



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 10, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes win again, stopping Canucks for 3-0-1 start

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

It's hard to say what excited Carolina Hurricanes fans most before Tuesday's game against the Vancouver Canucks, the thought of another Canes win or what might happen after it.

The Canes did a mad dash for a team leap into the glass at PNC Arena after beating the New York Rangers on Sunday, and said some other things were planned for wins on home ice. Many around the NHL noticed. Canes fans loved it and wanted more.

First things first: the Hurricanes did win the game, beating the Canucks 5-3. That had the crowd roaring. That's a 3-0-1 start for the season.

The aftermath: Micheal Ferland leading the players in some slow claps at center ice, then another dash down the ice and more glass-jumping.

Canes fans had a lot to like much of the game. Jordan Staal scored in the first minute, Sebastian Aho was throwing a fist-pump after scoring his second of the season and Andrei Svechnikov picked up his second NHL goal.

Warren Foegele, the rookie forward in constant motion, scored his third of the season and defenseman Brett Pesce scored his first.

