Korpisalo and Elvis Merzlikins — they'd likely be in the market for a short-term, veteran back-up.

Dallas Stars: What's next for playoff hero Anton Khudobin?

Truthfully, there are a few notable questions facing the Stars. Will Rick Bowness graduate from interim to full time head coach? (Yes, probably.) Will GM Jim Nill run back the same team, or make changes — and if it's the latter, how big will those changes be? Khudobin's future is of great interest here after he led this team to within two wins of a Stanley Cup, taking over the No. 1 job from an "unfit to play" Ben Bishop. But Khudobin has been a career backup who's never played more than 41 games in a regular season, so would he be content staying on in the same role, or does he want to seek more money or opportunity as a 34-year-old in a crowded market? Khudobin's expiring deal came with a \$2.5 million cap hit, but he may be the best backup in the league.

Detroit Red Wings: How aggressively will Steve Yzerman add to his roster with so much cap room?

The Wings head into the off-season with \$25.7 million in cap space, which Yzerman could strategically use to gear up his roster. Trades are also a possibility, as Yzerman has had more than a year to assess the rebuild and start to re-shape it. There are seven RFAs to deal with and a goalie to find, after Jimmy Howard revealed he was not going to be back with Detroit next season. Would Yzerman target his old team in Tampa for an offer sheet?

Edmonton Oilers: How do they find improved depth?

There are a lot of things being criticized in Edmonton after the team was knocked out by the 12th seed in the West. From Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl needing to be better defensively to inconsistent goaltending and more, the team just wasn't "there" yet.

Quality depth was the biggest concern. Sure, McDavid and Draisaitl could buy in more on defence, but there was so little production and impact outside of those top two lines that it's an obvious need. A veteran presence would be useful, along with a little scoring upside. This isn't too surprising and GM Ken Holland will take time to sculpt his team, but expectations are going to heighten and the worst thing would be for Edmonton to take a step back next regular season.

News that Oscar Klefbom may need surgery for a shoulder injury that could keep him out for an extended period would also thrust Edmonton into the defence market as they'd need to replace Klefbom's minutes and



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power play presence. Holland has a lot to navigate as the Oilers don't want to squander any more of McDavid's prime.

Florida Panthers: What are the priorities under new GM Bill Zito?

If you were to rank the most disappointing 2019-20 seasons, the Panthers would have to be way up there. Now they'll be figuring out how to correct that under new management, and one year after hiring Joel Quenneville as head coach. They have \$21.7 million in cap room, but that's because their two leading goal scorers, Mike Hoffman and Evgenii Dadonov, are free agents. So what is the priority? Owen Tippett and Grigori Denisenko could graduate as prospects, but that would likely bring growing pains. Sergei Bobrovsky is still making \$10 million against the cap, so that has to make you an aggressive adder, doesn't it? Aleksander Barkov has two years left on his contract and Jonathan Huberdeau has three, after which both would be UFAs. If this team doesn't make progress by then, would either stick around?

Los Angeles Kings: Who will they pick second overall?

We could get into roster questions, like which veterans will be back and if they'd consider trading any of them. But the Kings are in a transition period right now, where getting younger and more skilled is a priority, so whoever they choose with their first-round pick on Tuesday night will be central to the plan ahead. If it's Quinton Byfield, Los Angeles will get a big centre with real impact No. 1 upside after scoring 82 points in 45 OHL games and representing Canada at the WJC. If it's Tim Stutzle, the Kings will get a different kind of offensive whiz, and one who played against men for the Mannheim Eagles in Germany's DEL. Byfield is a centre, while Stutzle played on the wing for Mannheim, though a move to centre is a possibility if not the most likely outcome.

Minnesota Wild: Who will be their starting goalie next season?

At GM Bill Guerin's end-of-season conference, he touched on a lot of the teams' problems, including a need for a No. 1 centre and more skill up front. While those are fine upgrades to seek out (and maybe could be had in a Matt Dumba trade), most teams are looking for those elements and they're hard to acquire outside of the draft. The Wild also need goalies, and there could be a few options there in the off-season.

"I was disappointed in the goaltending this year," Guerin said. "Al (Stalock) had a tremendous year and Devan (Dubnyk) had an off-year, and it needs to be better. That's just the way it is. And if I told you anything different I'd be lying to you. It was not a strong point for us."

Could it be that 23-year-old Kaapo Kahkonen, the AHL's goalie of the year, simply slides in as the No. 1, or will the Wild explore a free agent market that includes a couple of starters and tandem options?

Montreal Canadiens: Will Marc Bergevin trade for an impact goal scorer?

The Canadiens used to have an organizational weakness down the middle, but between Philip Danault, Nick Suzuki and Jesperi Kotkaniemi, suddenly they're looking alright there. What they lack enough of, though, is reliable, star-power goal scorers among the forwards. Brendan Gallagher is that engine right now, but if the Habs are going to become a real threat, they need another option.

Max Domi, an RFA this off-season, is better at centre, but was being used on the wing, which opens up questions about his availability and if he could be used in a trade to get Montreal the sniper it seeks. They also have 11 draft picks, starting with 16th overall, and any of those could be available. After acquiring Jake Allen and Joel Edmundson, Bergevin has already resolved some other needs and he still has \$10.2 million in cap room. Can he take advantage of the tight cap situation around the league to get the impact forward he still requires?

Nashville Predators: How will they regain momentum?

The Preds are getting dangerously close to becoming another Minnesota Wild. The Wild, on paper, look like a pretty good team — lots of recognizable names, some players with upside and strong defence. But the Wild have been spinning their tires with just two series wins in eight years. They're good enough to get in, but not close to breaking through.

Now, the Predators reached the Stanley Cup Final just three years ago, but this is not the same team. They backed into the playoffs last year and were knocked out in Round 1. This year they couldn't get past Arizona. The Predators are good enough to get into the playoffs, but not to have an impact any more despite a roster that looks like it should never be an easy out. Craig Smith and Mikael Granlund will go to free agency. Kyle Turris is a buyout candidate. Nashville has just \$8.1 million in cap space, though, which means trade is the only way to meaningful and immediate change. How can GM David Poile reinvigorate the core and at least make the Preds a tough out once again?

New Jersey Devils: How close does GM Tom Fitzgerald think the Devils are to being a playoff team?

With a 28-29-12 record this season, New Jersey finished at the bottom of a tough Metropolitan Division, but there were signs of optimism. Young goalie Mackenzie Blackwood assumed a greater role and fit the part of a solid No. 1. The acquisition of 28-year-old Russian Nikita Gusev was a relative success. And, heck, they enter this week's draft holding three first round picks (their own, plus Arizona's and Vancouver's). So what are GM Tom Fitzgerald's next steps? Stay focussed on the long-term, try and use valuable cap space to hurry things along, or a little of both?

The Devils have \$26.2 million in cap space and how Fitzgerald uses that will be interesting to watch. Will they take on a bad contract or two if it means more draft picks? Or will they be a little more strategic and only consider trades that help in the present?

New York Islanders: Is Matt Barzal going to get an offer sheet?

The Isles are one of those teams in a real cap bind, with just \$8.9 million in room and RFAs Ryan Pulock and Devon Toews joining Mathew Barzal. The free agent market opens up on Friday, which means if some rival GM wants to try and pry Barzal away with an offer sheet, the window opens on Oct. 9. The Islanders already have six forwards making at least \$5 million for each of the next three years, so moving money out won't be easy to accomplish either. GM Lou Lamoriello has a lot to juggle over the next five days and it'd be best if a contract extension would get done so that an offer sheet to Barzal is never even an option.

New York Rangers: What does GM Jeff Gorton have up his sleeve?

The Rangers rebuild is nearly complete and the team should begin rising up the standings starting next season. They'll do it without franchise legend and future Hall of Famer Henrik Lundqvist, who was bought out on Tuesday, and will continue with a younger goalie duo of Igor Shesterkin and Alexandar Georgiev. Last summer's big pickup was Artemi Panarin and Alexis Lafreniere will likely get selected with the first overall pick on Tuesday. The Rangers are still left with roughly \$23 million in cap space with contracts to RFAs Tony DeAngelo and Ryan Strome to sort out. Will Gorton take another big cut through free agency or trade to upgrade his roster?

Ottawa Senators: Will they spend any money to support a young core?

Long-time veteran goalie Craig Anderson won't be offered a new contract before free agency. Veteran winger Bobby Ryan was bought out to make room in the lineup for an influx of younger players. Brady Tkachuk is quickly becoming a leader on this team and Pierre Dorion holds two draft picks in the top five, plus another 11 through the rest of the draft. But there is some danger in not surrounding a young core with enough experience, especially if the struggles continue as expected in 2020-21. Ottawa is currently under the cap floor with a whopping \$43.2 million in cap room, so if they wanted they could take on expensive contracts to gain more draft picks, or use that money to sign or trade for helpful players. We're a year away from owner Eugene Melnyk's stated commitment to be spending to the cap and there's now a previously unforeseen window to perhaps get started moving in that direction early.

Philadelphia Flyers: Make subtle changes or run it back?

The Flyers are a difficult team to figure out. On paper, there is a lot to like here and prior to the COVID-19 pause, they were playing like one of the best teams in the NHL. Once there, they earned the East's top seed, but were then given a hard time by Montreal and were eliminated by the division rival Islanders. For the past eight years Philadelphia has



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alternated back and forth from playoff team to non-playoff team and while things seem more stable now, there are a lot of good and promising teams in that division. The Flyers won't make any sweeping changes of course but what, if anything, will they add to the edges of the roster to supplement the core?

Pittsburgh Penguins: Will Matt Murray be traded and, if so, where to?

In his season-ending press conference, Penguins GM Jim Rutherford reaffirmed a commitment to the current core, meaning the yearly tradition of Evgeni Malkin trade rumours should end there. But Rutherford also mentioned that the way the Penguins went out, with just one win against Montreal and zero pushback in the deciding game, was "very disappointing and changes need to be made." Sidney Crosby is 33 now and Malkin is 34: How much longer will the window stay open? Rutherford mentioned it was "likely" that one of his goalies would be traded this off-season, and now that Tristan Jarry has signed an extension, Matt Murray is the one we're all expecting to go. It's a crowded market in net, sure, but a 26-year-old two-time Cup champion will be appealing.

San Jose Sharks: Can they fix the goaltending problem?

For the past two years in a row the Sharks as a team have had the league's worst 5-on-5 save percentage. Aaron Dell, the better of the two netminders statistically this season, is a UFA unlikely to return. Martin Jones, however, has a \$5.75 million cap hit for another four years and, short of a buyout, it'd be a miracle to get out from under that one now. So the focus will have to be on a new battery mate who could split starts and even, perhaps, end up as the No. 1. Devan Dubnyk is the rumoured target from Minnesota, which is a questionable fit given his age (34) and recent performance (.890 save percentage in 2019-20). San Jose has \$14.1 million in cap room and resolving the crease should be high priority.

St. Louis Blues: Will Alex Pietrangelo really leave?

One year after captaining the Blues to their first Stanley Cup, we're looking at the possibility of Alex Pietrangelo leaving in free agency. Under normal circumstances this situation may never have gotten this far, but the Blues are tight to the cap and will have personnel choices to make regardless of what happens with Pietrangelo. If he should leave, there would be an endless market for the right shot, 30-year-old defenceman who would be a No. 1 on most teams, so what kind of hole would that leave behind in St. Louis? That's the biggest question here.

Tampa Bay Lightning: How will Julien BriseBois manage a tough cap situation?

Congratulations on the Stanley Cup, Tampa Bay. Now you get to face the same issues those great Chicago Blackhawks teams faced: how to keep most of it together? Those Blackhawks lost some great players over the years and they never had to deal with a flat salary cap. The Lightning have a projected \$5.3 million in salary cap space, but will be a target for offer sheets to Anthony Cirelli or Mikhail Sergachev if neither signs an extension by Oct. 9. There are a lot of no-move and no-trade clauses on the team, too, so the trade options aren't clear.

Alex Killorn made our 25 trade candidates list for the fact his trade protection is only limited. While those two RFAs will need to be dealt with and other contracts moved out, BriseBois also will have to replenish the depth pieces if UFAs such as Zach Bogosian, Pat Maroon and Kevin Shattenkirk don't return. The players may have won the Cup, but the work starts now for the GM.

Toronto Maple Leafs: What kind of defenceman will they add?

Leafs GM Kyle Dubas noted plans to move ahead without altering his four star forwards, despite the fact that the team struggled to score against Columbus and with a clear need for improved defensive play. Tyson Barrie and Cody Ceci will hit free agency and the blue line will need to be addressed. Alex Pietrangelo is a target, though with just \$5.4 million in cap room how that would fit isn't clear. Instead, a cheaper fit such as Radko Gudas could be found. But under a flat cap, free agency could be tough to wade into, which makes the trade market another option. Kasperii Kapanen has already been traded and perhaps the 15th

overall pick he was acquired for will be flipped. You can bet the Leafs aren't done. Could Alexander Kerfoot could be available? What about Andreas Johnsson? The goal remains to upgrade the blue line, but it's not obvious how to get there.

Vancouver Canucks: What will happen with Jacob Markstrom?

The team's regular season MVP is now five days away from becoming an unrestricted free agent. If he stays, the Canucks would face the possibility of losing either Markstrom or Thatcher Demko to Seattle in next year's expansion draft (or trade one first). If Markstrom leaves there would be all sorts of suitors for him and the Canucks would be left in need of a replacement to at least be in a tandem with Demko. They may be able to save a little money that way, but would risk not being as solid in net as the young group tries to build on a promising season. Canucks fans should be excited about their core group and how they competed in the playoffs, but the goalie question is a big one to follow in Vancouver. The five-year, \$25 million extension Vegas gave Robin Lehner on Saturday is a floor market-setter for Markstrom.

Vegas Golden Knights: Will they shock us and be big players in trade or free agency?

Maybe it shouldn't be a "shock" if the Golden Knights are involved in the big-name player market. The Rangers are always in on available star players. Toronto and Philadelphia, too. As my Tape To Tape co-host pointed out, Vegas should be part of that "always interested group" now. The problem this time is that, after re-signing Robin Lehner for a \$5 million cap hit, they have no cap space left. A trade involving Marc-Andre Fleury and his \$7 million contract seems the most likely way to make room, but someone, perhaps a third party team, will likely have to retain some of that cap. And does it stop at Fleury, or could other bodies move for cap considerations? The Golden Knights have become a destination for players in their short time as an NHL franchise and the management team has gained a reputation for making bold moves. If they want to swing big again this week, some trimming will need to happen.

Washington Capitals: Who's going to replace Braden Holtby?

Ilya Samsonov is the new No. 1, but he's just 23 so leaning on him while trying to keep a Cup window open is a lot to ask of a youngster. Besides, with next season expected to have a tight schedule with possibly more back-to-backs than usual, a solid backup goalie is a necessity. Thankfully for Washington, the goalie market is full of options and the latest edition, Henrik Lundqvist, could be a great fit. Someone with experience who would be happy to play support to a young goalie on a Cup contender is a must-have.

Winnipeg Jets: Will they trade Patrik Laine?

In 305 NHL games, 22-year-old Patrik Laine has 138 goals and he was on track for a fourth 30-goal campaign before the season was paused. So why trade him? Laine wants a permanent spot on Mark Scheifele's wing, but the team has so far been reticent to make it happen. After signing an unusual bridge deal for a player of his calibre, Laine will be an RFA again next off-season, just two years away from being UFA eligible, so the Jets will need some resolution here in the next year. They also have plenty of roster needs, namely a second line centre and anyone who would help rebuild a once-strong blue line. If Laine is traded, GM Kevin Cheveldayoff should be able to fill at least one of those needs. It's hard to win a deal like this, but boy would it be exciting.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.05.2020

Sportsnet.ca / Top NHL UFAs by position: Looking at the 10 best goaltenders available

Emily Sadler | October 4, 2020, 9:04 AM



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During the lead-up to NHL free agency opening on Oct. 9, we're taking a look the top UFAs at each position. Today, we're breaking down a rich class of goalies who could be on the move this off-season.

When was the last time we had a crop of UFA goalies this strong? And that's not even including those who could be on the trade block as general managers look ahead to the Seattle expansion draft following the 2020-21 season.

Would-be UFA Robin Lehner, initially the No. 1 goalie on our list, set the market Saturday morning with the signing of a five-year, \$25-million extension that keeps him with the Vegas Golden Knights. After signing back-to-back one-year deals and excelling on three different teams within the past two seasons — and putting up incredible playoff numbers both years, too — Lehner is now able to settle into a market for the long haul.

So, who's up next?

With a handful of bona fide starters and several veterans still in line for those looking to take the tandem approach, the goalie market is poised to be busy this fall.

1. Jacob Markstrom

2019-20 team: Vancouver Canucks | Age: 30

2019-20 stats: 23-16-4, 2.75 GAA, .918 SV%, 2 SO in 43 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.67M

Markstrom and the Canucks are in a tough spot. There's an understatement.

Both goalie and management have made it clear they'd like to keep the partnership going, but a flat cap, impending expansion draft, and emergence of youngster Thatcher Demko present clear obstacles in inking the veteran to a long-term pact.

Giving him the job security of a no-move clause means exposing Demko to Seattle, and that feels like a definite nope for the Canucks. Signing him without that NMC will no doubt cost a little extra against the cap — especially considering he's got the leverage of being able to land it on the open market after another MVP-like season that saw his stock rise exponentially.

Re-signing Markstrom and playing out 2020-21 with an elite tandem will require some creativity on Benning's part — most likely a trade — if he's to keep both netminders out of reach of the Krakens' grasp by season's end.

2. Braden Holtby

2019-20 team: Washington Capitals | Age: 31

2019-20 stats: 25-14-6, 3.11 GAA, .897 SV%, 0 SO in 48 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$6.1M

A decline in his own performance, combined with the elite play of his peers like Lehner and Markstrom, places Holtby in unique territory this free agency — he's won't be the most coveted netminder of the crop, but he'll no doubt be a much-sought after man considering his track record of success (headlined by a Stanley Cup just two years ago).

It's likely we've seen the last of Holtby in Washington, but he's still very much a No. 1 in this league and would likely benefit from a fresh start as the Capitals turn to their rookie, Ilya Samsonov, going forward.

3. Anton Khudobin

2019-20 team: Dallas Stars | Age: 34

2019-20 stats: 16-8-4, 2.22 GAA, .930 SV%, 0 SO in 30GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$2.5M

With the exception of those in Tampa Bay, you really can't not be a fan of Khudobin right now. The veteran was thrust into the spotlight this post-season after Stars starter Ben Bishop was sidelined, and Khudobin backstopped Dallas all the way to the Stanley Cup Final.

Every year, we learn and re-learn the importance of having a solid backup goalie (1B is probably a better description) — both in terms of getting a team to the playoffs and then keeping them there. While age will likely halt any long-term talks, term will probably be the key for Dallas to keep him in the fold considering Khudobin's stock has never been higher. So high, in fact, that it's possible he just played himself right out of Dallas' budget.

4. Corey Crawford

2019-20 team: Chicago Blackhawks | Age: 35

2019-20 stats: 16-20-3, 2.77 GAA, .917 SV%, 1 SO in 40GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$6M

The Blackhawks are intent on keeping Crawford in their crease, with general manager Stan Bowman telling reporters he's "optimistic" he'll be able to re-sign his No. 1 goalie.

"In every situation, I'm always looking on the bright side," Bowman said, via the Chicago Sun-Times. "But until something comes to completion, I just don't know. We still have time on our side here, and that's what we're working through. We're realistic that it's a possibility [he will become an unrestricted free agent], but that's not what we're focused on."

His \$6-million seasons are in the past, but as we saw during a short playoff run in the Edmonton bubble, Crawford's still got plenty of good hockey in him and at this point in the Blackhawks' rebuild, it makes little sense to move on from a qualified No. 1.

5. Thomas Greiss

2019-20 team: New York Islanders | Age: 34

2019-20 stats: 16-9-4, 2.74 GAA, .913 SV%, 0 SO in 30 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.33M

The Islanders have gone with the goalie-tandem approach the past five years with Greiss, pairing him first with Jaroslav Halak for three years followed by Robin Lehner in 2018-19 and then Semyon Varlamov in 2019-20.

Varlamov is the clear starter on Long Island — he's under contract for the next three seasons at \$5 million per year, and got the majority of playoff starts throughout New York's post-season run this summer.

6. Cam Talbot

2019-20 team: Calgary Flames | Age: 33

2019-20 stats: 12-10-1, 2.63 GAA, .919 SV%, 2 SO in 26 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$2.75M

Considering the fate of the 2019-20 Flames, the roster that hits the ice in 2020-21 is probably going to have some key differences. But does that mean a new netminder?

Talbot said this week, via the Calgary Sun, that he's hopeful he'll receive an offer from the Flames brass ahead of Oct. 9.

"My status hasn't really changed," he said. "I'm still hopeful we can work something out with Calgary before the 9th hits, but I know they have a lot of other guys to re-sign, too."

With the Flames this year, Talbot recorded his best goals-against average since his second season in Edmonton, and matched that year's save percentage while playing second string to David Rittich.

"As of right now, there's been maybe one line of communication so far — just saying, 'Hey, I want to be back,' and that they want me back. But no formal offers or anything like that just yet," he said. "We're hopeful for one within the next few days. They said that they'd get back to us. So hopefully there is going to be one coming. But as of now, there hasn't been."

7. Henrik Lundqvist



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2019-20 team: New York Rangers | Age: 38

2019-20 stats: 10-12-3, 3.16 GAA, .905 SV%, 1 SO in 30 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$8.5M (bought out)

It's the end of an era in New York, as the Rangers' buyout of the final year of King Henrik's contract makes official their plan to move forward with two young netminders.

So, where does that leave Lundqvist? Sportsnet's Mike Johnston put together a list of intriguing potential options, should he opt to extend his career a few more seasons, with an emphasis on winning and the ability to mentor a young netminder in a crease-sharing role.

There's not a hockey fan out there who doesn't want to see The King crowned as a Stanley Cup champ before he hangs up his skates for good.

8. Mike Smith

2019-20 team: Edmonton Oilers | Age: 38

2019-20 stats: 19-12-6, 2.95 GAA, .902 SV%, 1 SO in 39 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$2M

Like the Flames, the Oilers have struggled to find the No. 1 netminder that can backstop this offensive team into an era of strong contention. It looks like Smith, unfortunately, was not the answer. Smith put up sub-par numbers in Edmonton and continued his troubling trend of falling flat in the post-season.

9. Craig Anderson

2019-20 team: Ottawa Senators | Age: 39

2019-20 stats: 11-17-2, 3.25 GAA, .902 SV%, 0 SO in 34 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.75M

It was confirmed late last month that the Ottawa Senators won't be making an offer to Anderson, their primary goalie of the past decade. Anderson told reporters he intends to continue his career and has been training all off-season with that in mind.

10. Aaron Dell

2019-20 team: San Jose Sharks | Age: 31

2019-20 stats: 12-15-3, 3.01 GAA, .907 SV%, 0 SO in 33 GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$1.9M

The 2019-20 season was not kind to the Sharks, who struggled mightily in many areas — especially in net, with the tandem of starter Martin Jones and Dell, who served as backup for the second fourth year.

After starting out strong in his first two NHL seasons in 2016-17 and 2017-18, Dell's numbers took a nosedive the past two years. It looks like a fresh start for both goalie and team is in order.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.05.2020

Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Rapid-fire thoughts on NHL trade rumours

Luke Fox

October 3, 2020, 8:15 AM

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. Tonight, we tested positive for

free-agent fever. We will begin our quarantine now and enter our recovery process on Oct. 10. We will get through this TOGETHER!

1. Glass half-full or glass half-empty?

Let's fret about the hockey hibernation later and soak in the deluge of news and rumours that is upon us. Fast on the heels of the Stanley Cup's booze cruise, we're getting the draft, free agency and enough trade chatter to knock out a tooth or two. Enjoy it.

Some thoughts on the latest scuttlebutt:

- Oliver Ekman-Larsson could've had his pick of half the league when he approached free agency. Instead, he bet on the team that drafted him.

"I love living in Arizona and I love playing for the Coyotes, so it was a no-brainer for me," Ekman-Larsson said upon inking his life-changing \$66-million extension in 2018. "Being loyal to your team and people that really care and believe in you, that's something I had in the back of my head and that's why I wanted to stay.

"I didn't really think about leaving or going anywhere else, to be honest with you, but it's nice to get an end to people asking me if I would stay or go somewhere else. I've been focused on staying in Arizona. That's where I want to play. I think we have something good coming."

The good never arrived, and the captain — holding a full no-move clause he negotiated with John Chayka — has earned the right to not stick around for more of the mediocre.

We understand why Ekman-Larsson wants to join Boston or Vancouver, but this is a difficult first deal for rookie GM Bill Armstrong to execute. How can the Bruins' Don Sweeney sell letting fan favourite Torey Krug walk and making an imported talent the highest-paid guy on the roster?

And with the Canucks so tight to the cap, how many young players lose their raise to make space for OEL?

- Jake DeBrusk would look great in Oilers sweater, but Sweeney would need to immediately start looking for a second-line winger.

- Regarding Patrik Laine: Has anyone traded away a 22-year-old 40-goal scorer and won the deal?

- Marc Bergevin saying he wants to make Brendan Gallagher Montreal's highest-paid forward sounds splashy until you realize that the highest-paid forward is Jonathan Drouin at \$5.5-million and Gallagher's comparables are much closer to \$6.5 million. Anything less than making Gallagher the highest-paid forward would be an insulting offer.

- Bergevin is willing to trade his first-rounder (16th overall) for a top-six winger, as he should be. It wasn't so long ago that Tampa's Julien BriseBois traded late first-round picks for bottom-six wingers Barclay Goodrow and Blake Coleman. Pittsburgh landed what it sees as a top-six winger in Kasperii Kapanen for the 15th-overall pick, but only because Toronto viewed Kapanen as a third-liner. The trick will be finding a team undervalues one of its wingers or has a glut of them.

- Laurent Brossoit signed Friday. There is going to be an NHL-calibre unsigned backup goalie waiting for a phone call upon the first injury of 2020-21, isn't there?

It's been rumoured for a few days, but Devan Dubnyk to SJ is picking up steam.

— Elliotte Friedman (@FriedgeHNIC) October 3, 2020

- I love Devan Dubnyk. I'm rooting for Devan Dubnyk. That said, his win total and save percentage have dropped in each of the past three years, and he's been playing behind a decent defensive squad. I'm not convinced he's the answer for San Jose.

- Vegas has been grouped in with Colorado, Florida and Detroit among the parties interested in trading for Krug's rights before Friday. The Knights' left side is decent and their right side got exposed against Dallas, so this is a tough fit for me. Would rather see them pursue righty Alex Pietrangolo and work their way down that list.



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• Rookie GM Bill Zito has already traded two regular defencemen away from the Florida Panthers, a bad defensive team. Is he simply cutting costs or setting up for a bigger play, like Krug?

Watch Round 1 of the NHL Draft on Sportsnet and SN NOW beginning at 7 p.m. ET/4 p.m. PT on Tuesday, Oct. 6. Then catch Rounds 2-7 on SN1 and SN NOW starting at from 11:30 a.m. ET/8:30 a.m. PT on Wednesday, Oct. 7.

2. Las Vegas, 2012: Sent to cover my first NHL Awards for this fine website, my editors wanted me to earn my pool time. In addition to conducting interviews and filing stories, they also asked me to shoot iPhone photos and capture Instagram videos for this thing called "social media" that was all the rage back then.

This entailed covering the red carpet walk of hockey royalty.

If you've never covered a red carpet before, understand that it is a manic free-for-all. A lawless environment in which the lions pounce on any fresh meat that tries to scoot by.

If you've never found yourself wandering a giant Vegas casino looking for a very specific location, understand that it may take you longer than anticipated to maze your way there.

I say all of this to say that when I did find the carpet, I was late, sweaty, confused and fumbling to figure out the recently-downloaded Gram when I looked up and saw the King gliding my way.

Resplendent midnight-black tuxedo. Hair clipped from the heavens. The amount of stubble that makes a man look like he doesn't care but he totally does. Smile out of a toothpaste commercial. Eyes the colour of confidence. Henrik Lundqvist looked like 59.5 million bucks as he walked in to collect his Vezina.

I asked for a minute of his time. Graciously, he said yes.

Then... nothing. Mind blank. Silence of the most awkward degree. I'd seen a flash of handsome and had pounced without a plan.

For the first and last time in my career, I was so flustered I couldn't even speak.

"Uh... I forgot my question," I finally conceded, disclosing my inner idiot. The carpet no longer looked red compared to my face. "It's all right. Go ahead to the next one."

"No, no, no. That's OK," Lundqvist replied, patiently. "Take your time. No rush." A smile.

Able to breathe again, I got through asking him a few questions — one of which may or may not have been "Will you marry me?" — and he sailed off to charm his next pesterer.

The Rangers lost a Hall of Famer this week, absolutely. But they also lost the classiest hockey player of a generation. Here's hoping Lundqvist takes his talents elsewhere and keeps his Cup dream alive. GMs are inquiring.

For a legend.

For representing the Rangers with class and dignity.

For loving our city unconditionally.

For saving the day, time and again.

For giving it all — always.

For New York sports.

For a lifetime of memories.

For you, HEN-RIK. pic.twitter.com/OQ4v7CIsZp

— New York Rangers (@NYRangers) September 30, 2020

3. The amount of dead money on the Rangers' books is staggering. Buyouts Dan Girardi, Kevin Shattenkirk, Ryan Spooner (retained salary) and now Lundqvist will account for \$12.99 million on the cap. Brad

Richards doesn't count against the cap, but the Blueshirts will still be paying the retired star \$1.06 million a year through 2025-26.

No wonder Jeff Gorton was happy to find a trade partner for the dependable but expensive Marc Staal. The price to unload Staal's paperwork wasn't cheap (a second-round pick), as the Detroit Red Wings did a fine job weaponizing their cap space and adding a solid veteran to a depleted defence core.

On paper, New York has more cap room than any club who qualified for the NHL's 24-team return to play. But Gorton has valuable RFAs to sign at every position: centre Ryan Strome, winger Brendan Lemieux, defenceman Anthony DeAngelo, and goalie Alexandar Georgiev.

Complicating matters? Every one of them holds arbitration rights. Every one of them is hot off the best showing of his career.

It'll be more challenging to wedge Jack Eichel's \$10-million contract into this roster than you think (wink).

Stray thought: If Gorton knew he was going to win the Alexis Lafreniere draft lottery, would he have signed Chris Kreider to a seven-year, \$45.5-million extension in February? That's a heckuva price for the third-best left wing on the depth chart.

4. Sportsnet's chief prospect prognosticator Sam Cosentino and I had a long, enjoyable Zoom call with projected top-10 pick and quick wit Marco Rossi from Austria. The story comes out next week, but this anecdote can't wait.

Rossi was interviewed by too many teams to count. I asked him the strangest question fired his way by an NHL team executive.

"The weirdest question I got was, like, if I would hit my mom to win a game," Rossi said, smiling. "And I said, 'No, I would never do that. Would you do it?' And he was just loving it. It was so funny."

Did you tell your mom?

"I did. And she was in shock," Rossi chuckles. "And I was like, 'No! I didn't say yes.'"

Poor Claudia Rossi, getting dragged into a fight from the stands.

5. Quote of the Week goes to the general manager of the Detroit Red Wings:

"I was doing yoga for most of the interviews, so I was trying to not be a distraction." — Steve Yzerman, on why he was muted behind a dark screen during Zoom calls with draft prospects

It'll be a while before we know how Detroit's 2020 picks turn out, but this draft is already a triumphant victory for multitaskers.

6. Yzerman dished on the backstory of drafting Conn Smythe runner-up Brayden Point in the third round of 2014.

At No. 80 overall, the Lightning were one pick behind Minnesota (79) and eyeing the undersized centre. One of the voices at the Tampa table piped up: "Oh, Minny. He's the type of guy Minny drafts."

The Wild were at the next table over.

Yzerman grabbed the phone, called Chuck Fletcher and said, "Chuck, are you interested in a seventh for us to jump in front of you for the pick?"

Fletcher looked over at Yzerman 10 feet away like, "Are you serious?"

"Yeah," Yzerman responded.

Fletcher shrugged. "OK, but you gotta tell me who you're picking."

Yzerman told him the truth.

"Obviously it turned out pretty good, but in all likelihood Point would have still been there, and we would've had our seventh-round pick," Yzerman told reporters Thursday.

At No. 80, Fletcher drafted defenceman Louie Belpedio (three NHL games played). The seventh was for 2015 and used to draft defenceman



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Jack Sadek, who had a respectable ECHL season with the Allen Americans last year.

7. All the juicy draft tales from the championship roster are coming to light.

Yzerman did the heavy lifting, but Brian Lawton and Julien BriseBois bookended his construction with some key ingredients.

Lawton was at the helm when Tampa drafted Steven Stamkos and Victor Hedman. He credits Jay Feaster for the Stamkos pick and delivered fantastic insight behind the Hedman decision on Real Kyper at Noon Wednesday.

Heading into the 2009 draft holding the second-overall pick and knowing the Islanders would select John Tavares No. 1, the consensus among Lightning brass was to choose Matt Duchene. However, the buck stopped with Lawton, and he had in his own mind landed on Hedman.

The GM quietly met with then-owner Oren Koules, informed him that the staff debates favoured Duchene but that on draft day he'd be taking Hedman instead. Koules gave Lawton the green light, and Lawton informed his staff at the draft that he was overruling the consensus.

Further, Lawton says he was "privately pleased" that he'd lost the lottery to the Islanders because he had concerns about Tavares's skating. By picking second, he'd able to secure his target in Hedman and avoid any backlash had he been tempted to take Hedman over the highly touted Tavares at No. 1.

Prior to the draft, Lawton invited Tavares, Hedman and Duchene to Tampa at the same time for interviews and testing and dinners. He wanted to see the three interact.

At one dinner with Koules and the three top prospects, the Lightning made a rule: no hockey talk.

Lawton said because Tavares and Hedman had been competing with players older than them, he sensed they were "much more advanced emotionally than Matt — and that meant something to me." He spotted the seeds of a leader in a shy youngster.

One unnamed staff member was ticked off that Lawton had chosen Hedman over Duchene. He approached Lawton post-draft and said, "Brian, the Colorado Avalanche are laughing at us."

8. I've been burning through episodes of SmartLess, the newish podcast started by actors Jason Bateman, Sean Hayes and noted Maple Leafs fan Will Arnett.

In one fun riff, Bateman chides Arnett for getting his golf balls custom stamped with the No. 17 — in honour of Wendel Clark, the "greatest hockey player" in Arnett's opinion.

Leafs president Brendan Shanahan, a friend of Arnett's, notices.

"I sometimes feel like Shanny feels like, 'Wow, you really love Wendel,'" Arnett said. "Shanny's 14."

"Well, that's a better score than 17," replied Bateman, arguing that looking down at such a large number isn't helpful for golf's mental game. "Save you three shots on the next hole."

9. The latest edition of Quest for Cup, the league's inside-the-bubble docuseries, features a pair of great speeches from inside the Lightning's dressing room before they reach the mountaintop.

One is from injured captain Steven Stamkos, explaining how impressed he's been by his teammates' play, how far they've come, and why he believes they have what it takes to finish off the Stars. (The speech is carpeted with F-bombs and won't be transcribed here, but seek it out. Earmuffs, kids.)

The other comes care of coach Jon Cooper, during the second intermission of Game 4, which was easily the best, most controversial and most pivotal game of the series:

"Do we have any worry in this room? Not a chance," begins Cooper, before preying on the mentality of the opposition.

"They've blown a 2-0 lead and given up goals at the end of both periods. They have zero room for error. That's it. They gotta be sitting over there like, 'Holy f—.'"

"Just come at them in waves. Keep driving, fellas. Go get it here, boys."

Tampa would take that back-and-forth grudge match 5-4 in overtime to seize a 3-1 stranglehold on the series.

10. "I'm the Big Rig! And I'm back-to-back!"

Even deep in a well of Bud Lights, Patrick Maroon knows what he has accomplished is a rare feat:

Maroon became only the third player of the expansion era to hoist the Stanley Cup in back-to-back seasons with different teams and the first since Cory Stillman did so in 2004 (Tampa) and 2006 (Carolina), a run interrupted by the lockout.

Claude Lemieux pulled off the stunt in the mid-'90s with Colorado and New Jersey.

"I thought last year was something else, but this year was something special. I've been fortunate enough to be on so many good hockey teams," Maroon said. "Most people don't get a chance to play in a Stanley Cup Finals. I got to do it back to back, and win. I got the chills talking about this."

Maroon took a surprising small-rig salary as a 2019 free agent and was worth every penny of the \$900,000 the Lightning paid for his services this year.

As a free agent, he heads to market with an opportunity to pull off an individual three-peat. Playoff teams could do much worse when it comes to complementary role players in their bottom six.

11. Turns out, you don't need a start date for the 2020-21 season to bet on the winner of the 2021 Stanley Cup. Some interesting odds (via BetOnline):

The Lightning (7/1) are favoured to repeat, followed by Colorado (15/2) and Vegas (15/2), then Boston (12/1). Despite winning the West, Dallas is tied at seventh (20/1) with Toronto.

Decent value in longshots St. Louis (22/1), Carolina (28/1), Winnipeg (33/1) and Chicago (80/1). Only the Senators (100/1) and Red Wings (150/1) have longer odds than the Blackhawks.

I made a video in anticipation of being in the bubble and competing for the Stanley cup. I wanted a reminder of my time with my daughter. It's been more than 2 months and today I'm headed home to see my beautiful baby girl and we kept our promise and are bringing home the cup!

— Blake Coleman (@BColes25) September 29, 2020

12. Hang around the game long enough and good things can happen.

KHL journeyman Andrei Kuteikin, a 36-year-old Moscow Spatak defenceman, fired a puck from behind his own blue line Thursday and it went right through CSKA goaltender Alexander Sharychenkov. Yikes.

The most enjoyable part of the video is Spatak coach Olegs Znaroks laughing at the goal, then realizing he better cover his face with his lineup sheet.

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The Athletic / Duhatschek notebook: A look at the defenceman market, Jack Eichel's best fit

By Eric Duhatschek Oct 2, 2020



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Today feels like the calm before the NHL trading storm, with the pace of meaningful transactions slowing down this past week, as the league counts down to the draft next Tuesday and Wednesday and then the opening of free agency two days after that.

On some level, the current system has always been a little backward. As a team interested in making changes, how do you commit to making any sort of impact trade if you also plan to be active in free agency?

Realistically, it makes little sense to go out and fill a hole on your roster via the trade route (and surrender significant assets along the way), if you genuinely hope to address your needs through free agency, with zero acquisition cost apart from salary.

The NHL timetable forces teams into a holding pattern of sorts and may account for the fact that the trade action at the draft isn't quite as frantic as it once was.

This year, matters are being exacerbated by all the uncertainty associated with a flat salary-cap and the budgetary restrictions being imposed internally on so many GMs by owners feeling the financial pinch. It means anyone expecting business as usual over the next seven days is going to be disappointed. This is the exact opposite, business conducted under unusual and ultra-fluid circumstances.

So much of what happens next will require a few dominos to fall. For example, if you're in the market for a right-shot defenceman, you scan the available list of pending free agents and find something that may meet your needs (Alex Pietrangolo, Torey Krug, Tyson Barrie, Travis Hamonic, Sami Vatanen, TJ Brodie).

Managers contemplating that list against the financial day of reckoning that's to come have to think: Is there a fit for our team? And if so, why then would you turn around and surrender an asset to acquire a commodity that you might be able to fill via unrestricted free agency?

It's the biggest question, in terms of where exactly to place the Arizona Coyotes' high-priced and available Oliver Ekman-Larsson who, thanks to a full no-move clause in his contract, fully controls where he may end up.

According to sources, Ekman-Larsson started with only one destination where he'd accept a trade – Boston – and then added a second, Vancouver. But if Arizona is intent on recouping an Erik Karlsson-like package in exchange for Ekman-Larsson, and there are so many potential defencemen available via free agency, who is going to offer up that kind of player/draft choice package?

In Ekman-Larsson, you get a player with seven years remaining on a contract that comes in at an \$8.25 million AAV. If you're Boston and you already have Krug, who you could sign for less than that, why would you let him walk as an unrestricted free agent and then give up a pile of assets for Ekman-Larsson? Anything's possible, I suppose, but that doesn't seem sensible. As for Vancouver, Ekman-Larsson might be a terrific addition, but he plays the left side and the Canucks already had a pretty strong left side as it is (Quinn Hughes, Alex Edler).

Every time a team thinks they can move a defenceman from one side to the other and think it will go seamlessly, it rarely does. Toronto tried it for a few minutes with Jake Muzzin and quickly gave up. St. Louis tried it with Justin Faulk. It didn't happen for him either. The player most adept at playing his off-side is Brodie, the Calgary pending UFA who is a left-shot defenceman but had his greatest success playing on the right side, usually opposite Mark Giordano. It's Brodie's flexibility that makes him one of the more underrated defencemen about to hit free agency – that and his skating ability, which doesn't seem to be slipping.

Brodie could represent good value if he gets to market.

Probably the most puzzling defensive piece right now is Barrie, who had an underwhelming year with Toronto after coming over in the Nazem Kadri trade. A year ago, coming off a season in which when he ranked seventh in scoring among NHL defencemen (59 points in 78 games), Barrie looked headed for a pay day in the \$7 million annual range.

Even in that last season with Colorado, Barrie never played the sort of minutes that a Brent Burns (25:05), Giordano (24:14) or John Carlsson (25:04) played in the 2018-19 season. Barrie averaged 21:47 per night. Colorado deployed him effectively, using him as the quarterback of the league's seventh-ranked power play and then, wherever possible, playing him protected minutes at five-on-five. If you review the ice time of the top 12 scoring defencemen from 2018-19, Barrie and Krug were the only two to average under 22 minutes per night.

Ideally, you'd like your \$7 million defencemen to play big minutes in every situation, but the reality is, there are a lot of players such as Barrie (fellow pending UFAs Kevin Shattenkirk, Krug, Erik Gustafsson also come to mind) that can help you in offensive situations, but need to have their ice time managed to minimize the risks they sometimes pose defensively.

Barrie's stock has dropped precipitously year over year. Chances are he'll need to sign short term, for medium dollars, and hope he can get his career trending upward again. Barrie's defensive limitations are not exactly stop-the-presses news at the moment, but people have also conveniently forgotten how effective he was in Colorado under a coach, Jared Bednar, that did a masterful job of managing his minutes.

Eichel to Rangers just makes sense

At this time of year, I always like to make a distinction between trades that could happen and trades that should happen. Publicly, the Buffalo Sabres have made it pretty clear that, at the moment, they are not interested in trading Jack Eichel to the New York Rangers, even though that's a delicious scenario to ponder. If the Rangers offered the first overall pick and the chance to draft Alexis Lafreniere and threw in a sweetener, could that contribute to an organizational change of heart? Maybe it should.

Think about it this way: The Sabres are in the midst of another discouraging reset that has Eichel, their best player, a little discouraged. It didn't help their cause when they traded away Ryan O'Reilly a few years back for pieces that never quite fit. So, the risk of doing something similar with Eichel is high. The difference, though, is that the Rangers have a lot more premium commodities to offer in order to land a high-end player, to whom a lot of dollars are committed over the next six years (\$10 million per season, though a \$7.5 million signing bonus for 2020-21 has already been paid).

The Sabres have been in a cost-cutting mode virtually throughout the pandemic. If you could swap out Eichel's money for a chance to draft Lafreniere (and his entry-level contract for the next three years) and get something else substantial included, it's something you'd have to consider, right?

There was a time when most trades were made primarily for hockey reasons. Once the NHL adopted the salary cap, finances became an increasingly important part of the equation and sometimes now are the most important part of the equation.

It's limiting for teams because the dollars on a contract add a layer of complexity to a trading game that is already quite complex. Still, the Rangers signalled a willingness to add an important, expensive piece with two moves they've conducted already this season – moving out Marc Staal's money to the Red Wings (and surrendering a second-round draft choice to make it happen) and then the buyout of Henrik Lundqvist. Lundqvist's buyout, plus what they'll be charged in 2020-21 for Shattenkirk's buyout, eats up about \$11 million in cap space next season.

But they were also able to shed themselves of \$5.25 million annually of Brady Skjei's money at last year's trade deadline (and got a first-round pick out of it as well). So as of right now, according to CapFriendly, they are 27th out of 31 NHL teams in terms of dollars committed to next year's roster, with a little over \$23 million left to spend. Obviously, acquiring a player such as Eichel would eat up a lot of that space – but it's also one of the rare times, in this day and age, where a team could actually contemplate such a move and make the arithmetic work.



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Eichel playing in New York City, at a time when the Rangers seem on the threshold of a turnaround, just feels like a good fit, something that should happen – if not this year, then sometime in the next 12 months.

Singing the Blues

Despite the fact that negotiations on a contract extension between the St. Louis Blues and Alex Pietrangelo went off the rails a while back, it just feels as if the two sides should be able to come to terms, even if it takes until the free-agent window opens. Under terms of the CBA, the Blues can still offer Pietrangelo a maximum eight-year term; any prospective suitor in free agency could only to seven years, which would ultimately affect the average annual value of the deal.

If St. Louis is offering eight years at around \$8 million, then any other bidder would almost certainly have to be offering \$9 million over seven years to make the dollars square.

If Pietrangelo moves on, the two most likely destinations seem to be Vegas and Florida, both of which have advantageous state tax situations that makes the Golden Knights and Panthers more competitive in the marketplace. Florida has the salary-cap space to potentially make it happen; Vegas would have to get creative and move on from both Marc-Andre Fleury and possibly Nate Schmidt and/or Paul Stastny.

For Pietrangelo, the path of least resistance would seem to be staying put – where he has roots, where he's won before. We'll see how that unfolds.

Vegas, meanwhile, is always getting creative, but if they want to land both Pietrangelo and free-agent goalie Robin Lehner, it will test their negotiating skills. Stastny, at 34, with one year to go at \$6.5 million and with a limited no-trade clause (he provides a 10-team, no-trade list) would seem to be high on the list of players they'd have to consider moving. A reunion in Winnipeg? Yeah, probably not.

'A nervous market'

As teams try to figure out what the salary structure in 2020-21 is going to be, the feeling is that the top handful of UFAs, including Taylor Hall, will get paid, and then there'll be a sharp, drastic cutoff at the middle and lower tiers. Just where does that cutoff come and who does it affect? That's the million-dollar question. No one knows but it is creating apprehension at every turn, not just for teams, but in the agent community as well. It's been described to me as "a nervous market" – agents learning quickly that the financial squeeze teams are feeling is real.

In the past few years, thanks to the free-agent courting period, teams had a clearer sense of whether a player was interested in them or not and also had a better idea of price point. This year feels like it'll be more like it was back in, say, 2012, where it took four days before the two premium free agents, Ryan Suter and Zach Parise, came off the board. Something similar may unfold this year with not every player disappearing off the UFA boards instantly.

Who will ultimately make the biggest splash?

Minnesota is interesting when you see how aggressive general manager Bill Guerin has been thus far. Guerin was groomed for his current position in the Pittsburgh Penguins' organization under GM Jim Rutherford, who tends to march to the beat of a different drummer from his notoriously conservative NHL peers and doesn't mind going first.

Guerin could be like that too. He's already signed Jonas Brodin, traded Eric Staal, told Mikko Koivu he won't be back and last March moved Jason Zucker to the Penguins. If Devan Dubnyk, Ryan Donato and probably Matt Dumba are on the move as well, Minnesota could be the most changed team in the NHL by the time the puck drops next season. That's just wild.

And finally

Last week, in the comments section of my notebook, Barry W. remembered that in 1980, the year the Flames relocated to Calgary from Atlanta, I'd had a short, unsuccessful tryout with the team. I'd been thinking about that myself a little because it's 40 years now since training

camp for the Flames' inaugural season opened. Around 60 players were invited to attend camp and at the end, 23 made the cut.

There was a lot of discussion, going back and forth, about who should and who shouldn't make the team, but there was little doubt as to who the worst player at the first camp was.

Me.

I was working for the Calgary Sun, and the editor there wanted me to attend camp and write about my experiences. I was a runner, a tennis player and a skier, but hadn't played hockey regularly since my mid-teens and had no business attending an NHL training camp. But in those days, editors didn't give you much of a choice. They said jump then pushed you out the door pretty quickly. It was a different era.

So, I did it. I wrote a three-part series and then spent the next 20 years covering the team.

The one thing I didn't know was why the Flames agreed to the request in the first place. It's hard to imagine such a thing today, but 40 years ago, not only did the Flames allow it, they did so without me signing a waiver or asking any insurance-related questions.

According to general manager Cliff Fletcher, it didn't seem like such an oddball request – and that sort of thing used to happen all the time.

"The first example of that, back when I was really young, came when I first joined the Montreal Canadiens organization," said Fletcher. "Back then, NHL teams only had one goaltender. So, the practice goaltender, for most days, was the sports editor of the Journal de Montreal. He travelled with the team, as they did back then.

"The association between the beat writers and the teams was very close back in those days. They used to eat dinner together. They'd go drinking together. It was like one big family.

"So, the idea of you going on the ice wasn't as foreign an idea back then as it would be today. Now, everybody would look at you and say, 'what, are you crazy?'"

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The Athletic / Drance: What I learned covering 65 NHL playoff games in the Western bubble

By Thomas Drance Oct 2, 2020

EDMONTON — I spent 60 days adjacent to the NHL's Western Bubble this summer, and as I reflect on the experience, two things stand out above all else. I learned that there's nothing normal about playing NHL games without fans in the building and that there is such a thing as too much live hockey.

In late July, I loaded up my Jeep with a few essentials and drove North. What awaited me was a two-month assignment in Edmonton, covering the NHL's return to play tournament in the Western bubble. During the months of August and September, I covered 65 Stanley Cup playoff games in person, which is roughly equivalent to 80 percent of an 82-game NHL regular season.

Consuming that much live hockey in that short a span of time is a monstrous undertaking. It was an isolating, exhausting experience and if I'm being honest, after about six weeks it sort of broke me.

In retrospect, I'm not even sure why I approached covering the playoff tournament like it was an attendance competition. Like a grade school award was on the line.

Certainly, that wasn't what I'd been explicitly asked to do by my editors.



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Part of it was FOMO, a basic fear of missing out on a quadruple overtime game that could disrupt the entire schedule in the Western bubble. Part of it was wanting to make sure my hockey beat writer colleagues at The Athletic in American markets had some eyes and ears in the building. And it felt silly not to be at games when they were happening an eight-minute walk from my furnished rental.

If I'm being honest though, I was so adamant about going to every game because watching and covering live hockey games is the part of the job I like the most.

I think there are a few specific things that everyone living through this cursed year misses about the way things used to be. Hugging your parents and mourning the dead collectively are at the very top of my list personally.

One of my top entries from my professional life, however, is just hearing the sound of a home crowd at an NHL hockey game when they collectively celebrate a goal. It's a sound I've heard a million times live, but never appreciated until I wasn't sure when I'd hear it again.

I watch a lot of video in my work, but since about mid-April, I've noticed that when I start clipping video of a play that results in a goal, and I hear that guttural, boozy, communal roar in a bumping NHL building, it gives me a lump in my throat.

So, yeah, I missed covering live hockey games during the pause. Then all of a sudden, this summer, I was thrust into an environment with access to multiple Stanley Cup playoff games every day.

It was intoxicating, for a while, and then it overwhelmed me. It was like fasting for two weeks, nodding off and then waking up in a Pizza Hut buffet. What I'm really trying to say is that I attended 65 NHL playoff games over the course of 60 days in part because I have self-control issues.

For all that covering a preposterous volume of hockey in a condensed period of time proved irresistible, covering games in the Edmonton bubble wasn't really covering games in the way that I love and miss. The sport was the same, the rules were the same, the on-ice performances were tremendous, but the experience was inhuman and remote.

There were no face-to-face interactions with anyone directly involved in the competition, there were very few bodies on press row until late in the conference finals and there was absolutely no buzz in the downtown Edmonton neighbourhood surrounding Rogers Place. Meanwhile, the disembodied soundboard effects that were piped into the arena to mimic the atmosphere provided by fans, were more a reminder of their absence than anything else.

Unsurprisingly, this wasn't remotely like the day-to-day grind of covering the regular season. Or the regular playoffs.

First of all, I brought my beautiful wife with me. We're blessed that she's working from home through the pandemic, and has the flexibility to relocate for two months within Canada. I couldn't have done this assignment without her. She's the real Conn Smythe winner, as far as I'm concerned.

We're both pretty virus conscious all around. We don't eat or drink at indoor establishments. We don't hang out with people outside our bubble indoors for very long, unless all are wearing masks.

So we executed this assignment in pure pandemic style. My wife and I drove to Edmonton in late July, with an overnight stop in Jasper, and we stayed in a furnished rental rather than at a hotel.

The big advantage of staying in a furnished rental: Laundry. The downside: No Marriott points.

It was worth it for the comfort of feeling settled and safe throughout the tournament. And I was able to cook, bring a pack lunch or dinner to the rink — sometimes both — almost every single day of the tournament.

The rink itself was preposterously cold, which was uncomfortable but it was convenient in that I didn't require a refrigerator for my pack lunches. A space heater was a pretty common purchase among hockey

operations staffers within the bubble, and among the Getty photographers on media row as well.

Technically I wasn't "in the bubble," even though I entered Rogers Place on a near everyday basis.

Instead, I was "bubble adjacent," credentialed but never "within" the bubble. Technically the bubble is called the "Phase 4 Secure Zone" and there are various groups, or levels of access to the secure zone. Players and coaches were Group 1, and then you move down the list — off-ice officials, ice crews, essential production personnel, service staffers, arena staffers — to the absolute inessentials. And the most inessential group, categorized as "Group 5", were the credentialed media members meaning we had no face-to-face interaction with any personnel essential to the games actually occurring.

Other leagues that went with a bubbled approach to their return to play efforts this summer, namely the NBA and the MLS, partnered with independent media to permit select media members to be within the bubble protocols. It worked safely for those leagues.

The NHL took a different approach, which created a difficult environment for media covering the tournament. I would argue the league paid the price for this approach. The Stanley Cup Final ratings were the lowest they've been in years.

There wasn't any kind of testing requirement for Group 5 media observers. In fact, entering the arena was only slightly more cumbersome than entering a rink is usually. And it quickly became routine.

There was a specific Group 5 entrance where you'd show your credential to get through the door, then clear a basic security scan and bag check and fill out a questionnaire ("have you been outside the country in the last 14 days?" "Do you have any muscle or joint pain unrelated to an athletic injury?" etc.). Eventually I got to the point where I could just list the questions and say "no across the board," which reduced my entry time.

The questionnaire would be filled out with your temperature, which was checked on entry. I'm deeply skeptical of the efficacy of temperature checks in general. I feel like my first readings are nearly always medically hypothermic anyway. You'd also get a little green wrist band to indicate the time that you entered the building.

Everyone was wearing facial coverings and the staff were all friendly and accommodating, within the understandable parameters that things were obviously going to be administered strictly.

Once inside the building, I'd head to the auxiliary press level on the seventh floor, a bit further from the rink than the standard Rogers Place press box is. Whether it was further away or not, I absolutely loved the perch.

Personally, I had a great view, right near centre ice, and everyday I'd go and unpack, setting up shop — laptop, binoculars, chargers all splayed out — at a bar height table that I used as a standing desk to watch games.

There weren't a ton of amenities, but on offer for free on press level there was always coffee, water bottles, soft drinks, fruit and whole loaves of bread accompanied by some spreadable condiments like peanut butter and occasionally Nutella.

There was also always a bowl filled with individually packaged marmalade, which became an obsession of mine as the playoffs went along. I'm not sure anyone ever ate a single packet.

In the qualifying round and the round of 16, there were often three games a day in the Western bubble: at 12:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. local time. I'd regularly do all three, showing up at the rink at 11:30 a.m. and leaving around 1 a.m.

Over the course of two months of work, I'd occasionally need a more private space in-arena, away from the piped-in music and the fake sounds of the game, so that I could talk on the phone.

So I started using a little family bathroom just off of the concourse, which I nicknamed "my office." I legitimately completed full telephone



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interviews, podcast and radio appearances, participated in Zoom media availabilities and had lengthy conversations with agents and players and coaches in that space. It was clutch.

My approach in the Western bubble wasn't particularly common among other writers. There were broadcasters that racked up hours in the rink the way I did and the various game photographers definitely did, but on media row at the top of the 200 level it was often just me and Edmonton game day staff for at least a couple of games per day until the Eastern Conference final.

When I think about what really made me go a bit Captain Kurtz mid-way through the assignment, it's hard to pick between the burnout and the overall isolation.

Either way, I want to shout out my The Athletic colleagues Daniel Nugent-Bowman, who spelled me on a few key occasions, and Arpon Basu, who was so excited to watch live hockey again and has such a genuine, positive energy that his arrival during the conference final served to remind me that this assignment wasn't just a grind but was also a privilege.

I also want to give a shout to Oilers PR manager Shawn May, who was there constantly, even more-so than I was, and had a pretty thankless task acclimatizing media to a surreal situation, handling the front-of-house portion of the postgame Zoom availabilities and handling hosting duties. He did tremendous work.

For all of that, the real sense of seclusion wasn't from any loneliness on press row. It was from the way this tournament was set up in the first place. Media attendance was all but discouraged, access was severely curbed and it was extraordinarily difficult to do the sort of work that we're used to.

I mostly carved out a niche by transcribing all the swear words, and zeroing in hard on game analysis. I think it worked, but it was a challenge unlike any I've ever dealt with as a hockey reporter previously. And at the end of the day, ironically, the bubble story I wrote during the 2020 Stanley Cup playoffs that I'm most proud of, was the one that required the most conventional level of one-on-one access.

Usually I'd expect to come out of a playoff run with a couple of new contacts that I text with regularly and a small handful of players that I have real rapport with, know are good to talk to in the room. This year there was next to no real networking aspect to spending two months in the bubble.

Instead, in the hostile environment of a Zoom media availability, I found there was no genuine way to build real trust — or even to tactfully ask a difficult question — with players or coaches when you're just a disembodied voice. Personally, I found it near impossible to get good quotes even out of the players and coaches that I know personally. Eventually, I stopped doing the Zoom availabilities on an everyday basis unless I was writing off of the specific game or needed something hyper specific.

From the perspective as a neutral media observer adjacent to the NHL's Western Bubble, the hockey itself was on display in extraordinary abundance. Aside from a few standout off-ice moments — Matt Dumba's emotional speech to open the tournament in the West, the players in the Western bubble spilling out of the room when lining up behind the spokesmen from the four teams after the player-led walk out to protest system racism — the humanity of the game was not.

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The Athletic / NHL free agents: 15 under the radar UFAs to target

By Scott Burnside Oct 2, 2020

In a matter of days, the free-agent market will open, ushering in one of the most unusual offseasons in NHL history.

On the heels of an unprecedented playoff tournament, NHL GMs must now construct rosters for a 2020-21 season with the knowledge that the league's salary cap will remain flat at \$81.5 million for the coming season and perhaps the next two or three seasons after that.

This makes finding the right under the radar free agent — or two — to compliment the roster critical to success. You need look no further than the Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning. The low-profile, low-cost additions of Kevin Shattenkirk, Zach Bogosian, Luke Schenn and Pat Maroon show that, even though they don't have the profile of Alex Pietrangelo, Torey Krug or Taylor Hall, those kinds of additions may ultimately be worth their weight in gold.

Here's a look at some under the radar free agents (and a future Hall of Famer thrown in for good measure) expected to hit the market at noon ET on Oct 9.

Henrik Lundqvist, G, New York Rangers

The future Hall of Famer and New York Ranger icon isn't exactly under the radar, but if The King is going to find an NHL home after being bought out of the final year of his contract, which carried an \$8.5 million cap hit, it's going to take a very special and in some ways under the radar fit. At 38, Lundqvist doesn't need to play anywhere or to prove anything. But let's say the desire to win a Cup still burns bright. He'll need to dramatically modify his salary demands and it's likely no team is going to give him term beyond one year. But where? What about Washington where the Caps are expected to be relying on youngster Ilya Samsonov to take over the reins for Braden Holtby, who is also an unrestricted free agent. The Caps brought in Peter Laviolette to shake things up and the window for Alex Ovechkin et al isn't getting any wider, so maybe having Lundqvist aboard for a year works. Plus, Lundqvist could take the train from New York. Lots of folks seem to like Colorado, but not sure why that is so. And if Jacob Markstrom departs Vancouver, there is a lot of love about the idea of a Lundqvist/Thatcher Demko duo for the emerging Canucks.

Corey Perry, F, Dallas Stars

The former Hart Trophy winner is one of a number of low-risk signings that paid huge dividends during the recently completed playoffs. A number of those players are on this list as a matter of fact. After being bought out of the final two years of his contract by Anaheim, Perry signed a bonus-heavy one-year deal with Dallas last offseason that paid him \$3.25 million but carried a modest \$1.5 million cap hit. For most of the regular season it appeared to be money poorly spent as Perry had five goals in 57 games and was known mostly for being ejected in the opening moments of the Winter Classic for a Perry-like elbow to the head of Nashville's Ryan Ellis. But come playoff time Perry justified Dallas GM Jim Nill's faith, collecting five goals and four assists, including the double-overtime game-winner in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final. Is that performance a catalyst to a similar gig next year for the 35-year-old? It is likely that Dallas moves forward without Perry, but consider this: if Perry is in the Vegas lineup, do they fare differently against Dallas? Or Colorado? Food for thought.

Justin Schultz, D, Pittsburgh Penguins

The 30-year-old Schultz saw his career revived in Pittsburgh where he won two Stanley Cups and at one point hit the 50-point mark in 2016-17. Injuries have taken their toll the past couple of seasons and Schultz's role was diminished, making him expendable as his \$5.5 million per season contract comes to an end. A right-hand shot, Schultz could be a bargain alternative to teams looking for a depth defender to juice up a second power play unit. Anaheim might make sense if it falls short on Kevin Shattenkirk or Tyson Barrie. Or what about Tampa, where GM Julien BriseBois will have to work some salary cap magic, especially on the back end with only two regular defenders under contract for next season? Given the success the Bolts had with Shattenkirk, whom they signed after he was bought out by the Rangers last offseason, Schultz might not be a bad fit with the defending Stanley Cup champs. Just saying.



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Zach Bogosian, D, Tampa Bay Lightning

Talk about going from the outhouse to the penthouse. What a year for Zach Bogosian, who was basically fired by the abysmal Buffalo Sabres midseason and signed a pro-rated \$1.3 million deal with the Bolts on the eve of the trade deadline. Bogosian, 30, was terrific in the playoffs, lining up for the most part with Conn Smythe Trophy-winner Victor Hedman and playing a solid, heavy brand of hockey mostly against opposing teams' top forward lines. That performance should net Bogosian some term and a nice raise this offseason. He could be a boon to a team looking for a player who can play up and down a defensive alignment. Toronto has a ton of cap issues but Bogosian would certainly address some size and grit needs on the back end for the Leafs. Calgary has a ton of UFAs on its back end and is looking to change the mojo a bit, so that could be an interesting fit. And what of Washington where Radko Gudas (see below) looks to be on his way out and the Caps need to reload in a hurry?

Carl Soderberg, F, Arizona Coyotes

Carl Soderberg has always been a little undervalued as a solid, two-way NHL center with better than average offensive smarts. He finished the 2019-20 regular season with 17 goals for Arizona, this after a career-best 23 in 2018-19 in Colorado. He is 34, so there is that, but for a team looking to fill a hole down the middle with a solid veteran player who can kill penalties and chip in at 5-on-5, you could do a lot worse. And with Arizona looking to pare salary, it looks like Soderberg will be looking for a new home. The other factor to consider is that among the high-end UFAs, there aren't many centers on the market, so a team like the Rangers — which had penalty killing issues last season and is looking for depth down the middle — or Nashville — pending what happens with Kyle Turris — could be a nice landing place for the popular Soderberg.

Patrick Maroon, F, Tampa Bay Lightning

Back-to-back Stanley Cups for the big winger begs the question, does Patrick Maroon have a third in him? Maroon signed a one-year deal for a modest \$900,000 with Tampa after helping his hometown Blues win their first Stanley Cup in 2019. Probably doesn't fit for Tampa moving forward given its cap space issues, although never say never pending what kind of raise Maroon might be hoping to achieve given his playoff successes. Maroon is a big-bodied fourth-line guy who is going to chip in 10 goals or so during the regular season and maybe provide a nice net-front presence on the power play. His value, of course, is magnified come the playoffs when the rules are different, and size and grit become critical assets. He has shown he can up the ante and make life miserable for opposing defenders and netminders at critical times. If not Tampa, Maroon will certainly get a look from a team — like Toronto, for instance — looking to add low-cost jam to the forward group.

Tyler Ennis, F, Edmonton Oilers

Let's ponder this: If Tyler Ennis doesn't break his leg after catching his skate in a rut at Rogers Arena in Game 3, does Edmonton not get knocked off by Chicago? There is a usefulness about Ennis, who can play center and wing, has better than average skill and is a popular teammate, whether it's with the Oilers or elsewhere. Ennis, 30, played for \$800,000 last season, splitting time between Ottawa — where he was an important part of the team's rebuilding offense with 14 goals and 33 points — or Edmonton. With Sam Gagner signing in Detroit, there is lots of discussion about the Oilers trying to keep Ennis around, but he'd be a nice fit on a lot of teams, including back in Ottawa where the Senators are hoping to take a significant step forward.

Wayne Simmonds, F, Buffalo Sabres

The last two or three seasons have been a challenge for popular power forward Wayne Simmonds. Injuries have made it difficult for Simmonds to play the kind of grinding, physical game that saw him score at least 24 goals in five straight seasons for the Flyers from 2013-2018. This season Simmonds managed just eight goals in 68 games in New Jersey and Buffalo. But Simmonds told Pierre LeBrun recently that he's finally healthy after multiple surgeries the past few seasons and he's been "training like an animal." Does a short-term, low-dollar deal work on a team like Toronto, Simmonds' hometown? Presumably, the Sabres loved

the idea of Simmonds' leadership capabilities, so what about a team like Carolina with Justin Williams no longer leading the way and a young core hoping for big things next season?

Ilya Kovalchuk, F, Washington Capitals

Are the joyous 22 games that Ilya Kovalchuk played for the Montreal Canadiens in 2020 enough to keep the NHL door open for the 37-year-old sniper? Because that stretch was pretty much the high point for a player who has amassed 876 points in 926 NHL games but whose NHL career now appears to be hanging by a thread. Kovalchuk had 13 points in 22 games for Montreal, which picked him up after his contract was terminated by the Los Angeles Kings in December. It was great to watch, and from all reports the Habs loved having Kovalchuk around. That burst of productivity was enough to entice Washington to pick him up at the trade deadline, but Kovalchuk managed just one goal and four assists in 15 games for the disappointing Caps, including a grisly one-assist performance in eight playoff games. The simple solution would be to return to Montreal on a one-year, league-minimum deal, but does GM Marc Bergevin have that kind of latitude or does he even want to go down that road? If not Montreal, where? Sadly, maybe nowhere.

Radko Gudas, D, Washington Capitals

Have to admit that I have a soft spot for Radko Gudas. Thoughtful, funny, he is a guy that you would definitely seem to want in your room and to have your back on the ice. The truth is, by the end of last season, it really wasn't a great fit in Washington. Gudas was a healthy scratch late in the regular season and appeared in five of the Caps' eight playoff games mostly because John Carlson was banged up. So Gudas will most likely be on the move. He's a third-pair guy, but at 30, he is still young enough to have lots left in the tank, he still has the ability to be a sometimes devastating hitter and he continues to play the game with considerable snarl. So look for a team looking to add some toughness to its defensive depth to be interested.

Mike Smith, G, Edmonton Oilers and Craig Anderson, G, Ottawa Senators

These two veteran netminders are together because Smith, 38, and Anderson, 39, are nearing the end of stellar NHL careers. Smith isn't likely to return to Edmonton, where he shared time with Mikko Koskinen. Smith remains a superlative puck-handler, which is no small feat given the speed of the game, although he does have a tendency to over-handle the puck sometimes as we saw this summer. Anderson, on the other hand, has been a quieting influence in the sea of chaos that has been the Ottawa Senators the past few seasons. What makes both these men potentially attractive on a one-year deal is that, along with being consummate pros, both have recent playoff successes on their resumes. Smith was the Flames' best player in an opening-round loss to Colorado in 2019, which earned him a spot on the Edmonton roster this season. Anderson was outstanding leading the Senators to the Eastern Conference final in 2017. They obviously fit mostly with a team relying on an emerging young netminder with little money to spend on a backup. Like the Capitals, for instance, or in New Jersey where the team is expected to move on from veteran Cory Schneider but won't want to spend much.

Bobby Ryan, F, Ottawa Senators

Bobby Ryan has certainly seen some ups and downs in his career and full marks for his candor in confronting an alcohol problem that saw him step away from the Senators this past season. Ryan was awarded the Bill Masterton Memorial Award for dedication and perseverance to the game. Shortly thereafter the Senators announced they were buying Ryan out of the final two years of his deal that carried a \$7.25 million annual cap hit. So, now what? A right-hand shot, Ryan last hit the 20-goal mark in 2015-16, but how much of his decline and lack of durability can be attributed to his off-ice issues? And more to the point, on a one-year, low-value deal, does Ryan represent an acceptable risk? The simple answer is yes, that's why you might see teams like San Jose, which needs help on the right side, or Montreal, depending on how its roster evolves vis a vis Max Domi, as potential landing spots. Sure, the sentimental move would be Philadelphia as Ryan grew up in the area as a Flyers fan. But not sure he really fits where the Flyers are heading given the young



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talent stockpiled up front unless, of course, James van Riemsdyk and his \$7 million salary for the next three seasons somehow exits the landscape via trade or buyout.

Andy Greene, D, New York Islanders

There was some skepticism when Islanders GM Lou Lamoriello shelled out a prospect and a 2021 second-round draft pick to acquire pending free agent Andy Greene. But Lamoriello knew Greene, 37, well from their shared days in New Jersey, and Greene rewarded Lamoriello's faith with exemplary play as the Isles marched to the Eastern Conference Final. Greene, the long-time captain of the Devils, would still like to play and his solid performance with the Isles suggests he's still going to help on any number of clubs. Possible he could go back to New Jersey, although GM Tom Fitzgerald is looking to add a little heft to the left side of the blue line and Greene's not really in the Devils' wheelhouse given his age. Greene could, of course, stay with the Islanders where he played mostly with Nick Leddy but could end up being a nice partner for one of the Isles younger blueliners. Certainly a team with a young blue line in need of a solid presence would seem to be a good fit for Greene. Ron Hainsey, 39, performed that role in Ottawa and if he doesn't return that might be a good landing spot.

Jimmy Vesey, F, Buffalo Sabres

It's been a strange career arc for the former Harvard star who couldn't come to terms with Nashville, the team that drafted him with the 66th pick in 2012. The Preds traded his rights to Buffalo, but Vesey was disinclined to sign there and ultimately signed with the Rangers as a free agent. The expectation was he'd be an important part of the rebuild in New York, but it didn't really turn out that way. Vesey, 27, was dealt back to Buffalo before this season and his production fell off the map even though he did get some opportunities playing with star center Jack Eichel. The Sabres liked Vesey's penalty killing work, but could a change of scenery see Vesey approach the 20-goal potential he seems to have? Someone's got to play in Arizona so maybe that's a good fit for a team that won't have to expose itself to much term or dollar. Or maybe Ottawa where the rebuilding Senators will need to flesh out their forward corps with some experienced NHLers, and Vesey is attractive given his relatively young age.

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The Athletic / What's in a name? For NHL players, deciding on pronunciation can be a challenge

By Daniel Nugent-Bowman Oct 2, 2020

In the months leading up to the 2020 NHL Draft, top prospect Tim Stützle spent hours on his computer being grilled by general managers and scouts.

Before the tough questions came, however, each video interview started with the same seemingly innocuous question: How do you pronounce your name?

"Literally every team asks that," Stützle said, laughing at the thought.

And for good reason. Stützle is a dazzling offensive threat, a dynamic skater and a nifty playmaker. He's a surefire top-10 pick.

His name is one people need to know. Enunciating slowly and clearly in his conversations with NHL brass only increases the odds he'll hear it announced properly on draft day.

Still, that's far from a certainty. Even after his careful dictations, tongue-tied attempts were as common as the German forward zipping past an opponent.

"It's 'Stootz-LE,'" the 18-year-old said. "It's always a little bit funny. For them, it's tough to say the umlaut. In Germany, it's just normal. It's easy to say. Because they don't have it in America or in Canada, normally it's more 'Stutz-LE.'"

Stützle takes all the slip-ups in good stride. He doesn't fret the mispronunciations, reasoning that his surname is a tricky one.

With an easygoing attitude and a cheery disposition, Stützle won't be inclined to correct people forever and might give in to whatever is easiest for others. It might not be long before he joins the long list of NHL players current and past who have been referred to by multiple pronunciations over the course of their careers.

Changes in a name's pronunciation have occurred for a variety of reasons – either at a player's request, through clarification or after a period of initial indifference.

Regardless of the reason for the switch-up, it all comes down to one thing for broadcasters: making sure it's said as closely as possible to what the player ultimately settles on.

Between Brad Marchand's superb play and outlandish antics, fans of opposing teams have had many opportunities to refer to the Bruins pest using unflattering terms or four-letter words.

Hockey commentators haven't had as many options to choose from, and picking the right one hasn't always been easy.

"There was such a discrepancy with how many people were saying 'MAR-shond' and how many were saying 'MAR-shand' that we asked him, and he said 'MAR-shond' is really the way he wanted it said," veteran NHL broadcaster Mike (Doc) Emrick said. "We, universally, at NBC shifted to 'MAR-shond.'"

"It becomes a factor of habit that is difficult to break immediately. Sometimes in the heat of the moment, play-by-play guys will shift back to what they have said rather than what they mean to say because they have to shift gears. Sometimes when things are going really fast, we don't do it flawlessly."

Marchand used the current pronunciation as a rookie, went by the other moniker for years thereafter and then reverted.

"People called me 'MAR-shond.' When I grew up, I said 'MAR-shand.' That's what I said," he said. "But then I started asking my family. Everyone started questioning it. They said they usually go by 'MAR-shond.'"

Confusion or inconsistency in enunciation can come because of a variety of reasons. If anyone should know, it's Emrick.

Respected hockey commentator Dick Irvin Jr. put Emrick in charge of overseeing the compilation of phonetics of tricky names for the broadcasters' pronunciation guide beginning in 1983 at the latter's request.

Emrick tasked local play-by-play men with asking the players on their teams how to properly say their names each September. The broadcasters would then call him and leave a message on his answering machine with the careful dictations.

Emrick transcribed them and published a list in time for the start of the season. It took roughly a week to do – the first part anyway.

"Invariably, after the guide was put out, there would be three or four calls from PR people who would say, 'Our broadcaster called you with that and he was wrong.' So, then you would have to put out an addendum to it," Emrick said. "This was long before the days of email. It wasn't a lightning-like way that you could get the message out to teams other than by sending some kind of a fax. It was not a simple process to try to keep everybody updated on what was accurate.

"From that standpoint, at times it was a headache. But the idea was that we all at least know the proper way to say a guy's name."

After the 2004-05 lockout, the NHL took over the process from Emrick et al.



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The teams' PR staffers now put microphones on the players and ask them to say their names. They transcribe them and convert them into phonetic spellings.

Like the previous method, this one isn't foolproof.

"Some players are not as clear speaking into a microphone," Emrick said. "Some people that work with them are not as insistent on having them say it slowly and naturally and saying it a couple of times."

The process and the result aren't perfect. Not everyone speaks as clearly as Marchand, for instance, Emrick said.

At the very least, the pronunciation guide provides a baseline.

National broadcasters like Emrick, who calls his share of afternoon games with limited pre-game availabilities, can consult with his local colleagues.

The better solution whenever possible is to get it from the horse's mouth and simply ask the player.

That method worked well for Oilers radio play-by-play man Jack Michaels when Andrej Sekera showed up in Edmonton after signing with the team in 2015.

Michaels asked and was told the more appropriate pronunciation for the Slovakian blueliner was "SEK-er-a" (almost two syllables) rather than "Se-KER-ra," as he'd been called before.

Asking a player doesn't always get the desired result, though.

"Hockey players, as a rule, are super deferential. Their answer is always, 'Whatever. It doesn't matter,'" Michaels said. "I always have to get through that. 'Just tell me.'"

"The least I can do when you've made the National Hockey League is pronounce your name correctly. That is a bare minimum."

European players can be particularly deferential, with many dictating their names and then saying, "But I don't care" – the worst words a broadcaster can hear, Emrick said. "We want them to care. And we wanna try to replicate how they say their names."

Kevin Quinn, who calls Oilers games on Sportsnet and other contests on Hockey Night In Canada, will ask incoming European players how they say their name. The common reply: "How do you pronounce it?"

Quinn generally counters with a couple of his own questions.

When you go home to Helsinki or Moscow or Stockholm, how do they say your name? What does your grandmother think – how would she like it pronounced?

"I think it's a sign of respect," he said. "It really isn't that difficult to try and accommodate."

Russian surnames can bring their share of inconsistencies. Think of all the ways Rangers rookie netminder Igor Shesterkin's last name has been said last season. English pronunciations usually place emphasis on the first syllable, whereas in Russian it's on the second.

Panthers forward Evgenii Dadonov asked Quinn to say "Da-DON-ov" rather than "DAD-on-ov" on the air without mentioning anything to the local broadcast team.

All broadcasters want to get names right – or as right as can be. Sometimes being perfect isn't perfect.

Former Oiler and 2012 No. 1 pick Nail Yakupov played junior in the OHL with Sarnia, so his name had been North Americanized by the time he arrived in Edmonton.

Yakupov told Quinn he wouldn't be able to say his name as Russians typically do. But when Yakupov scored one night in New York, Quinn belted out, "Na-EEEEEEEELLLLL Yak-KU-pov!"

The call gained praise from the winger but confused Quinn's bosses. The problem was it sounded unnatural coming out of a North American man's mouth to be heard by a predominately North American audience.

Quinn's colleague Michaels understands the predicament.

"I don't get it right to the point where I'm gonna make an idiot out of myself or I'm going to do a disservice to the player's name," Michaels said.

Emrick is on the same page. He had to North Americanize the surname of the Stastny brothers when they played for the Quebec Nordiques in the 1980s because passing plays became tongue twisters. Saying Stastny the Slovakian way – "STOSH-ny" – three times in row became cumbersome when Peter, Marian and Anton were whistling the puck back and forth.

"It got in the way of the flow of the verbiage," Emrick said.

There's a fine line because he wants to pay the proper respect. "My philosophy is not to draw attention to myself; it's to draw attention to the player," he added. "You don't wanna sound affected."

Ever since he entered the NHL, Elias Pettersson has been making the heads of defencemen and goaltenders spin with his dazzling creativity and deadly shot.

But the Canucks centre has also been creating headaches for broadcasters as they struggle over how to properly pronounce his name.

It was particularly a talking point early in his rookie season as Pettersson burst onto the scene without a consistent standard for dictation.

It's taken quite some time before the player himself set the record straight, opting to make life easier for those behind the mic.

"I'm just gonna pronounce it my way," he said. "The accent here is different. For me, Canadians and North Americans can't say the Swedish version, so I like it as 'Elias PET-ter-sson.'"

The Vancouver star figured people following the Canucks couldn't properly accentuate the end of his name like those speaking his native language. It should be 'PET-ter-shon.'

The way Swedes pronounce his name would sound like it was being bastardized coming from the mouth of a North American person, Michaels argues.

Yet there has been variation in how the 2018-19 Calder Trophy winner's name is or should be said on the west side of the Atlantic Ocean.

"He was on After Hours and Scott Oake asked him about it. And Scott Oake said, 'OK. That's it. It's PET-ter-sson from now on,'" Quinn said.

"I'm like, 'That's Rogers. That's my company. I have to call him what everyone calls him.'"

Michaels, however, asked him on two separate occasions during his freshman campaign and got the same – but different – answer.

"Everyone else is calling him 'PET-ter-sson,' but he's told me to my face: 'PETE-ter-son' and he's used his name as 'PETE-ter-son' in a commercial," Michaels said.

Pettersson claims he doesn't really care how he's referred to but noted it was Brock Boeser who helped him zero in on the "PET-ter-sson" handle.

He admits to switching thing up in Edmonton last season, however, which has added to the confusion.

"I said it a different way then," Pettersson said. "(Boeser) gave me a little chirp for that. I like it more his way."

Other times, broadcasters are told to make a change because it suits those in the community better.

Emrick recalls Teemu Selanne's surname being the Finnish "Sel-LEN-ne" in the pronunciation guide when the winger was a rookie. However, because Winnipeggers called him "SEL-lan-ne," the team asked the rising star if he'd be agreeable to adopting the new pronunciation. The rest is history.



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A change in the way fans hear some of their favourite players' names can happen for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, like in the case of Sekera, it's a result of moving to a new team in a different city.

During his brief stint as an Oiler early last season, winger Tomas Jurco asked to go by the more traditional Slovakian pronunciation of "Jur-CHO" rather than "Jur-CO" – as he'd been known throughout his career.

Daniel Briere wanted to be addressed as Danny Briere when he arrived in Philadelphia. He was concerned people in the City of Brotherly Love would be confused by the French pronunciation of his first name.

Similarly, journeyman forward Alex Chiasson's name was said differently than you'd hear today after arriving in Ottawa from Dallas as part of the Jason Spezza deal.

Chiasson is from Quebec and, since Ottawa is a bilingual city, some media and fans began using the French pronunciation of his surname – in which the first syllable is more elongated.

But he asked that the Anglicized version be used again after one season.

"It just felt like it got butchered a little bit," the Oilers winger said. "The way it is now is just easier.

"If you're not from a French community, it's hard to pronounce it the other way."

Other times though, a change is requested by the player for a more personal reason.

Defenceman Alexander Petrovic, who spent the 2019-20 season with the AHL's Providence Bruins, once asked for his last name to be pronounced to honour his Serbian roots (Pet-TRO-vich) rather than the North American way he grew up with (PET-tro-vich).

The decision was made early in the 2017-18 season when Petrovic was with the Panthers. The reason was so his grandfather, a refugee from the former Yugoslavia who settled in Edmonton, could hear the traditional dictation when he watched the games on TV. Budimir Petrovic died a few months later in February 2018 at age 96.

"I know he was very proud of me playing in the NHL," Petrovic said. "I thought for him hearing the name the right way was a good thing."

Mid-career name changes can wreak havoc on broadcasters. Depending on how ingrained the previous version was in their minds, old habits sometimes die hard.

"I can be annoying to be around because if we're in casual conversation with colleagues and someone happens to say some name wrong, I'll instantly bring it back up and say it the right way," Michaels said. "If I hear something, it starts creeping into my little brain and once it's in there it's hard to get out."

As hard as it is on those doing play-by-play, the player's decision is all that matters.

Conor Sheary went a couple of years before clarifying that his name is pronounced "Share-EEE" and not "Sheer-EEE." The late Derek Boogaard didn't revert to the proper articulation of "Beau-guard" because the revised version sounded scarier to the tough guy.

In Stützle's case, he has plenty of time to decide how determined he wants to be about having his name pronounced correctly or whether he'll relent and opt for more North American dictation.

After an eventful summer in which he received a well-wishing text from countryman and Oilers superstar Leon Draisaitl and took up golfing, Stützle is now in his second year with Adler Mannheim of Germany's top pro league.

He hopes this stint is a short one. His intentions are clear: He wants to make the NHL this season, which means coming to North America for training camp.

At that point, the queries for clarification about his last name from media members will surely begin in droves.

"I don't feel very bad if it's pronounced wrong because it's tough to say," Stützle said. "I have no problem with that."

He'll eventually be forced to settle on something. And once the pronunciation has been decided, it's the broadcasters who must ultimately adapt.

"I took the Dale Carnegie course," Emrick said. "Dale Carnegie always said, 'The sound of a man's name is the sweetest sound to his ear.' However that person wants it is how we are to do it.

"Sadly, it's an imperfect science where you do make mistakes on guys. You don't want to, but it's three hours of talking and you are going to make mistakes. But you wanna have the basics in front of you so that you get it right because it is their name."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.03.2020

Sportsnet.ca / Top NHL UFAs by position: Looking at the 10 best defencemen available

Emily Sadler | October 2, 2020, 9:40 AM

During the lead-up to NHL free agency opening on Oct. 9, we're taking a look the top UFAs at each position. Today, we're showcasing what is a pretty deep group of defencemen who could be on the move this off-season.

We've got a strong class of rearguards due new deals this fall, headlined by the No. 1 UFA of 2020 and including some smooth-skating defenders who can provide an instant boost to a team's blue line. Let's dive in.

1. Alex Pietrangelo

2019-20 team: St. Louis Blues | Age: 30

2019-20 stats: 16G, 36A, 52Pts in 70GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$6.5M

Last year's Stanley Cup-winning captain is this year's biggest UFA, and there's no shortage of interest around the league. No. 1 rearguards like Pietrangelo don't become available too often — last year's would-be big-name UFA defenders, Drew Doughty and Erik Karlsson, re-signed with their respective clubs long before even getting a chance to sniff free agency.

But is Pietrangelo really on the move?

All season, both team and player maintained that their top off-season priority would be to re-sign on the dotted line. Pietrangelo made it clear during his end-of-season media availability that he wants to stay a Blue:

"Of course I do," he told reporters. "It's the only place I've known professional hockey."

Only, the math is complicated — and made even more so by the flat cap. In a normal year, Pietrangelo could expect to garner upward of \$9 million a year, considering the going rate as well as his consistent production and proven ability to win. In an interview with The Athletic's Jeremy Rutherford last month, Pietrangelo revealed that talks between his camp and Blues management had broken down — a development that doubles as a call for public pressure from fans.

There are eight days left before NHL free agency begins, and there remains no update/progress between the Blues and captain Alex Pietrangelo. Things can change quickly, but that's the word at the moment.

— Jeremy Rutherford (@jprutherford) October 1, 2020



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According to Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman, the two sides are "going to take one more run at this."

Writes Friedman, "The biggest question: Do the Blues believe he will leave?"

2. Torey Krug

2019-20 team: Boston Bruins | Age: 29

2019-20 stats: 9G, 40A, 49Pts in 61GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.25

Krug is, in so many ways, an embodiment of what Bruins hockey is all about: Gritty, physical, skilled, versatile, and incredibly tough to grind down. Yet, it's looking increasingly like his days sporting the spoked B are about to come to an end. Despite a desire to keep this partnership going, neither side sounds particularly hopeful that it'll actually happen. Bruins general manager Don Sweeney also has two RFAs to extend in Jake DeBrusk and Matt Grzelcyk, plus Zdeno Chara, and just \$14 million to spend, which doesn't leave much for Krug.

Krug made it clear during a recent media availability that he's looking for a long-term pact, and said he's "very opposed" to taking a one-year deal when asked about that possibility.

"I've bet on myself and I've taken shorter term deals for less amount of money for my whole career now," he said. "This is my time in terms of my value at its peak. I'm in a position now where I need to make the most of it. I've done it long enough now and that's the situation I'm facing."

That said, Krug made it clear he'd love to stay in Boston — but also knows it's not personal on either side.

"I'm a big believer that there's a journey for all of us. Whether it's here or somewhere else, I'm not too worried about it or anxious about it," he said (via NBC Sports). "There's an emotional attachment (to Boston), but that's a mistake that a lot of athletes get caught up in when they start their professional careers. There's nothing personal about it. It's business on both ends. Teams have to put their best foot forward spending a certain amount of money and athletes have one shot at making all of their money in their careers. Whether you play one or two years up to a 10-15-year career, you have one shot to do it all. I realize that and it is what it is. There's an emotional attachment (to the Bruins) and I've made no secret about it. My teammates know it. Everyone knows it. It's part of the business that stinks, but we'll see what happens moving forward."

Geography links the Livonia, Mich., native to the Detroit Red Wings, and the rebuilding team's cap space and positional need adds to that case. Krug could be a trade candidate in the coming week as teams seek an exclusive negotiating window with the UFA-to-be.

3. Tyson Barrie

2019-20 team: Toronto Maple Leafs | Age: 29

2019-20 stats: 4G, 34A, 39Pts in 70GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.5M

When the Maple Leafs acquired Barrie last off-season, it looked like the chemistry would be instant between the quick, skilled club and their new smooth-skating, puck-moving defenceman. Only, things didn't exactly pan out as expected for Barrie, making it a near-certainty that the two sides would part ways in free agency, chalking up the one-year relationship to an unsuccessful experiment and a lesson learned.

Still, a down year on the stat sheet — Barrie's handful of goals was his lowest total since his rookie year — won't stop him from being one of the most popular free agents in his class.

4. T.J. Brodie

2019-20 team: Calgary Flames | Age: 30

2019-20 stats: 4G, 15A, 19Pts in 64GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.65M

Another disappointing playoff performance from the Pacific club makes the Flames' off-season particularly intriguing this year. Does general manager Brad Treliving make a few tweaks to complement his core, or will he opt for more drastic actions?

Sportsnet's Eric Francis believes that if it comes down to a decision between Brodie and fellow Flames D-man Travis Hamonic, Brodie would be the most likely to remain in Calgary. Though we didn't see as much of his offensive upside this past season, he continues to be a strong presence on the blue line — particularly when paired with captain Mark Giordano as one half of the team's best backend duo — and remains one of the top ice-time leaders.

5. Kevin Shattenkirk

2019-20 team: Tampa Bay Lightning | Age: 31

2019-20 stats: 8G, 26A, 34Pts in 70GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$1.75M

The past few years have been a roller-coaster for Shattenkirk, going from longtime Blue to rental Capital, sought-after UFA to Rangers buyout, then affordable Tampa Bay pickup to Stanley Cup champion. Whew.

Shattenkirk found solid chemistry on Tampa Bay's blue line, providing an affordable upgrade and using the opportunity to revive his own career — his 34 points this season was his highest total since his last campaign with the Blues, and had him on pace to hit the 40-point plateau like he did consistently during his standout St. Louis career.

6. Travis Hamonic

2019-20 team: Calgary Flames | Age: 30

2019-20 stats: 3G, 9A, 12Pts in 50GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.86M

Another piece of Calgary's core on the blue line, it feels like Hamonic's fate goes hand-in-hand with Brodie's. Not as flashy as the D-men listed before him, but a steady stay-at-home presence that could come at a relatively affordable price.

The Big Show

Daily Flames Roundtable: Will Travis Hamonic be on the Flames' roster next year?

September 11 2020

Your browser does not support the audio element.

7. Sami Vatanen

2019-20 team: New Jersey Devils + Carolina Hurricanes | Age: 29

2019-20 stats: 5G, 18A, 23Pts in 47GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.875M

Due to an injury at the time of his trade, we didn't get to see much of Vatanen with the Hurricanes as he had to wait until landing in the Toronto bubble to make his debut with his new club. Health has held back the rearguard, who has never been able to play a full season, but has given us plenty of glimpses of his smooth skating and mobility in healthy stints.

As strong a fit as he may be in Carolina, we will probably never fully find out what could have been — a seven-game trial probably isn't long enough to gauge chemistry. Health will certainly factor into his next deal, which could be a short-term one.

8. Chris Tanev

2019-20 team: Vancouver Canucks | Age: 30

2019-20 stats: 2G, 18A, 20Pts, 69GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.45



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With the condensed off-season and a flat cap, this fall is shaping up to be particularly busy for a number of NHL general managers, but few have a to-do list longer than the one on Jim Benning's desk.

Tanev's name isn't at the top — Jacob Markstrom and Tyler Toffoli are — but it's not too far down, either. The longtime Canuck had a career year in 2019-20, providing a strong physical presence and excellent partner for rookie sensation Quinn Hughes. And while Hughes is a reason to keep Tanev in the fold now, his pending payday as an RFA following 2020-21 could hinder Benning's ability to offer Tanev much for his services down the road making it likely he could land a better offer elsewhere.

Dynamic forward Elias Pettersson will be an RFA at the same time as Hughes, which puts even more pressure on Benning to get things right this fall in order to set himself up nicely to make next summer's negotiations easier.

9. Brenden Dillon

2019-20 team: San Jose Sharks + Washington Capitals | Age: 29

2019-20 stats: 1G, 13a, 14Pts, 69GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.27M

The Capitals dealt a 2020 second-round pick and a conditional third in 2021 to the Sharks for Dillon, and were happy with the addition. According to Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, Washington is in the process of "trying to move money" in an effort to keep him.

Washington is officially on trade watch.

10. Zdeno Chara

2019-20 team: Boston Bruins | Age: 43

2019-20 stats: 5G, 9A, 14Pts in 68GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$2M

The past two off-seasons have seen Chara sign a one-year deal with Boston, taking a year-by-year approach to the final chapter of his career. Considering how close the Bruins have been to winning it all these past few years, it feels very likely that he re-ups for another go-round this fall.

He put together another solid year in 2019-20, ranking second in average ice time behind only Charlie McAvoy, and is still incredibly tough to play against.

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Sportsnet.ca / Treliving predicts uncertainty may restrict unique off-season trade market

Eric Francis October 2, 2020, 6:48 PM

While many expect next week's draft and subsequent free agency to produce a flurry of transactions, Brad Treliving isn't so sure.

The Calgary Flames GM said Friday the unprecedented circumstances and long list of unknowns could have many teams effecting significant changes to their rosters long after free agency hits next Friday.

"It's a little bit of tentative market tight now," said Treliving, who has historically used the draft to make big trades. "I do think there will be activity as we approach the draft, but I think it may be a later trade market.

"If you get through the draft and a little bit of free agency and people see things they were looking for that they don't get in free agency, it may extend into the fall once the dust settles a little bit. There are a lot of

unknowns. It's a unique time. There are lots of discussions going on but it's a new frontier where there are a lot of things in play."

Watch Round 1 of the NHL Draft on Sportsnet and SN NOW beginning at 7:00 p.m. ET/4 p.m. PT on Tuesday, Oct. 6. Then catch Rounds 2-7 on SN1 and SN NOW starting at from 11:30 a.m. ET/8:30 a.m. PT on Wednesday, Oct. 7.

Treliving described the market as being "clogged," where the constraints of a flat salary cap have GMs hesitant to be one of the first to dip a toe in the water to start setting the new price structure for pending UFAs and in trade.

"A lot of it is just hesitation of people not knowing what the market is — there's a real hesitation now to take on excess money," he said, before listing factors complicating his world. "First of all, we don't know when we're playing. We have a flat cap. I don't think that, itself, is restrictive, because there will be movement.

"But there's a cautiousness to the market right now in terms of dollars today, but also a year and two years out, looking at your team. You're looking at balancing contracts for years to come. You've got an expansion draft on the horizon so that plays a role in it too. There are lots of factors in it. The next week is busy, but it's not the end of time. It may not all just happen in one or two days here."

Another factor that could hamper activity is that by staging the draft virtually there is no interaction on the draft floor, in lobbies, restaurants and watering holes that can lead to deals.

But the biggest issue is trying to peg player value at a time when the cap is expected to be stagnant for some time.

"Usually in free agency you have a pretty good idea of what prices may be and where a person slots, but that's a little bit different right now," said Treliving, who had ongoing talks with his five UFA defenceman and UFA goalie Cam Talbot, but has yet to table anyone offers ahead of Friday's free agent frenzy.

"Does that position still cost what it did a year ago? Did it go down, or go up? Those are unknowns. Even the expansion draft — it's great to go get this player, but six months later you have a protection issue. Lots of activity, very little productivity in terms of player movement to date. I do think this stuff will carry on beyond the draft and the first day of free agency."

With \$17 million in cap space, the Flames are in a better position than many other teams in terms of having flexibility to navigate through it all. The team needs a goalie to play alongside David Rittich and Treliving said he'd be happy to have Talbot return for a second season.

But at what cost?

With a dozen unrestricted goalies to choose from, the Flames and roughly nine other teams will soon determine the worth of everyone from Jacob Markstrom, Robin Lehner and Anton Khudobin, to Braden Holtby, Thomas Greiss and Talbot. Will Henrik Lundqvist be in play? How is the market affected by the possibility Matt Murray, Marc-Andre Fleury, James Reimer or Darcy Kuemper could be traded?

The Flames' other obvious need is on the blueline where there is a gaping hole to fill alongside Noah Hanifin on the right side of the second pairing.

Again, the Flames will have plenty of free agents to choose from, including the possibility of bringing back players like TJ Brodie and Erik Gustafsson. They'll also weigh the merits of trying to obtain a defender or two via trade, which is another market that has GMs guessing at values.

"You'd certainly like to do some things but you need a partner," said Treliving of the trade route. "We're gauging the market now, but we've got decisions to make. Having flexibility down the road — does that open up opportunities for you?"

So many questions.



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And as Treliving predicts, many of them may not be answered as early as you'd think.

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Sportsnet.ca / An early ranking of NHL's top 12 UFAs from star-studded 2021 group

Luke Fox | October 2, 2020, 8:13 AM

Any financial advisor will tell you: it's never too early to start planning for the future.

So, as the NHL races toward the opening of 2020's free agency period (Oct. 9), it's worth keeping in mind a star-studded group about to enter pivotal contract seasons in 2020-21.

This group is well and able to ink extensions with their current clubs, and we've already seen the Minnesota Wild (Jonas Brodin, seven years at \$6 million) and Montreal Canadiens (Jeff Petry, four years and \$6.25 million) take care of business early — weakening 2021's UFA defencemen crop in the process.

Unlike past off-seasons, general managers already know the 2021-22 cap ceiling (flat at \$81.5 million) and can start mapping a roster for the next two seasons or start identifying impending UFAs they'll be hard-pressed to afford. Which is why this list shares a few names in common with the trade-bait lists floating around.

Here now is a very early preview of 2021's class of unrestricted free agents, including a round-up of the latest buzz around their next deals.

1. Alex Ovechkin

Age on July 1: 35

Position: Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$9.5 million

The skinny: If Ovechkin (706) is serious about taking a run at Wayne Gretzky's all-time goals record (894), he'll need a fresh multi-year commitment from the franchise that drafted him first overall way back in 2004. It's blasphemous to envision the Great Eight in any other sweater.

Nicklas Backstrom and Ovechkin have expressed a mutual desire to play alongside each other for as long as possible, and the centreman negotiated his own \$46-million extension that should see him setting up Ovechkin's one-timer through 2024-25.

"My only concern going forward is that maybe Ovi might hire Nick to do his next contract," quipped GM Brian MacLellan, confident the sides will work on an extension when talks with Ovechkin pick up at training camp.

The superstar is reportedly negotiating his own deal.

"We had a good conversation at the end of the year with Ovi, just to have both parties communicate what they're thinking and kind of set the table for what could happen next year as far as keeping him around and moving forward with a contract with him."

According to Russian outlet metaratings.ru, MacLellan has already floated a three- to five-year extension to the captain that would carry an AAV between \$9.5 million and \$10 million.

2. Dougie Hamilton

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Defence

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$5.75 million

The skinny: The Hurricanes traded for Hamilton, in part, because they liked his cost certainty. Well, after one more season, the price tag for the top defender in 2021's UFA class won't be so certain.

Hamilton will be due for a raise the same summer as breakout star Andrei Svechnikov (RFA), and Carolina already has four other D-men signed long-term at \$4 million-plus per year. Which is why you'll hear trade rumours around solid right shots like Brett Pesce and Hamilton, already on his third franchise.

"It makes more sense to get to it sooner than later," GM Don Waddell said of Hamilton's negotiations. "Dougie is going to be an unrestricted free agent come next year after the upcoming year. Andrei will be coming off his entry-level deal. So, it's two different kind of negotiations we're looking at. There's no timetable. There's no deadlines. They both have another year left.

3. Tuukka Rask

Age on July 1: 34

Position: Goaltender

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$7 million

The skinny: The question isn't whether Rask — a Vezina-winning, Cup-winning, Jennings-winning stud — is deserving of an extension. The question is whether he wants one.

Rask openly pondered 2021 retirement this past season and drew criticism in some (unkind) circles for departing the playoff bubble early to attend to a family matter and leaving the Bruins' crease to backup Jaroslav Halak.

GM Don Sweeney assures that Rask and his family are doing well, adding he has "zero reservations about where Tuukka will be both on and off the ice for us" in 2020-21.

"You have to respect his privacy and allow him the latitude to take care of (personal issues)," Sweeney maintained. "And ultimately it hasn't affected his play on the ice. We have good goaltending, and we'll continue to do so."

The flat cap might prevent Sweeney from offering Rask a raise in an off-season during which it will also face decisions on several other free agents, but it would be difficult to argue that an engaged Rask isn't worth at least \$7 million somewhere.

"I'm sure we're going to have good conversations with (Sweeney) after this season and go from there," Rask said on WEEI 93.7 FM's The Greg Hill Show. "But I'm only 34 (when my deal expires), so it's not too old. So, I might play another year or two and then go from there.

"But I don't want to promise anything either way because you never know what's going to happen."

4. Gabriel Landeskog

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$5.57 million

The skinny: True, the budget-conscious Avalanche have a track record of dealing away talent before they hit paydirt: Paul Stastny, Ryan O'Reilly, Matt Duchene, Tyson Barrie....

But Colorado has an open window to contend for the grand prize, and anything other than a long-term extension for the captain would rock the core in a bad way. Real dollars are more of a concern than cap space in Denver, so Joe Sakic should lock up Landeskog for the rest of his prime.

How does seven years and \$49 million sound?

5. Frederik Andersen

Age on July 1: 31

Position: Goaltender



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2020-21 salary cap hit: \$5 million

The skinny: Andersen is easily the best netminder the Maple Leafs have employed since Ed Belfour, and yet there is no certainty he'll start for Toronto in 2020-21.

GM Kyle Dubas is open to offers for his workhorse No. 1 netminder, a valuable asset whose inevitable raise in 2021 would strain the organization's salary structure. The executive is reportedly only interested in parting with Auston Matthews' roomie for a top-four defenceman.

Andersen holds a 10-team no-trade clause. That he's collected a \$4-million signing bonus and will only command \$1 million in actual salary through 2020-21 makes his contract all the more enticing.

Trade or no trade, long-term commitments to core pieces like Andersen or Zach Hyman don't exactly feel imminent.

"Every one of these decisions takes on a more pronounced importance," Dubas said during his season-ending press tour. "We have space, but we don't have it in overabundance, and especially if things are going to be locked in for a couple years with the cap, we'll probably not be able to act as quickly as we'd like to with some of these guys coming up."

Andersen's thoughts on a second contract with the Leafs?

"Whatever's gonna happen, happens," he said.

6. Jordan Binnington

Age on July 1: 27

Position: Goaltender

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$4.4 million

The skinny: "You've got to be bold, because fortune favours the bold," Binnington explained of the bet-on-yourself bridge deal he signed after backstopping the Blues to their first championship.

After a stellar regular season in 2019-20, the brash, late-blooming goalie was force-fed some humble pie, going 0-5 with an .851 save percentage in his second post-season. Yikes.

Free of recency bias, St. Louis traded away the hotter goalie (Jake Allen), essentially reinforcing its faith that Binnington will carry the club in his contract season.

Unlike current UFA Alex Pietrangolo, the timing of Binnington's payday aligns nicely, as the cap-straining contracts of Alexander Steen and Tyler Bozak will come off the books right when he asks for a raise.

Does he look nervous?

7. Kyle Palmieri

Age on July 1: 30

Position: Right wing / Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$4.65 million

The skinny: An unsung star on a bad team, the hardworking Palmieri is quietly riding a five-year streak of 20-goal seasons and is one of the last leaders standing on a roster that is getting younger by the trade.

Extension talks with GM Tom Fitzgerald are reportedly underway, and cap space is no issue in New Jersey. If the club cannot find common ground with a consistent forward who contributes in all situations, Palmieri will make a heckuva trade chip now or at the deadline.

The Islanders, Avalanche and Oilers are among the playoff-seeking clubs looking to add scoring on the wings.

8. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Centre / Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$6 million

The skinny: A regular to the trade rumour mill, Nugent-Hopkins enters his contract year hot off back-to-back 60-point campaigns. One of the few mainstays of the Oilers' top six, RNH has improved his two-way game and has the versatility to complement Edmonton's superstars from the wing or centre his own middle-six line when necessary.

Although Nuge cannot be replaced internally, until he is re-signed, speculation around the 2011 first-overall pick's future will linger. He does not hold trade protection.

Writes colleague Mark Spector: "I'd guess he'll be looking for Leon Draisaitl money (\$8.5 million), though the Oilers may think that's high. But with Connor McDavid (\$12.5 million) and Draisaitl (\$8.5 million) atop the salary structure, Nugent-Hopkins could be signed for a number that does not leave Edmonton like Toronto — top-heavy with three forwards averaging over \$11 million apiece."

Positive extension talks were reported to have taken place this week between the Oilers and Nugent-Hopkins' camp.

9. Phillip Danault

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Centre

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$3.08 million

The skinny: Danault's name is "out there" this off-season, Elliotte Friedman reports, but trading responsible centremen before they hit age 30 is seldom advisable. Even if the future looks bright at the position (see: Nick Suzuki, Jasperi, Kotkaniemi).

Danault doesn't exactly put up Xbox numbers — he's never surpassed 13 goals and has reached 50 points just once — but he tilts the ice, nullifies the opposition's top centre regularly and is a plus-35 player over the past two seasons.

Yes, GM Marc Bergevin was quick to commit to Petry, but his decisions for 2021 UFAs don't end there.

10. Brendan Gallagher

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Right wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$3.75 million

The skinny: Gallagher says it would be great to sign a long-term extension in Montreal this off-season and return the focus to winning in Montreal.

"For me, it's pretty much everything," Gallagher told reporters in September. "The money's important. I'm not going to sit here and lie and say it's not going to be important to me. But it'll be enough money regardless of what it is. I'll be able to live a happy life post-hockey, and that's not going to be a worry. I want to enjoy my time and I want to enjoy my experience and I want to have an opportunity to be a winner. And that's really what you want to be remembered for."

Gallagher has juiced up his offensive contributions over the past three seasons, hitting the 50-point mark twice and thriving in Montreal's top six. Sportsnet's Eric Engels points to Chris Krieder's recent seven-year, \$45.5-million extension with the Rangers as a fair comparable.

Bergevin is on record saying preliminary negotiations have begun and he's confident a new deal can be worked out. The GM intends to lock up Gallagher and make him the club's best-paid forward.

11. Brandon Saad

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Left wing

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$6 million



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The skinny: Don't worry. If Stan Bowman elects to trade Saad, he can always trade back to get him at a later date.

Ah, we jest. But dealing Saad (again) is an option that must be at least considered with younger forwards coming up in the system (Dominik Kubalik, Dylan Strome) and Chicago staring at some tricky cap manoeuvring.

Saad is a five-time 20-goal man who has enjoyed a solid career in Chicago's top six and is responsible on the defensive side of the puck. He's not in line for a noticeable pay chop.

So, Bowman will be forced into the difficult decision of either trading away a room favourite or committing significant dollars and term to a player who rides into 2020-21 with a career-best 15 per cent shooting percentage and may have already peaked offensively.

12. David Krejci

Age on July 1: 35

Position: Centre

2020-21 salary cap hit: \$7.25 million

The skinny: The highest-paid Bruin will have to take a paycut, but Krejci's performance in the 2020 playoffs — a team-leading 12 points in 13 games — reasserted the value a dependable two-way pivot can bring.

Krejci is only a year removed from a 70-point performance, and unlike Boston's top-line players, he is seldom surrounded by elite offensive weapons. The legs are getting older, the contract needs to get shorter, but Krejci's hockey sense reminds us of the value in having a second-line centre you can trust in important situations.

"I'm not planning on retiring, that's for sure," Krejci said. "I plan on still playing. But for how long or what's going to happen after (this contract), I guess we'll see. I'm definitely not planning on going into next season as my last."

Whether it will be his last with the Bruins could depend partly on the internal development of touted centre prospect Jack Studnicka.

More notables: Eric Staal, Tomas Tatar, Zach Hyman, Ryan Getzlaf, Niklas Hjalmarsson, Adam Larsson, Derek Stepan, Paul Stastny, Philipp Grubauer, Alexander Edler, Petr Mrazek, Travis Zajac, Matt Niskanen, Jaden Schwartz, Tyler Bozak, Ryan Murray, Nikita Gusev, Nick Foligno, Brandon Sutter, Nick Bonino, Alec Martinez, Adam Lowry, Blake Coleman, Sean Kuraly, Barclay Goodrow, Pekka Rinne, Jamie Oleksiak, Jordan Martinook, Tanner Pearson, Jordie Benn

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The Athletic / Predictions review: What I got right and wrong about the 2019-20 NHL season

By Dom Luszczyszyn Oct 1, 2020

Another season is in the books (almost a year to the day of when it started!) which means it's time to look back before we start looking forward again.

It's my job to make predictions around here and unlike the majority of pundits who throw stuff into the void, I take pride in going over what I got right and wrong over a full season. Readers deserve that, they deserve transparency to know whether predictions are worth their words. I've been doing that for each of the past three seasons and this year is no different.

2016-17 Predictions Review

2017-18 Predictions Review

2018-19 Predictions Review

Last year my preseason projections and game predictions were quite strong, but I had a rough time in the playoffs and that forced me to make some much-needed adjustments, outlined here. I'm happy to report those changes paid off across the board with what was probably my most successful season of predictions to date.

Below I'll go through each set of predictions (preseason, game and playoffs) as a whole and then go through each team one-by-one.

Preseason Projections

As usual, we previewed what to expect from each team before the season started. The 2019-20 season was obviously a little different because, well, it never finished, but we can still make due based on each team's point pace. After 70 games there shouldn't be too many large changes from that number anyway.

Before the season began I grabbed prognostications from 11 different sources including my own and also ran a survey taken by more than 1,300 fans to give us 12 sets of predictions. On average, the 11 other sources were off by about 8.4 points, with the best being 7.34 points from Pinnacle, arguably the world's most respected oddsmaker. My model had an average error of 7.07 points and was the only set of predictions to beat the market. Not bad.

For further context, 1,337 people took the fan survey. Only eight had a lower average error than my model and the average fan (which is different than taking the average for each team) was off by just over nine points.

As for the playoffs, two of the 14 teams with a playoff probability north of 50 percent — San Jose at 72 percent and Minnesota at 59 percent — were outside a playoff spot when the league was suspended back in March.

Overall, it was a very successful season.

Regular Season Game Probabilities

This right here is the meat of any prediction model. Most people will rightly care more about point projections, playoff chances, series odds and Stanley Cup probabilities, but none of those things can be deduced without a solid foundation of predicting game outcomes first and foremost.

This year there were 1,082 games played during the regular season and the team favoured by my model won 608 games, good for 56.2 percent — a little less accurate than last season. Just like last year though, it was mostly in range, meaning if a game probability was 60 percent, those teams really did win around 60 percent of the time, give or take (the 50-55 and 65-70 range were a little lower though).

A better reflection of a model's accuracy is in that same vein, rewarding probability accuracy rather than whether a favourite won or not. That's usually measured by log loss and my model declined slightly in that regard this season, going from 0.6738 in 2018-19 to 0.6770 in 2019-20.

To my knowledge that was par for the course for most of the field this year though. There are three other big hockey modellers that make their game odds public on a day-to-day basis: Hockey Viz, MoneyPuck and Charting Hockey. I asked each of them for their log loss this season and they happily obliged with Peter Tanner of MoneyPuck citing it was a down year for him as well. Along with the Pinnacle lines I collected throughout the year, here's how the four models stack up in comparison to the market.

Again, my model is at the top and is also the only one that beat the odds I collected (it's worth noting most of those were collected in the morning and that closing lines would likely perform better). Beating the market is generally a very good sign and my model has done just that for two seasons in a row while being very close to the previous season as well by log loss. In each season the model was profitable from a betting perspective with 2019-20 being its best season yet. That's a strong sign and it's exactly what I meant earlier when I said the off-season changes to the model paid off. They literally did.



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What you'll notice though is the range on the above chart is very tight when compared to something like playoff probabilities as you'll see in the next section. I deliberately used the same x-axis scale for both charts to show how over a much larger sample size, the margins are a lot smaller.

Lastly, mostly to appease Hockey Viz's Micah McCurdy (who also taught me how to do this next trick), I've computed deciles of risk for each of the five models. Essentially, it sorts win probability for the home team, separates the probabilities into 10 equal bins (because there were 1,082 games, the two median games for each model were eliminated to create 10 equal buckets of 108 games), and then looks at how many games the model was expected to predict and how many it did.

It's a way to view how well-calibrated a model is, a fancier method over the first chart in this section. Generally, you'd expect to see the difference between projected and actual randomly fluctuate around zero. All the models pretty much fall in line, with my model, in particular, having some good luck in the fourth decile and poor luck in the seventh. In terms of average absolute error per decile, MoneyPuck's model had the lowest rate at 2.8 percent, followed by The Athletic at 3.3 percent, Charting Hockey at 3.6 percent, Hockey Viz at 3.9 percent and Pinnacle at 4.4 percent.

Playoff Probabilities

Last year, this is where things fell apart, choking on the biggest stage when it matters most. That's thankfully not the case this time as the improved model turned in a very strong playoff performance.

There were 12 prognosticators with odds for every series that were tracked by Colin Cudmore, plus the oddsmakers at Pinnacle once again. Of those 13 sources, my model was second to only Hockey Viz who put in another strong playoff showing.

My model tends to be a bit more aggressive than the field, so it benefits from a "chalkier" postseason that featured a lot of heavy favourites winning. In all, it only got 12 of 23 "favourites" right (nine of 15 in the actual playoffs), but the strong log loss is much more important. It means the degree of certainty was generally well-tuned.

Now that is out of the way, we can get to the team-by-team breakdowns. On some teams, my model will be bang-on. On others, it would've been dead wrong. That's the beauty of trying to predict a game as chaotic as hockey – you have to be prepared to be wrong, a lot. The secret is being the least wrong as well as learning why you got something wrong. Going through each team should illuminate that.

Team-by-Team Breakdown

Note: Team point projections are from these updated projections from Oct. 2, 2019, but unfortunately the graphics weren't updated with the new figures. All point totals and playoff probabilities will be accurate, but some of the division odds and point distributions may be slightly off.

Tampa Bay

Season Preview

"The Lightning have the best shot and the gap between them and second place is massive, similar in size to the one between second and seventh. Whether it's an unfair expectation or not, this team will be graded not by another spectacular regular season, but by whether they're hoisting the Stanley Cup come June. With a near-flawless roster, it's hard to see it being any other team, but as this exact team showed last spring, the championship is earned not given."

Lo and behold the first wrong prediction ... the Lightning hoisted the Cup in September not June, idiot.

Kidding aside, having Tampa Bay as the Cup favourite at the start and all throughout the season was an extremely easy call – and yet there were still detractors throughout the season suggesting the team was undeserving, that the model couldn't account for the team's will to win, that they weren't designed to win in the playoffs when it mattered. The truth is you're not a winner until you win and then the narrative changes as it has for Tampa Bay, despite the fact they were unequivocally the best team on paper all season.

Some folks thought differently after a very slow start for the Lightning, but my model never wavered having them as the top-rated team throughout the bumpy beginning much to the chagrin of some commenters. They eventually found their footing as expected and never looked back finishing at a 108-point pace – a little less than expected – but most importantly with a Stanley Cup. Finally. This is the best team my model has ever created a projection for and they made it count.

Dallas Stars

Season Preview

"While there's clear separation between the remaining teams and the rest of the league, Dallas comes in at the bottom of that list. Dark horse? Definitely. Legitimate contender? Not right now."

Like the Lightning, my model was only a couple points off with the Stars' regular-season point projection. They finished the year playing at a 97-point pace, good for third in the Central as expected.

The quote I highlighted from the season preview is an interesting one and the answer depends on your frame of mind: does Dallas making it to the final prove the Stars are a contender or is it a case where a dark horse team actually came through? I'm of the mind that it's the latter, an impressive run where the Stars had to get through some tough teams to get to the final, but I can also see the argument for the former.

There will be some that say my model was "wrong" in the playoffs for having Dallas as underdogs against both Colorado and Vegas, but it's exactly what almost everybody else had. It would've been silly not to and underdogs winning doesn't make a model wrong – if a probability is at 65 percent, the 35 percent has to happen 35 percent of the time for it to be right. Part of Dallas' charm this season was that the Stars were pesky underdogs that beat two impressive powerhouses. Pretending it was the opposite does a disservice to their special run.

Vegas Golden Knights

Season Preview

"The Golden Knights are deep and have star power now. As a result, they enter the 2019-20 season as a bona fide Stanley Cup contender, one with a clearcut path through a soft division."

In terms of regular-season point totals, this is a really strong start and the projection for Vegas turned out to be one of the most accurate of the season, off by just 0.2 points. The Golden Knights did indeed win the division, as projected 45 percent of the time and made it to the third round. This wasn't a difficult prediction to make, but that's sort of the point as the goal is to be accurate and that means nailing the easy ones. When it comes to predictions, the large majority of them should make sense at the time.

New York Islanders

Season Preview

"There's a big difference between what was expected (51.4 percent) and what actually transpired where the Islanders earned 55.7 percent of the goal share, and that difference is what creates disbelief. Few teams can manage that, especially on a consistent basis which is why more than one season is needed to be sure."

This is a tale of three seasons for the Islanders: one where I was wrong, one where I was right and one where I was wrong again. The final regular-season results were off by just 7.4 points, right about average, so nothing to see there, but it's the way the team got there and what they did after that's most interesting.

The expectation to start last season was regression, that the team was unlikely to beat their expected goals rate again. The average projection for the Islanders was 88.6 points and my model was right in the middle of that, so there wasn't any specific dislike for the team that wasn't present elsewhere.

So what did the Islanders do? They of course went on an insane tear to start the season to prove any and all doubters wrong. It was awesome to



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witness and my model was starting to come around. The team looked for real, starting the season 16-3-2 on the strength of a 17-game point streak.

And then the regression hit. In the following 47 games the team went 19-20-8, an 80-point pace that spanned 57 percent of the season and put the team's playoff hopes in jeopardy before the pause (I remember Islanders fans asking me why their chances were so high). Few expected the Islanders to be an 80-point team, but if they continued at that rate for the final 14 games the team would've finished the season around 93-94 points, a touch closer to their preseason projection. It should be noted some of that is due to missing Adam Pelech and Casey Cizikas for long stretches, but it's not the entire reason. From Nov. 25 to Dec. 31 (when Pelech went down to injury), the team went 9-7-1, a 92-point pace.

The main idea behind the team's expected regression was the team being unable to keep up their 5-on-5 goals above expected rate and that's indeed what happened. For the season the Islanders ranked 23rd in goals percentage at 48.3 percent, 1.6 percentage points below expected.

All that led to tempered expectations during the restart, and then a funny thing happened. The Islanders won. And kept winning. Not only that, they looked good while doing it. Real good. Analytic-darling level good. The type of good that would make any model happy. Given the way the team played the past year it was very hard to see coming and the team's playoff chances were low as a result. In my eyes, it's my favourite way of being wrong: seeing a team be legitimately good and not simply fluke into good results.

My model only uses regular-season results so next season's forecast will be lower than expected given the playoff results, but if the team can keep that level of play up from the postseason, I'll be more than happy to be wrong about them again.

Boston Bruins

Season Preview

"As it has been for the last decade or so, the goal is to bring another championship home to Title Town. And as it has been for the last decade or so, that goal is well within reach."

The Bruins didn't win a Cup, but they had a good enough team to do so considering they won the Presidents' Trophy. They seemed to be one of the team's most hurt by the pause as they were an older team that lost a lot of momentum built during the season, not to mention their Vezina-nominated starting goaltender as well as their No. 1 seeding. Things might have been different if they got to play Montreal and the Islanders rather than Carolina and Tampa Bay.

With a 13-point improvement, the Bruins saw the third-largest positive increase over projected making their season one of the bigger "misses." My model was higher on them than most (average projection was 102.1, market price was 100.5 points), but the one major whiff here was having them lower than the Leafs to start the season. I wasn't alone in that assertion as seven of the 11 other sources also did, but it's worth mentioning. For me, it was the relative age of both groups that pushed Toronto above Boston. The Bruins proved last year the core still had the goods.

St. Louis Blues

Season Preview

"This Blues team is no fluke and they have a decent chance of repeating the magic this season or at least representing the West in the Stanley Cup final. While the results at the time were iffy, this team carried a lot of hype from the offseason and there were inklings of a sleeping giant buried underneath all the losses. They're the real deal and the team to beat from the West."

One of the main reasons for adjusting my model was this very team and the changes meant I went from being one of the lowest on the Blues during the 2019 playoffs to one of the highest before the 2019-20 season. The 101-point projection was nearly three points clear of the

average projection and the third-highest projection. It was also much higher than the shockingly low market price of 96.5 points, too. The Blues still managed to beat my projection by a decent amount, but it was still "less wrong" than others overall.

As for the playoffs, my model was very high on St. Louis' chances, but like the Bruins, the Blues struggled to become fully engaged in the bubble. They too lost their top seeding, falling to fourth and were then upset by the upstart Canucks in the opening round.

Colorado Avalanche

Season Preview

"This is not a Stanley Cup contender in its current iteration. Not yet anyway. The team has the potential to be that after an impressive showing in the playoffs, no doubt, but the Avalanche haven't earned it just yet."

If there was a team I was most wrong about to start the season relative to prevailing consensus it was probably the Colorado Avalanche, a team that was unequivocally worth the hype despite my Debbie Downer prediction. After a second-round finish the previous season and a strong off-season, there were many anointing the Avalanche as hockey's next great power. At the time I saw the potential, but was hesitant to put the team on a pedestal. With an MVP-calibre season from Nathan MacKinnon, a Calder-winning season from Cale Makar and the team's depth finally looking like a contender, Colorado smashed even the most optimistic expectations with a 108-point season. Against my more pessimistic forecast, the Avalanche finished 13 points clear of their projection, the fourth largest discrepancy of the season.

Washington Capitals

Season Preview

"Though my model sees a strong team in Washington, there's still a sense of skepticism when it comes to how the Capitals earn wins as it's unconventional compared to the rest of the league. For most teams, a weak expected goals rate coupled with high percentages screams regression, but the Capitals have made a habit of routinely being the exception to the rule."

Like clockwork, the Capitals played at an over 100 point pace and won their division, all while my model remained skeptical of their continued success. The average projection for them was also 97 points this time around though, so it wasn't just me getting them wrong.

Having said that, it became clear near the end of the season that there were legitimate cracks in the team's armour and that came to fruition in the playoffs where Washington was manhandled by the Islanders in five games. That the Capitals were vulnerable was something my model repeatedly suggested, so I'll take that as a partial win – even if the regular season results were dead wrong once again.

Philadelphia Flyers

Season Preview

"It's hard to predict exactly where the Flyers land as there's little certainty with the team landing close to the middle with a 46 percent chance at the postseason, just outside the East's top eight. While there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding the Flyers, what is likely though is that the team should improve on last season's performance."

Last season, no team disappointed more relative to their projections than Philadelphia. Naturally, it was the exact opposite this year as no team performed better than the plus-14 point rate the Flyers mustered. Funny how that works.

The 91.4-point projection was the second-highest to only Evolving Hockey's 93.2 and a bit higher than the average of 88.5 points. It's not much, but it's a little less wrong than the field, which is always good. That adds up and contributes to the strong overall showing.

For Philadelphia, three things contributed to the over-performance: stronger forward depth than expected, an excellent top pair, and Carter



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Hart being the real deal. All three were possibilities before the season started (especially the emergence of Hart), but it didn't seem likely to get all three happening. The biggest whiff was undoubtedly on Matt Niskanen's value. I thought he might be washed up after his previous season in Washington, but he went right back up to being a legitimate top-pairing defender and just the partner Ivan Provorov needed.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Season Preview

"While I see the argument for downgrading the Penguins, I'm not sure I agree with it. They may no longer be the league's best team or even in the conversation for it, but Pittsburgh should still be a contender with next season being business as usual as long as the core remains intact."

Some of you may be too old to remember this because last September is now a very distant, foggy memory of a much simpler time where we were allowed to be within six feet of each other – but the big thing people were talking themselves into was the demise of the Pittsburgh Penguins. The team's average projection was 95 points and there was a growing consensus that the team was in danger of dropping out of the playoffs. The previous year's first-round sweep was fresh on people's minds.

My model saw things differently, projecting the team to remain among the league's top teams, projecting Pittsburgh to finish with 99.4 points, the highest of any source. Despite an influx of injuries, the team chugged along and it was indeed business as usual where they finished the season at a 102-point pace, and a 99 percent chance of making the playoffs under normal circumstances.

Technically the team missed the playoffs because the league changed the rules after 70 games, but I'm not going to grade myself based on what the league had to do to salvage the season. The projections were based on a 16-team playoff and under those guidelines there's no way Pittsburgh misses, plain and simple.

Carolina Hurricanes

Season Preview

"The Hurricanes are often hyped up each summer, but it's never been to this degree, where 100 points are the expectation and not just a pipe dream."

If not for an injury to Dougie Hamilton, the Hurricanes might have nailed this projection. In 2018-19 they finished with 99 points and this season they were on pace for 98. They may not have won the division, but that's some solid consistency and right there with their projected point total of 100.

Edmonton Oilers

Season Preview

"Without many changes during the offseason, internal improvement is the motto for Edmonton's 2019-20 season. With a new coach anything is possible, but I'm highly skeptical given the quality of the roster outside of its star talent. McDavid, Draisaitl and Nugent-Hopkins can only carry this team so far. They need help. A lot of it."

Remember two teams ago how there was no way I was grading myself on a Pittsburgh miss because the rules changed? It's the same story here where no credit should be given on the Oilers "missing" while being projected to do so 79 percent of the time. No modeller is modelling for a pandemic that alters what it means to be a playoff team after 85 percent of the season is finished. The Oilers had a 95 percent of making the playoffs at the pause – there was basically no way they were missing either.

The Oilers were a very welcome surprise this season finishing second in the Pacific off the strength of a 96-point pace, 12 points more than expected. That's one of the largest positive improvements over expected this season. An 84-point projection was right in line with average so this is a case where everyone was wrong about the Oilers.

The big thing missed was the team having bar none the best special teams in the league. A strong power play was expected, but not to that degree and not to go along with an elite penalty kill, too. Goaltending was relatively solid and the emergence of Kailer Yamamoto (not on the original roster) was much needed, too. The team had massive depth issues and adding a bona fide top-line winger halfway through the season was just the jolt they needed, creating much-needed balance in the top six.

Player-wise, the biggest welcome development though was the play of Leon Draisaitl who was the best offensive player in the league last season. I and many others figured there was a strong chance of regression in 2019-20 after he scored on over 20 percent of his shots, but he found a way to do it again cementing himself as one of the game's best snipers. He was projected to be a 99-point player, but blew past that to go from superstar to one of the league's best players.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Season Preview

"Toronto is getting closer to a goal that's eluded the city for over 50 years and this could be the year they finally break through, though they'll actually have to win a playoff round this time around. Big changes in the offseason should help with that. With a very limited amount of red on the chart above, the chances of Toronto having a bad season are low."

Narrator: They did not break through.

I feel like I should've known that after writing "with a very limited amount of red on the chart above, the chances of Toronto having a bad season are low" that it would be almost exactly what happened. Toronto finished the season at a 95-point pace, away from the fun blue zone and into the grey mediocre zone. That's not where anyone expected them to be a year ago with an average projection of 101.7. At 105.6 points though I was much higher on this team and that turned out to be very wrong.

There are two main reasons the Leafs didn't live up to the hype my model bestowed upon them: Mike Babcock and goaltending. The team had a rough start to the year under their former coach, but under Sheldon Keefe looked much closer to what was projected of them. They played at a 103-point pace with strong underlying numbers – and that was despite getting .913 goaltending at 5-on-5. Before the season Frederik Andersen was projected to be an elite-level goalie, but didn't deliver anything close to that. If he's just average, this is a very different blur.

In a normal season the team still probably makes the playoffs – they were above 80 percent before the pause mostly due to little competition from the Panthers for the third seed – but missed this season due to the altered format.

In past seasons with this core, a first-round loss really wasn't that big of a deal, not when they faced a top-five team each time. They were big underdogs in 2017 and 2018, while 2019 was a coin-flip series. A 2020 qualifying series against the Blue Jackets where they were big favourites? Now that's an actual disappointment and one my model didn't see coming. I still believe Toronto is a better team than given credit for, but there's no doubt my model over-estimated them this past season.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Season Preview

"Those two were massive pieces, ones that completely change the team's outlook, but their loss doesn't mean the season is a write-off. There's still some depth here that give the team a slight glimmer of hope for the upcoming season."

My model was really high on the Blue Jackets relative to consensus opinion before the season started. The team's over-under was 83.5 points, fan consensus was as low as 83 points and the average projection was 86.5 points – I was at 90.6 points. I wasn't alone there as MoneyPuck, Evolving Hockey, Charting Hockey and strangely enough USA Today were all around that ballpark too, but it was still crazy to see the Blue Jackets prove a lot of people wrong. Columbus bested even the rosiest projections playing at a 95-point pace.



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The Blue Jackets had strong depth, some solid talent and one of the league's best blue-lines so it wasn't too hard to see them staying competitive. That the team went all-in on team defense was a savvy strategy given their roster make-up and it paid big dividends with another playoff berth.

Florida Panthers

Season Preview

"A lot will depend on how much new head coach Joel Quenneville can get out of the current roster because as it stands now the team looks only slightly above average on paper."

Around 93 points was where most people were at with Florida and it's right where they landed. This was an easy one, but what's funny is that most people expected this because they figured the team would get improved goaltending after signing Sergei Bobrovsky who was rated as one of the league's best goalies before the season. But he was one of the league's worst this season. As always, goaltending is voodoo.

Nashville Predators

Season Preview

"Big moves were made this summer in the name of balance with the goal of winning it all and the team looks to be in good shape to make a run."

Yeahhhhhhhh ... about that ...

Few teams were as frustrating this season as Nashville who looked decent on paper to start, but were never able to consistently put it together. That Pekka Rinne fell off a cliff certainly doesn't help matters, but it felt like most of the team struggled to play up to their usual level aside from Roman Josi. It led to an embarrassing qualifying round loss to the Coyotes where they simply couldn't solve Arizona's goaltending.

My model was a big fan of Nashville before the season relative to the field and that proved to be dead wrong. Their average projection was closer to 97 points while I figured the addition of Matt Duchene could get the team back above 100 points.

Vancouver Canucks

Season Preview

"Despite improvements, the Canucks are still a team on which a lot of things have to go right for them to qualify for the postseason. While the organization can finally sell the hope of a turnaround, it's more than likely that next year's likely leap forward will fall short of the playoffs."

Again, I was a little lower than the consensus here at 84.6 points. The average was closer to 87 and Vancouver surpassed even that with a 93-point pace. Kudos to the Canucks, especially the management who made some very bold plays in the summer of 2019 to get to this point.

No play was braver than acquiring J.T. Miller who turned into a big-time player for the Canucks. My model initially forecasted him to be a low-end first-liner worth 1.8 wins, but instead he was sensational, a perfect fit next to Elias Pettersson. He provided elite value all season, worth 2.8 wins.

The other major miss was on Quinn Hughes. Similar to a miss on Cale Makar, all I had to predict Hughes' value was his production outside the NHL. That led to a generally optimistic forecast of one win for a first-year defender, but it clearly wasn't optimistic enough as he was elite from the get-go, an absolute game-changer for the Canucks. It's very rare for a defenseman to play at an elite level in his rookie season, but Hughes (and Makar) managed, which helped lead Vancouver to a playoff berth.

New York Rangers

Season Preview

"From goalie to defense to forward, there is a lot of upside here but also a lot of risk. Rangers fans are excited about the season to come and they deserve to be, and while there's a chance everything goes right and every player realizes that upside, the more likely scenario is this season will be met with growing pains."

There were growing pains to start, but the Rangers got over them in the season's second half where they surged toward the playoff bubble. It was still a difficult climb as the team was seventh in their division (and had one of the toughest remaining schedules before the pause cancelled those games), but the fact they made things interesting was a pleasant surprise. A lot of credit for that goes to Artemi Panarin's MVP-calibre season, Mika Zibanejad's emergence as an elite center and Adam Fox turning in an incredible campaign of his own. Strong play from Ryan Strome, Tony DeAngelo and Pavel Buchnevich also helped, alleviating some of the misses from some younger talent not developing as quickly. Kaapo Kakko was especially disappointing. In order to take the next step, the Rangers needed a lot of things to go right and they got that this season.

Calgary Flames

Season Preview

"The playoffs and the chaos induced by its small sample size usually obfuscate a team's ability, but in Calgary's case it brought about legitimate reasons for concern as the team deserved to lose their first-round series, being outplayed handily in the process. The Flames should still be a playoff team this year, especially in a very weak Pacific Division, but should also take a sizeable step back. This team still has a bit to prove."

One of the most controversial previews I had last season was for the Flames who had previously won the West. Naturally, fans didn't take kindly to a 96-point projection. That was on the low-end of projections so I understood the skepticism, but the market was at a similar place.

The Flames were a strong possession team the year prior, but got a lot of career seasons out of their best players that looked unlikely to be replicated. That's exactly what happened and the Flames fell from their lofty perch toward wildcard team status before the pause. As it turns out, the 96-point projection was strong, but not pessimistic enough.

Winnipeg Jets

Season Preview

"The question this season shouldn't be "can the Jets win the Stanley Cup?" Instead, it should be "can the Jets make the playoffs?" Right now, the odds are basically 50-50 and the team starts on the outside looking in."

Those 50-50 odds were before Dustin Byfuglien's surprise retirement. After, I was one of the lowest on the Jets as it became increasingly difficult to see the team in a playoff spot with that awful defense corps. Luckily for them, Connor Hellebuyck saved their bacon night after night en route to a Vezina Trophy to keep things interesting.

The market price for the Jets was a steep 96.5 points and fans were similarly high at 95 points and the Jets naturally finished right in the middle. They didn't finish as badly as my model figured, but their run as a contender looked to be over.

The big takeaway though is the quote I pulled from the original season preview and that still rings true. This year, it became much more about making the playoffs than winning the Cup and in the end the Jets were right there on the fringes before the pause.

Minnesota Wild

Season Preview

"There's plenty of reason to believe the Wild are being overlooked right now and may surprise a lot of people come next season. They should be in the playoff mix."

There were a lot of people who thought the Wild would be one of the league's worst teams after an awful off-season with the fan survey averaging at 80.6 points, but the models weren't among them. My model along with the ones at Hockey Viz, Money Puck, Evolving Hockey as well as Andy MacNeil's all had the Wild eclipsing 90 points, which they were on pace to surpass. As expected here, the Wild were right in the playoff mix and that's a big win for the models.



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Arizona Coyotes

Season Preview

"The Coyotes finishing with basically the same point total as last season despite offseason additions and better health may not seem fair, but there was plenty of reason for skepticism with last year's club."

Some were higher than my projection, some were lower, but in the end the Coyotes landed right in the middle where I had them, finishing with an 87-point pace, just one more than their previous season. A lot of the reasons for skepticism surrounding the previous year's club indeed came to fruition as the Coyotes were still a mediocre 5-on-5 team that simply didn't have enough elite offensive talent at the top of the lineup. Acquiring Taylor Hall helped change that, but not enough.

Chicago Blackhawks

Season Preview

"Chicago is arguably not bad enough to be a bottom-feeder, but also not good enough to be a playoff team – the Blackhawks are in that mushy middle ground that few teams want to be a part of. It means any range of results feels plausible for this team, outside of being a legitimate contender. Still, I'd expect Chicago to finish closer to the bottom than the top."

Near the bottom is indeed where the Blackhawks finished, earning a few points less than their 87 projected, which was lower than the average of 89 points. One of the big issues with the prior model was the massively undeserved love it had for the Blackhawks, so it was nice to be on the right side of things this time around.

Chicago ended up "making the playoffs" too and the model got another nice win there. It still had the Blackhawks as underdogs against the Oilers, but it gave the team a much better chance of pulling off the upset than the market dictated.

Montreal Canadiens

Season Preview

"With how awful the bottom of the Atlantic is and how strong the top is, there's pretty much two reasonable places Montreal can land: fourth or fifth in the division."

And that's exactly where the team finished, fifth, where the Canadiens were expected to land 35 percent of the time. The team was eight points lower than expected, but was a bit undone by bad luck in close games. The 90-point projection was a little lower than the average 91.3 points.

Buffalo Sabres

Season Preview

"No fan base deserves this level of suffering. It deserves hope. Sorry to say, it's not getting it here as the 2019-20 season looks like more of the same. The Sabres have a 94 percent chance of extending their playoff-miss streak to nine seasons."

My new favourite tradition after every season is scrolling back through the comments on the standings projection page and re-reading what Sabres fans were saying about my model's biased hatred for their team around October/November. Here are a few of my favourites:

Oct. 17: "How long will Buffalo have to be consistently good before they start getting some love from this algorithm?"

Oct. 19: "So Buffalo is in the bottom 3rd of the league?? Yeah.. they're consistently beating teams you have in the top 3rd.. but ok"

Oct. 21: "Tough look for Sabres, If they play .500 hockey from here on out then they end up with 98 points I believe. That was good enough for a wild card last year. The model still giving them a 27% chance only? yikes"

Oct. 23: "Sabres win again. This model is broken. Probably should make a change instead of just waiting...."

Oct. 29: "Buffalo, the top team in the league won't make the playoffs?"

Anyway, while the average projection was 84 points, I projected the Sabres to finish with 81 points and sixth in the Atlantic at the start of the season. They finished with 81 points and sixth in the Atlantic. Is that good?

New Jersey Devils

Season Preview

"With the team making big-time moves during the offseason, New Jersey looks poised for a major bounce-back season, one where a return to the playoffs is a very real possibility."

The hype train was in overdrive for the Devils last fall and my model was, unfortunately, one of the highest on them at 92 points. A few other sources had the team in that range, but the average was in the high 80s. Either way, the Devils were well under that with an 81-point pace season and my model was more wrong than others.

The big problem was an over-valuation of the players brought in. The season preview led off with the four big names and expected the quartet of Jack Hughes, P.K. Subban, Nikita Gusev and Wayne Simmonds to provide 5.6 wins of value. They were collectively worth ... minus-0.5 wins. That right there is the difference between a right and wrong projection and it's a bit troubling for a player-driven model that it comes from the four guys who switched teams. That's something to look into.

It's a huge whiff brought along mostly by the two big tickets, Hughes and Subban, performing below replacement level when my model expected a high-end second-line center and a No. 1 defenseman.

For Hughes, it was simply an issue of probably not being NHL-ready and NHL overestimating his ability. He was the most difficult rookie projection I've ever had to make because he was the first player to make the jump directly from the USNTDP to the NHL. As for Subban, there was a chance the decline he showed the year prior would continue, but at the time it seemed to be injury-related. After one year in New Jersey he looks close to cooked, but that could be a product of his new surroundings as well.

On top of all that, Taylor Hall – the team's primary driver – didn't look right early on and was also traded, plus the Devils struggled to get any goaltending early in the season, tanking any hopes of contending for a playoff spot. A lot more went wrong than expected.

Anaheim Ducks

Season Preview

"What the Ducks also have going for them is the league's best goaltending, which is the biggest difference-maker between them and the teams below them. It's the main reason the team is outside the bottom 10 despite an unimposing group of skaters, a group that ranks as the league's fifth worst."

Woof. This right here is the problem with relying on goaltending or forecasting it. The team finished closer in line with their skater rating as John Gibson couldn't replicate his past success. Once the Ducks couldn't get goaltending to prop them up, they were toast.

My model projected the Ducks to finish with 90 points, an extremely lofty goal that looks awful in hindsight. It was a bold bet to make with the market at 80.5 points and other sources averaging 85.7 points. Only Hockey Viz was higher and I would bet it was for the same reason: Gibson.

The Ducks finished the season on pace for 77 points, 13 fewer than I projected and the difference really was in net. For starters, I projected Gibson to be worth 4.8 wins. According to Evolving Hockey, he was worth 1.3 wins. That doesn't explain it all, but that's a seven-point difference that puts the Ducks at 84 points. Closer to the field, but I was still no doubt way off here.

Los Angeles Kings

Season Preview



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 5, 2020

“Los Angeles finished second last in 2018-19 and it seems that the league’s basement is likely to be the team’s new home for the foreseeable future.”

The only shock here is the team didn’t finish last in the Pacific thanks to a pathetic showing from the Sharks. Otherwise, this one was right on the money with the Kings pacing at 75 points after being projected for 75.5 points. There was some contention at the time about my model’s rating for the team’s biggest stars, and while both Anze Kopitar and Drew Doughty bounced back slightly, neither was able to play up to their usual level, earning value much closer to their bearish projections.

San Jose Sharks

Season Preview

“As the team’s core continues to age the journey to the top becomes more arduous. San Jose’s impending demise looks more likely than ever before, especially with captain Joe Pavelski leaving for the Stars in the offseason. That’s a massive loss and he hasn’t been adequately replaced.”

Every year there’s always a team or two that everyone is convinced will be a playoff team and they fall flat on their face instead. This year that team was San Jose, a team one year removed from a conference final appearance. Every model except Hockey Viz had the Sharks above 95 points and a likely playoff team and of the 1,300 fans who took my preseason survey, only 12 saw San Jose dropping to below 85 points. Just one was under 75, which is where the team finished.

It was a remarkable collapse, one that was on the tail end of the team’s projected points distribution. There was always a chance the Sharks could struggle, but very few could have imagined something like this. Even the 28 percent chance the team missed the playoffs in a very weak Pacific Division generated some contention last summer. Everyone was wrong about the Sharks, to a mostly similar degree.

Ottawa Senators

Season Preview

“While the majority of hockey fans and analysts have a pretty high degree of certainty that Ottawa is the league’s worst team, the hockey gods don’t play by those rules. There’s a widely variable range of outcomes where the league’s weakest team has a chance of finishing in a higher spot than initially expected.”

When I initially wrote the season preview I had Ottawa ranked last. That changed just before the season started where my model had them ranked 30th. Given the team’s roster at the time I was skeptical they could hit 70 points but this turned into the most accurate projection of all teams. The Senators were projected for 30th overall with 71.5 points and they finished 30th with a pace of 71.6 points.

Detroit Red Wings

Season Preview

“The odds? Two percent. It takes a special kind of bad to have that kind of certainty toward failure, one the Red Wings qualify for.”

Interestingly, my model was the only one to have Detroit as the worst team in the league behind Ottawa. Sure, it was only by 0.1 points, but on average the Wings were projected to be seven points clear of the Senators. That I projected the fight to be closer is a win.

In reality, it wasn’t close at all. The Red Wings stunk like no other team, finishing the year on a 45-point pace, 26 points off their initial projection. It takes a special kind of awful to be projected to be the worst and still have the most off projection of any team. They made the initial two percent chance at a playoff berth look generous and ended up being off the charts bad. I’ll have to fix my scale for next season.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.02.2020

Sportsnet.ca / Top NHL UFAs by position: Looking at the 10 best right wingers available

Emily Sadler | October 1, 2020, 10:24 AM

During the lead-up to NHL free agency opening on Oct. 9, we’re taking a look the top UFAs at each position. Today, we’re examining the right wingers who could be on the move this off-season.

With a few exceptions, this year’s crop of forwards favours depth over difference-makers — and our ranking of right wingers follows that general trend, too. While those at the top of this list can bring vast upgrades to a team’s top six, many will likely factor into supporting roles.

If you’re looking for versatile wingers who have also played along the right side, including Conor Sheary, Mike Hoffman and Vladislav Namestikov, they’ve been listed in our top 10 left wingers. Forwards like Mikael Granlund, Erik Haula, Colin Wilson, Derick Brassard and Tyler Ennis can be found in our centre rankings due to their versatility and ability to play down the middle.

1. Evgenii Dadonov

2019-20 team: Florida Panthers | Age: 31

2019-20 stats: 25G, 22A, 47Pts in 69GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4M

Dadonov broke out in 2017-18 with a 28-goal campaign and matched it one year later, hitting the 70-point plateau in 2018-19. His 22 goals at the time of the season hiatus in March had him on track to match his goal-scoring numbers once again, and will have GMs looking closely at the top-six forward — though, a long-term deal with the 31-year-old probably isn’t in the cards.

New general manager Bill Zito has some important decisions upcoming when it comes to his two biggest free agents and goal-scorers in Mike Hoffman and Dadonov. Does he keep one? Neither? It feels unlikely he’d hang on to both, and trading for right winger Patric Hornqvist suggests he’s already made his decision.

2. Tyler Toffoli

2019-20 team: Los Angeles Kings + Vancouver Canucks | Age: 28

2019-20 stats: 24G, 20A, 44Pts in 54GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.6M

Between sorting out his goaltending situation, settling up with a handful of RFAs and addressing fellow UFA Chris Tanev’s contract situation on the blue line, Canucks general manager Jim Benning has a lot on his plate this fall as he looks to build on the young club’s thrilling post-season success. It feels like re-signing Toffoli is right up near the top of his to-do list, as it should be. Toffoli found an instant fit with the Canucks upon being acquired from the Los Angeles Kings. His Vancouver tenure started with a four-game point streak and a point-per game pace in 10 games before the season stoppage, and though an injury early in the playoffs limited his post-season playing time, he marked his return with a three-point game against the Vegas Golden Knights and finished the post-season with two markers and four points through seven matchups with the Cinderella-like Canucks.

Toffoli has made it clear he’d like to stay in Vancouver.

“I want to stay in Vancouver, and that’s my No. 1 priority as of right now,” he told reporters earlier in September. “If things progress — and not in the right direction — then that’s when I have to think about going to a different place.”

3. Wayne Simmonds

2019-20 team: New Jersey Devils + Buffalo Sabres | Age: 32

2019-20 stats: 8G, 17A, 25Pts in 68GP



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2019-20 cap hit: \$5M

If there's one player on this list who looks particularly poised for a rebound season, it's Simmonds. It wasn't so long ago that he was a force to be reckoned with in Philadelphia, a special combination of physicality and point production. He hit 50 or more points in four consecutive years with Philly (2013-2017) and reached 60 twice, but his numbers since those Flyers days haven't looked good. Short stints in Nashville, New Jersey and Buffalo didn't bring much success for the teams or the player, and now it's clear a fresh start is needed. As a Scarborough native, there will always be rumours of a collaboration with the Maple Leafs — and considering the Leafs' need for grit and depth, it does make sense as more than just a hometown connection.

4. Jesper Fast

2019-20 team: New York Rangers | Age: 28

2019-20 stats: 12G, 17A, 29Pts in 69GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$1.85M

With the trade of Marc Staal and the buyout of Henrik Lundqvist, Fast is now the second longest-tenured Ranger behind Chris Kreider. He was a rookie back in 2013-14 when the club went all the way to the Stanley Cup Final, and is now facing a crossroads in New York as the team embarks on another off-season of change.

Just thinking, with Marc Staal and Henrik Lundqvist gone, Chris Kreider is now the senior #NYR in terms of service.

— Rick Carpiniello (@RickCarpiniello) September 30, 2020

The 2019-20 season saw him on pace for his most productive campaign yet — his previous personal best was 13 goals and 33 points in 2017-18 — but his efforts went unrewarded in the post-season as he was injured just one minute into New York's Qualifying Round series against Carolina.

5. Craig Smith

2019-20 team: Nashville Predators | Age: 31

2019-20 stats: 18G, 13A, 31Pts in 69GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.25M

He was never the team's biggest star, but Smith has been part of the Predators fabric and a consistent presence down the right side for the last decade — he ranks fourth in games played in the franchise's history.

After another disappointing season, general manager David Poile preached much off-season change to come, and confirmed earlier this week that his two biggest UFA forwards (Mikael Granlund and Smith) will in fact be hitting the open market.

Smith's agent, Kevin Magnuson, told The Athletic's Adam Vingan that the camp is seeking a three-year pact in free agency:

"A three-year deal is our goal," Magnuson told Vingan. "I think the number, because there are eight to 10 teams that have decent cap space, I think we won't be too far off at the end of the day. He's not going to be signing any blockbuster deals, but at the same time, he's going to be in the market or a little bit above it, I think."

6. Bobby Ryan

2019-20 team: Ottawa Senators | Age: 33

2019-20 stats: 5G, 3A, 8Pts in 24GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$7.25M (bought out)

After finding success and enduring difficult stretches throughout his career in two different NHL markets, Ryan now has an opportunity to write what could be the final chapter of his NHL career after being bought out by the Ottawa Senators.

Ryan took a personal leave of absence for much of 2019-20 to enter the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program, citing issues with alcohol abuse.

His emotional return in February saw him tally a hat trick at home and his personal journey was recognized this fall as he was the recipient of the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy.

The San Jose Sharks, who are shallow at the position, are rumoured to be interested.

The Sharks are one of many teams believed to have checked in on free agent Bobby Ryan, I'm told. They could certainly use a right wing.

— Kevin Kurz (@KKurzNHL) September 29, 2020

In an interview with NBC Sports Philadelphia earlier this week, Ryan said that the Flyers would be high on his list in free agency should the opportunity arise:

"I think any kid that has a hometown team grows up thinking they would play there some time," said Ryan, whose hometown of Cherry Hill, N.J., is just across the Delaware River from Philly.

"Really, the opportunity has never presented itself, I'm not sure if it will this time around, but if the Flyers were to make an offer or extend a camp invite, they'd move high on my list because of all the connections. For me, it's one step at a time, just wait to see who makes an offer and go from there," he continued.

"I've never had this opportunity, you know, to hopefully field offers, because when you're a buyout person, you don't know what's going to come through for you," Ryan said. "But just the chance to field some offers and take a look around, and for once control where you're going to play the next few years. My outlook is positive, I'm just going to sit down with my wife and see what makes the most sense for us to finish it up."

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

7. Corey Perry

2019-20 team: Dallas Stars | Age: 35

2019-20 stats: 5G, 16A, 21Pts in 57GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$1.5M

No, he didn't hoist the Cup at the end of it all, but you could still make the case the Corey Perry was one of the biggest winners of these Stanley Cup Playoffs. After being bought out by the Anaheim Ducks in June 2019 after 14 seasons with the Pacific club, Perry took a one-year offer from Dallas — a contract that turned out to be one of the Stars' best off-season moves, along with securing fellow veteran forward Joe Pavelski.

Both had fairly quiet seasons... until the playoffs started. Perry reminded us all how much of a pain he is to play against (a seriously important quality to have on all contending rosters), and showed us that Corey Perry is still in there, too. Both veterans came up clutch late in the Cup Final, with Pavelski scoring in three of six games and Perry putting up three goals — including the overtime winner to keep the Stars alive in Game 5.

The last six goals scored by the Dallas Stars this postseason have been scored by Corey Perry and Joe Pavelski, the two oldest players on the Stars roster. Both were offseason free agent signings.

— Scott Bell (@ScottBellDMN) September 27, 2020

Considering how close the Stars came to winning — and how big a part Perry played in that success — it would make sense for them to try to keep him in the fold for another run, but that could prove really difficult financially considering the team's top two goal-scorers are RFAs (Denis Gurianov and Roope Hintz) and everyone's new favourite goalie, Anton Khudobin, is also a free agent.

8. Justin Williams

2019-20 team: Carolina Hurricanes | Age: 38

2019-20 stats: 8G, 3A, 11Pts in 20GP



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 5, 2020

2019-20 cap hit: \$700,000

Williams took time to ponder his future and consider retirement last off-season, ultimately re-joining the Hurricanes midway through the campaign. We don't yet know whether he'll be back for another season, but it feels certain that if he does come back, it'll be with Carolina and no one else. Still, considering his success in his extra shortened season, he's more than worthy of a place on this list.

9. Michael Frolik

2019-20 team: Calgary Flames + Buffalo Sabres | Age: 32

2019-20 stats: 6G, 8A, 14Pts in 57GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.3M

His numbers dropped significantly in 2019-20 and his tenure in Calgary was rocky near the end, but Frolik could still fill a bottom-six role in the league on a short-term deal.

10. Tyler Pitlick

2019-20 team: Philadelphia Flyers | Age: 28

2019-20 stats: 8G, 12A, 20Pts in 63GP

2019-20 cap hit: \$1M

A late bloomer in the NHL, Pitlick was one of the more consistent bottom-six forwards in Philly this season — an area that we saw struggle this past post-season. Philadelphia was undoubtedly a strong fit, but could also choose to fill that depth position with a younger player making the jump into the lineup. Fellow depth players like Nate Thompson and Derek Grant are also up for new deals, giving GM Chuck Fletcher plenty to think about.

More left wingers to WATCH: Josh Leivo (VAN), Melker Karlsson (SJS), Stefan Noesen (SJS), Tobias Rieder (CGY)

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.02.2020

Sportsnet.ca / NHL's top 20 UFAs of 2020: Latest rumours, reports

Emily Sadler | October 1, 2020, 4:15 PM

As we near the official opening of free agency on Oct. 9, here's an updated look at the biggest names looking to sign on the dotted line this fall.

1. Alex Pietrangelo, D, St. Louis Blues

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$6.5 million

After a season-long saga that saw both sides consistently reiterate a desire to continue the relationship, it looks like Pietrangelo and the Blues could be parting ways. As The Athletic's Jeremy Rutherford reported last month, talks between the two parties have broken off.

"There was a discussion today, and I guess the best way to sum it up, we haven't really made much progress," Pietrangelo told Rutherford. "We just think right now, with where things are at, that maybe it's best for both sides to see what's going on in free agency, what the team can explore, what I can explore and if there are better fits for each side."

Math was always going to be an issue — general manager Doug Armstrong said as much earlier this off-season, and the flat salary cap makes the \$9-million-plus annual salary Pietrangelo can command on the open market tough to accommodate.

"We're a little disappointed that we're in this situation," Pietrangelo told Rutherford. "We weren't able to hammer out the details what we wanted in a deal. There was some work that we tried to get done that we couldn't get done, so both sides agreed that maybe it's in the best interest. We're two weeks away. Not saying anything can't change, but as of right now, that's kind of our plan, and we'll see where things go."

Rutherford also noted that despite the break in talks, Pietrangelo hasn't ruled out a return to St. Louis. And Pietrangelo going public could just be his camp's way of applying more pressure to Blue brass, via public outcry against losing their captain.

Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported in his latest edition of 31 Thoughts that Blues management and Pietrangelo's camp are going to take one more run at this and suggested the biggest question is this: "Do the Blues believe he will leave?"

2. Taylor Hall, LW, Arizona Coyotes

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$6 million

"It'd have to be very creative to keep him [in Arizona]," Coyotes general manager Bill Armstrong said Wednesday via NHL.com, addressing Hall. "That's something we're going to explore. We're never going to turn our eye to talent like that. He's a heck of a player, but we've got to explore. These are [things that are] going to happen between now and free agency. We're going to explore everything."

"Creative" is a word that came up a few times with Armstrong on Wednesday. During an interview on Sportsnet's Hockey Central last week, he said the front office will need to exercise a little creativity when it comes to acquiring assets.

"There's a little bit of a creative way that we have to go and acquire assets to stay in the game and make sure that we're still bringing players in — whether it's college free agents, European free agents, or it's through the draft," he explained.

The Coyotes aren't slated to make a selection until Round 4 of this fall's NHL Draft and don't have a first-rounder until 2022 — they sent their 2020 first-round pick to New Jersey in exchange for Hall, and forfeit next year's after breaking the league's combine testing policy.

Though Armstrong didn't mention Hall during his Sportsnet appearance, it feels like trading Hall's rights could count as a "creative" way to recouping a few assets in the form of a pick or two from a team looking for exclusive negotiating time with the top forward on the market — not to mention the chance of tacking on an eighth year to a new deal with him.

Ten seasons into his NHL career with just two short playoff stints to show for it, Hall's priority heading into the biggest decision of his career is no surprise.

"I think honestly it's probably all winning," Hall told reporters in August, following Arizona's Round 1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche. "Any player at this stage in their career who's had the career I've had, 10 seasons only making the playoffs twice, that's really what I'm after. We'll see what happens there."

Sportsnet's Rory Boylen looked at a handful of teams that could potentially land the top forward of the 2020 class, with the on-the-rise Montreal Canadiens (\$18.5 million in projected cap space) and Avalanche (about \$22.3 million) particularly intriguing.

Hall acknowledged the current financial landscape of the league is strained due to COVID-19.

"I don't think the money is going to be what it was before COVID or before this season, but that's fine," he said. "I think we get paid a lot of money to play a game and we'll see what happens."

3. Torey Krug, D, Boston Bruins

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.25 million



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Krug has spent his entire NHL career to date with the Bruins – first on back-to-back one-year bridge deals, followed by the four-year pact that's expiring now – and is looking for a long-term commitment. He'd like that to be with Boston, but made it clear he won't be signing another short-term deal to stay.

"I'm very opposed to that," he told reporters earlier in September. "I've bet on myself. I've taken shorter-term deals, less amount of money my whole career now. This is my time in terms of my value at its peak. I have the ability, I'm in a position now where I need to make the most of it."

Torey Krug cryptically posting a picture of the Boston skyline on twitter. No words. Just a picture. Feels like a goodbye post of sorts. If Krug does indeed follow the elsewhere, he's earned his chance to see how much he can command on open market pic.twitter.com/ycd11M3juz

— Joe Haggerty (@HackswithHaggs) September 10, 2020

4. Robin Lehner, G, Vegas Golden Knights

Age: 29

2019-20 cap hit: \$5 million

Goaltending was the biggest storyline for the Golden Knights this post-season – having two starting netminders will do that — so it's no surprise that the club's crease remains in the spotlight as they stare down the off-season after being ousted from contention by the Dallas Stars in the Western Conference Final.

"We don't have those answers for you right now," general manager Kelly McCrimmon told reporters last week, addressing goaltending. "But [the] first order of business, I think, in many respects, is to sort that out."

Two one-year deals and a deadline trade have seen Lehner suit up for three different teams in the past two seasons, and he's thrived with all of them. His dominance this post-season (9-4 record, 1.84 goals-against average, .924 save percentage and four shutouts) has ultimately hoisted him from popular UFA-to-be to the hottest goaltender potentially on the market.

That is, if he even makes it to free agency. As his incredible playoff numbers indicate, Lehner looks right at home in the Golden Knights crease and after all signs initially pointed to the 29-year-old being a short-term rental for a long post-season run, it sounds like both team and player are looking to keep this relationship going.

Golden Knights reporter Jesse Granger of The Athletic wrote last month he believes the team is planning to lock up Lehner with a long-term contract extension.

This could get complicated, though, as starter-turned-backup (and fan favourite) Marc-Andre Fleury still has two more seasons remaining on the three-year extension he signed with the club back in 2018, coming in at \$7 million per season.

Fleury told Granger last week that he's not looking for a trade out of Vegas:

"I want to stay in Vegas," he told Granger. "I don't know what the future holds, but I've loved every moment since I got here."

"This team means a lot to me, and the city has been so good to me," Fleury said. "The fans, and [owner Bill Foley] have been so awesome. It's a great team, and I thought when I came here that maybe I could retire here. I wanted to end my career here."

5. Tyson Barrie, D, Toronto Maple Leafs

Age: 29

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.5 million (this AAV is split between Colorado and Toronto)

Barrie's time in Toronto didn't go how he or the Maple Leafs expected, making a clean split in free agency a certainty for the two sides.

"I wish I would've left a little more of a stamp on the series," Barrie, who didn't register on the scoresheet through all five games of the qualifying

round against the Columbus Blue Jackets, said in August following the conclusion of Toronto's season.

Asked about where he might land and what kind of contract he's looking for going forward, Barrie said, "at this point I have no idea what the future holds."

All has been quiet on the rumour front when it comes to Barrie, but it's safe to say he will be prioritizing chemistry and opportunity in an effort to regain his game with another squad.

6. Jacob Markstrom, G, Vancouver Canucks

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.67 million

In a matter of days during the Canucks' incredible playoff run this summer, the Hockey Twitter tide shifted from an urgent call to re-sign Markstrom to a sudden consensus that Thatcher Demko's the guy after the rookie broke out in the playoffs and nearly broke the Golden Knights in the process. But for general manager Jim Benning, this isn't a one-or-the-other decision.

"[Coach Travis Green] is a big believer in having two good goalies," Benning told reporters during his end-of-season availability earlier this month. "With the travel schedule we have during the regular season, I believe we need to have two good goalies."

Benning told reporters that Demko's emergence doesn't change the team's motivation to sign Markstrom, who is expected to earn a nice raise to the tune of around \$6 million per year, and indicated that those negotiations to bring back the veteran will start this week.

"Jacob is an important guy in our group," Benning explained. "He's a leader and he was our MVP over the regular season, so we're going to try to figure out a way that makes sense for us and that makes Jacob and his agent happy, to try to figure out a deal to get him signed."

Staying the course and re-signing the veteran goalie, who is without a doubt the Canucks' MVP of 2019-20, would pave the way for one heck of a fine goalie tandem in Vancouver with starts split down the middle, but it could also set the team up for trouble when it's time to start handing out protected roster spots ahead of the Seattle expansion draft as every team is only able to protect one netminder.

The Big Show

Chris Johnston talks Stanley Cup Final, 2020-2021 season and Jacob Markstrom's future

September 22 2020

Your browser does not support the audio element.

If Markstrom were to hit the open market, there would be a long line of interested suitors. The Flames, Red Wings, and Maple Leafs have been rumoured to have interest. Clubs like San Jose, Carolina, and Buffalo should be interested, too.

7. Mike Hoffman, LW/RW, Florida Panthers

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.1875 million

Florida's got a lot of question marks right now. The team parted ways with general manager Dale Tallon following its qualifying-round loss to the Islanders this summer, and it's safe to say plenty more changes are on the way now that new GM Bill Zito has taken over and embarks on putting his own stamp on the club.

Hoffman looked like a sure rental candidate at the deadline but ultimately wasn't moved. His strong performance through four games against the Islanders – three goals and five points – should make him a popular player among teams looking for another scorer to contend, though that scoring will be tough to part with for Florida.

8. Braden Holtby, G, Washington Capitals



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$6.1 million

It's looking more and more likely that we've seen the last of Holtby in All Caps, as Washington general manager Brian MacLellan told reporters last month that he expects Holtby to reach free agency.

"I'd expect him to go to free agency. The goalie market is unusually deep this year," MacLellan said during a Zoom call after the team announced the hiring of Peter Laviolette as head coach. "I talked to his agent last week briefly about where he's at and the kind of opportunities he's looking for."

"I would assume he goes to free agency and we'll keep in contact with him throughout the free agency period and see if he's getting what he wants."

At the beginning of the season, Holtby was a no-brainer as the top goaltender on the list of pending UFAs at his position, but the standout play of peers Lehner and Markstrom have seen the spotlight shift. Holtby's own struggles this year have complicated his future outlook, and back-to-back early playoff exits for the 2018 Cup champs have made the Capitals' next moves tough to predict.

Holtby struggled to find consistency this past season, and the emergence of rookie netminder Ilya Samsonov brought added urgency to Washington's decision, especially when you consider the upcoming expansion draft next year. That Stanley Cup on his resume, however, should see him land a decent deal — wherever that may be.

9. Evgenii Dadonov, RW, Florida Panthers

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$4 million

Another question mark for Florida, with all that applies to Hoffman being relevant here, too.

Dadonov quietly put up back-to-back 28-goal campaigns down in Florida, tallying 65 and 70 points in his past two seasons, and a scoring spree in January had him just three goals shy of that total through 69 games this season. A quiet post-season didn't do his stock any favours, but he's one of the more low-key intriguing names to watch as one of the league's most underrated sharpshooters.

10. Tyler Toffoli, RW/LW, Vancouver Canucks

Age: 27

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.6 million

After a down year in 2018-19 with 13 goals and 34 points on a floundering Kings squad, Toffoli got off to a strong start in Vancouver upon being traded in February.

An injury early in the playoffs had us wondering if we'd seen the last of him this year, but the 28-year-old came out flying upon his return in Game 2 of the second round against Vegas. His seamless fit with the Canucks makes him a priority for Benning in what's shaping up to be a busy off-season in Vancouver with defenceman Chris Tanev also seeking a new deal.

"I want to stay in Vancouver and that's my No. 1 priority as of right now," Toffoli said last month.

"I want to stay in Vancouver and that's my number one priority right now." -Tyler Toffoli and teammate Tanner Pearson discuss their time spent in the NHL bubble and look ahead to the #Canucks 20/21 season. pic.twitter.com/7UhVbURsFO

— Vancouver #Canucks (@Canucks) September 11, 2020

11. Mikael Granlund, C/LW, Nashville Predators

Age: 27

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.75 million

With GM David Poile promising changes ahead, there's really no question that Granlund will be wearing a different sweater come 2020-21. With a flat cap and a down year on the stat sheet, Granlund could be a strong candidate for a short-term deal somewhere to get him back to his playmaking ways.

12. T.J. Brodie, D, Calgary Flames

Age: 29

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.65 million

Flames GM Brad Treliving said in the spring he wanted to bring both Brodie and fellow rearguard Travis Hamonic back into the fold. But with the flat cap, will he be able to?

As the more offensively gifted of the Flames' two pending UFA d-men, Brodie could be the more likely — but less affordable — signee in Calgary.

Brodie's name has been in trade rumours before. Now, with another disappointing post-season in the books, the question in Calgary is whether (or maybe how much) Treliving will opt to split up his core and revamp his roster.

13. Anton Khudobin, G, Dallas Stars

Age: 34

2019-20 cap hit: \$2.5 million

Every post-season, we re-learn the importance of having not just one solid goaltender but two. This year's lesson comes courtesy of Khudobin. The veteran netminder started almost every single one of the Stars' games this summer as No. 1 netminder Ben Bishop has been sidelined as "unfit to play," and backstopped the club all the way to the Stanley Cup Final.

Lehner, Markstrom and Holtby are the biggest names potentially hitting the goalie market, but Khudobin will be a popular name, too — and, really, his market value has never been higher. The best fit for him? Dallas. Only, he may have just priced himself out of the market.

14. Kevin Shattenkirk, D, Tampa Bay Lightning

Age: 31

2019-20 cap hit: \$1.75 million

He's not the top UFA candidate he was just a few years ago, but Shattenkirk's impact on Tampa Bay's blue line — both in leadership and playmaking — should put him among a number of strong blue-liners ready to sign quickly if he hits the open market. After he finishes celebrating his Stanley Cup win, of course.

Shattenkirk on how far he's come since having his contract bought out by the Rangers last offseason: "I've never forgotten what happened to me last summer. I use that to fuel me." #Bolts #TBLvsDAL

— Bryan Burns (@BBurnsNHL) September 26, 2020

BriseBois: "Kevin Shattenkirk was an incredible leader for us. [Kevin and Pat Maroon] both exceeded my expectations for how much they brought to our team in the locker room and on the ice. They were key contributors to our team. They may have been exactly what we needed."

— Tampa Bay Lightning (@TBLightning) October 1, 2020

15. Travis Hamonic, D, Calgary Flames

Age: 29

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.857 million

Hamonic, who made the decision to opt out of the NHL's restart this summer to be with his family, has been a steady presence in Calgary and would no doubt be a smart signing for Treliving to make. The GM has a little more cap flexibility than some of his NHL peers, but how much will he devote to his blue line?



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16. Sami Vatanen, D, Carolina Hurricanes

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.875 million

Vatanen had to wait a while to suit up for a game with the Hurricanes, the team that acquired him from the Devils at the deadline, due to the lower-body injury that had him sidelined at the time of the league hiatus. Considering how little he played with his new teammates, Vatanen fit in well with the Hurricanes. The club's depth at the position makes them unlikely to bring him back, however.

Injuries have prevented the rearguard from ever being able to play a full season, which will factor into his next deal.

As expected, #Canes GM Don Waddell plans to have RFAs Haydn Fleury and Warren Foegele back in the fold. UFAs Trevor van Riemsdyk and Sami Vatanen are likely to test the open market, but the door is not closed on either returning if the price is right.

— Michael Smith (@MSmithCanes) October 1, 2020

17. Corey Crawford, G, Chicago Blackhawks

Age: 35

2019-20 cap hit: \$6 million

While Crawford's \$6-million seasons are over, his career isn't. We haven't had many opportunities to see Playoff Crawford of late, but we got a pretty decent show this summer when the veteran netminder backstopped Chicago to an upset victory over the Edmonton Oilers in the qualifiers and kept the club alive in Game 4 of Round 1 against the Vegas Golden Knights.

Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported in 31 Thoughts last month that Blackhawks management and Crawford's camp were initially "not seeing eye to eye on the dollar value of an extension."

Should the two side part ways, Crawford would be a compelling case for a team looking for a veteran 1B — in the same vein as Khudobin has been for Dallas and Halak has done for Boston.

18. Ilya Kovalchuk, LW, Washington Capitals

Age: 36

2019-20 cap hit: \$700,000

Montreal's Kovalchuk experiment got off to a great start — the veteran proved he's still got a little magic left in him, and his success looked even better with a \$700,000 price tag attached — and saw the club flip him to the contending Capitals for a profit at the deadline. He fell flat in the playoffs with Washington, but it feels likely this wasn't the last we've seen of Kovalchuk in le bleu, blanc et rouge. He's a strong candidate to return to Montreal as a free agent on another low-cost contract.

19. Erik Haula, C/LW, Florida Panthers

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$2.75 million

A string of injuries has hindered Haula's ability to match the success he had with the Golden Knights in 2017-18, and he wasn't able to strike up any chemistry with the Panthers upon being traded to Florida at the deadline. There's no doubt he's been a much-loved and valuable member of each team he's played on, but durability will factor into his next deal.

20. Wayne Simmonds, RW, Buffalo Sabres

Age: 31

2019-20 cap hit: \$5 million

Simmonds has struggled to find his stride since landing in Nashville at the 2018-19 deadline. Since then, he's scored just nine goals and 28 points in 85 games split between the Predators, Devils and Sabres. He's

just three seasons removed from back-to-back 30-plus-goal campaigns and should be a top candidate for a short-term deal on a team that can help revive his career.

Other notable pending UFAs to keep an eye on: Jesper Fast (NYR), Craig Smith (NSH), Chris Tanev (VAN), Joe Thornton (SJ), Zdeno Chara (BOS), Chris Tanev (VAN), Alex Galchenyuk (MIN), Thomas Greiss (NYI), Brenden Dillon (WSH), Cody Eakin (VGK), Cody Ceci (TOR), Justin Schultz (PIT), Michael Frolik (CGY), Vladislav Namestnikov (OTT), Erik Gustafsson (CHI), Pat Maroon (TB), Zach Bogosian (TB), Kyle Clifford (TOR), Radko Gudas (WSH), Justin Williams (CAR), Mikko Koivu, Carl Soderberg (ARI), Brad Richardson (ARI), Derek Grant (PHI), Tyler Pitlick (PHI), Nate Thompson (PHI), Henrik Lundqvist (NYR), Jimmy Vesey

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: With Stanley Cup awarded, NHL faces new questions

Elliotte Friedman

- Will fans be able to attend games in 2021?
- Tampa not satisfied with one Cup win
- Buffalo not trading Eichel

The Stanley Cup is awarded. The draft is next, with free agency to follow. Then ... what?

We live with uncertainty in 2020. You can go online and find 1,000 quotes to inspire you, to frame "uncertainty" in a way that seems appealing or inviting. But the truth is most people hate it. We want to know where we're going.

In sports, we are creatures of habit. Season ends. A couple months off. Next season begins. Repeat, re-use, recycle. Stanley Cup. Draft. Free Agency. See you in September. Well, it's October. See you in ... January? Maybe?

This is a personal opinion, but I think the NHL would be very interested in a Jan. 1 return. I'd be shocked if there was a Winter Classic without full attendance; that's wasting a great event. But it's become a major day on the league calendar, and you could symbolically tie in a fresh start for both hockey and, well, society itself — "Good riddance, 2020. Now let's drop the puck!"

The problem is, right now we're all guessing. We don't know what's going to be happening in three minutes, never mind three months. As both Commissioner Gary Bettman and Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly correctly pointed out, waiting as long as possible to make decisions was the right call.

So, in the absence of answers about next year, here are the questions:

WHEN WILL FANS BE ABLE TO ATTEND?

In both his State of the Union address prior to Game 1 and as he presented the Stanley Cup to the Lightning, Bettman went out of his way to mention how much the fans were missed. It was a smart move, because a) it's true, and b) their engagement will be critical to resuscitating revenues.

Owners across the NHL have a consistent phrase when it comes to the 2020-21 season: "We need to see a path to attendance." Bettman doesn't do "random thoughts," which made it noteworthy when, unprompted, he tossed one out there last week: "It's conceivable that we start without fans, that we move to socially distant fans at some point and by some point in time maybe our buildings are open.... How we start doesn't necessarily mean that's how we have to finish."



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So much of this is dependent on factors Bettman can't control: governments, general public behaviour, the border, eventual medicine/vaccines, you name it. But half the NHL's revenue comes through this avenue, and continuing without them is useless. I did ask Bettman if there was any possibility the NHL does not resume until next fall, and he pooh-pooed it. Several sources then reached out to say, "That is absolutely not what he wants."

They're watching other leagues to see how fans in stands works, but it's not exactly apples to apples because many of the examples are outdoor stadiums. (Exception: the Dallas Cowboys.) European hockey may give the best evidence, but it's still too soon to say there's any real data. Ask yourself how comfortable you would be entering an arena, and how many people you'd want around you.

One exec said Tuesday that he didn't envy Bettman's position: "He just pulled off (the playoffs), which no one thought he could do. Now, he's got to do it again, but somehow find a way to get fans involved."

Which brings us to ...

HOW WILL REVENUE-SHARING WORK?

One of the theories is that the NHL will consider "short-term" bubbles in markets fans can attend. Teams go there for two weeks, then go home. In theory, that makes sense. In practice?

What if your biggest revenue-driving markets won't allow crowds? What if your options are markets that have a history of low attendance, or little interest in anyone but the home team?

Does it make any sense to go down that path?

Completing the season didn't make the NHL any money. It allowed the league to fulfill its commitments to television and sponsors, plus award the Stanley Cup. The bubble costs are estimated at \$75 million to \$90 million (USD), which was helped by playing in Canada — although safety was the primary reason this country hosted both sites.

Even revenue titans are feeling the strain, so imagine how the teams who count on sharing are feeling. Because I am contractually obligated to discuss how everything affects the Leafs, let's say the Canadian/Ontario government rules, "Sorry, Toronto, no fans for you." Imagine that ripple effect down the NHL. Would the league have to put all revenues in a pot and split them 31 ways?

And then ...

WILL THE PLAYERS BE PAID FOR 82 GAMES REGARDLESS?

This is going to be a big one. Honestly, I missed how big an issue this could be.

The NHL and NHLPA put their abrasive history behind them to reach a long-term CBA extension before the return to play. In it, the players accepted a 10 per cent deferral and a 20 per cent escrow deduction, which means they are entitled to 72 per cent of their gross salaries in 2020–21. There is also an agreement that the NHL not use specific powers that allow it to reduce salaries if COVID-19 eliminates games for 2020–21.

Basically, the players are saying, "We've given back enough." Owners are saying, "We can't be expected to pay for games that won't be played."

Of note, players who are under contract for next season who were also on a roster at the time of the March "pause" are due one paycheck by Oct. 31.

That is why, even though it is extremely unlikely we get an 82-game season, Bettman continues to state it as a target. I don't know how this one will be settled, but it's delicate.

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

31 THOUGHTS

1. As much as the last two months exceeded all expectations, I don't think there's much that will be incorporated from it as the NHL returns to normal. One thing I wondered about was weekday triple-headers. People enjoyed the extra hockey without another game at the same time. Could late-afternoon playoff games become a regular occurrence? The answer appears to be no. I understand why. Regular work schedules will resume, and afternoon games tend to mean lower food/alcohol/concession sales.

2. Before we get to the news of the week, I wanted to look back at the Stanley Cup Final. The last three champions — Washington, St. Louis and Tampa Bay — had all considered blowing it up. The Blues are a bit of an outlier because they didn't have the sustained record of the other two teams, but GM Doug Armstrong resisted mass surgery months before they won.

When you have great players signed long-term, the lesson is to bet on their talent, find depth, challenge everyone to get better and nastier. One year ago, Jon Cooper, Nikita Kucherov and Andrei Vasilevskiy had to eat it while Kenan Thompson skewered them at the NHL Awards. The Lightning were supposed to be soft. Look who they beat: Columbus, Boston, Islanders, Dallas. Not a wimpy team among them, and they gave as good as they got. They were 10-1 with the long change.

After the team had zero rebound chances in Game 5, Brayden Point followed his shot to score the Cup winner on one. At five-on-five, Conn Smythe winner Victor Hedman played 157 minutes with Kevin Shattenkirk, 150 with Zach Bogosian, 63 with Jan Rutta, 52 with Erik Cernak, 42 with Luke Schenn, 30 with Mikhail Sergachev and 10 with Ryan McDonagh (courtesy: NaturalStatTrick). Who does that? He also shrugged off a forechecking Ross Johnston like a rag doll. Vasilevskiy played every minute. Only Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux have had more assists in one post-season than Kucherov did.

That's not an asterisk — that's an exclamation mark.

I've heard that Cooper has a thing for post-season montages: Hockey Night in Canada's, "One Shining Moment" from the NCAA Tournament, etc. Betting this one will be his favourite:

3. When Dallas won the Cup in 1999, I remember seeing Roman Turek walking out of the arena, knowing his days with the Stars were done. As Chicago celebrated in 2010, they knew it would be the last time they'd be together. Some of that exists with this edition of the Lightning, too. It sounds like GM Julien Brisebois has done a lot of the internal legwork already, knowing which players are (or are not) willing to waive no-move or no-trade protection. (Several have indicated they prefer not to.)

The Lightning are not satisfied with one win — they want to maintain themselves for a shot at more. Expect Brisebois to think unconventionally. I think teams will ask if Sergachev wants a bigger role. He's on the left side with Hedman and McDonagh.

4. One staffer the Lightning could lose: assistant director of amateur scouting Darryl Plandowski. Arizona is hot for him to run its department with Ryan Jankowski.

5. Dallas was the one team that never moved from arrival to departure. They stayed in the same hotel for two months straight. Just imagine it. If they'd won two more games, they would have been the first team since the 1995 New Jersey Devils to win the Cup without a single player getting a Hart Trophy vote.

Their blue line is excellent, and it will be interesting to see how they navigate new contracts next summer for Miro Heiskanen and the vastly improved Jamie Oleksiak. They will try to move one big salary, although trade protection is an issue. Corey Perry had five goals in the regular season, same in the playoffs. Joe Pavelski had 14 in the regular season, 13 in the playoffs. At 34, Anton Khudobin battled through the heaviest workload of his career. He's probably priced himself out of Texas. Ben Bishop's full no-trade becomes a partial, but his actual dollars drop now to three years at \$3.5 million. That's manageable for the Stars.

6. Okay, now to the news. We start with one GM absolutely trashing all the rumours: "How much money do you think is out there?" Some business is getting done. If teams want to spend on someone, they will.



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7. The Rangers made Henrik Lundqvist's buyout official on Wednesday, but expect them to bend over backward to treat him as royalty. One thing they've adamantly refused to do is speculate on his next steps, believing it is the future Hall of Famer's right to address it.

8. No confirmation from team and/or agents, but word is Carolina was willing to look at eight years, \$7.5 million per year on an Andrei Svechnikov extension. That's not low, but the player is willing to bet on himself to do even better, which is why this might end up being a bridge deal — for now.

9. Not sure it is even possible, but I think Arizona and Vancouver had an Oliver Ekman-Larsson conversation.

10. Minnesota asked Dustin Byfuglien if he wanted to play for them. If there was one team he'd consider, it was probably the Wild. But agent Ben Hankinson doubts the big defender ever plays in the NHL again. Too bad.

11. On the Instigators radio show, Buffalo GM Kevyn Adams told Andrew Peters and Craig Rivet: "People make phone calls and ask about players every day. My job is to listen.... We have no intention and we're not looking to do anything with Jack Eichel."

The Sabres paid Eichel a \$7.5-million bonus this season. Seventy-five per cent of his 2020–21 salary is paid. It is absolutely senseless for them to make an Eichel trade for this reason. But if things don't get better, we are going to revisit this topic next spring.

12. When it comes to Patrik Laine, it sounds like he and the Jets are trying to solve an issue before it really becomes a problem. Winnipeg has term with Kyle Connor, Nikolaj Ehlers, Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler. That's what they like and it's why I think an Ehlers trade, as has been rumoured, is not Winnipeg's want. Laine's next negotiation will be massive. In the meantime, the winger wants guarantees of playing with Scheifele, which the Jets aren't so willing to give. My sense is the Jets are saying, "Let's try and do this now before we have to negotiate again."

There's a legit chance it happens. Columbus, hoping to make a major move, is in there, but is there a match? Same with Carolina. Two teams that could do it: Los Angeles and Philadelphia. I'm just not sure they would. I also wonder about the Islanders. It's the kind of stealth move Lou Lamoriello would love. But they've got cap issues and it's not like he'd give us a hint.

13. No change as far as I can tell on Alex Pietrangolo. He, his agency (Newport) and the Blues are going to take one more run at this. A lot of tough negotiators here. The biggest question: Do the Blues believe he will leave?

14. New Jersey's 18th and 20th picks are in play. (Not the seventh, I don't think.) The Devils could do a lot of things: move up, move down or trade for immediate help. If the move is for a player, they are looking for youth (maximum 26) with term or team control. It's a specific target.

15. Mackenzie Blackwood took a huge step for the Devils this year, but opponents suspect their lack of overall organizational depth at the position has Russian goalie Yaroslav Askarov on their radar. Askarov is the true wild card of next week's draft. Among the teams suspected of eyeing him in the top 15: Ottawa, New Jersey, Minnesota, Carolina and Edmonton.

16. Anaheim is not averse to trading down a few spots from six.

17. Washington is trying to move money to keep Brenden Dillon.

18. The sheer volume of free-agent goalies is affecting the trade market at the position. Teams are wondering if it is worth giving up an asset when they can simply sign someone. Pittsburgh has run into that issue as it tries to clear its crease.

19. Therefore, it's not a total surprise that word seeped out Arizona's preference is to keep Darcy Kuemper. I wouldn't put that in stone because anything can happen, but the winds are blowing in a different direction.

20. I don't believe Vegas desires to buy out Marc-Andre Fleury.

21. Calgary is checking in on every available goalie. I think the Flames talked with Columbus, too, but that's cooled down. Depending on what's available, they could do a big revamp of their blue line. When talking about Taylor Hall with New Jersey, Noah Hanifin's name was discussed.

22. I also wonder if the Coyotes test the market on Clayton Keller.

23. Back in November 2005, Anaheim traded Sergei Fedorov to Columbus. The Blue Jackets then put Todd Marchant on waivers, where he was claimed by the Ducks. At the time, then-GMs Brian Burke and Doug MacLean claimed there was nothing fishy — "just a coincidence!" — but they are bad liars. Plus, they've now admitted it was set up to get around Marchant's no-trade. Patric Hornqvist realized that Pittsburgh could have put him on waivers, and Florida was going to claim him. The Panthers wanted him badly.

24. Hornqvist is one of Florida assistant GM Paul Fenton's best draft picks, and it wasn't a surprise Fenton would go after the winger. I wonder if there's a Ryan Donato/Henrik Borgstrom-style swap in the future. The former is another Fenton favourite, while the latter could use a change of scenery.

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25. This is purely me thinking out loud: if, sometime down the road, there's any doubt about Florida's direction, could Joel Quenneville end up in Seattle? There's no evidence of any issues with the Panthers, but he was hired by a different GM and who knows how everyone feels next summer.

26. Before Toronto zeroed in on Manny Malhotra for its coaching staff, the Maple Leafs investigated the possibility of Joel Ward.

27. Last week on Hockey Central at Noon, Hart Trophy Winner Leon Draisaitl told Jeff Marek that he calls his "canoe paddle" of a blade "the burger flipper." Love that.

28. As the league gets more into gambling, it will need to clamp down on the NHL.com roster report. There were some snafus during the playoffs, and you can't have that so close to game time. Too much money on the line (and not just my own).

29. Nikita Soshnikov has two goals and 11 points in seven games for KHL Salavat Yulaev. He's a free agent next summer. Someone's going to try to bring him back.

30. You probably heard Monday night that Pat Maroon became the eighth player to win back-to-back Stanley Cups with different teams. The others: Cory Stillman (Tampa Bay 2004, Carolina 2006 — lockout in between); Claude Lemieux (New Jersey 1995, Colorado 1996); Al Arbour and Ed Litzenberger (Chicago 1961, Toronto 1962); Ab McDonald (Montreal 1960, Chicago 1961); Lionel Conacher (Chicago 1934, Montreal Maroons 1935); Eddie Gerard (Ottawa 1921, Toronto St. Patricks 1922, Ottawa 1923). There is, however, another.

31. Two-time Stanley Cup champion Bob Nevin died last week at age 82. He played 1,141 games between the NHL and WHA, with 310 goals and 741 points. He was an avid golfer. A friend told a hilarious story about being one foursome behind Nevin at a charity golf tournament, and pulling up to the tee as the retired forward was about to hit at a par-three. It was one of those "get a hole-in-one, win a car" deals. Nevin swung, unleashing a beautiful shot that hit the green and rolled into the cup. My friend (and his group) went wild with excitement, then noticed a lack of emotion from Nevin's quartet, which was laughing a little.

"Why aren't you celebrating?"

"Because I put my first try in the water," Nevin replied.

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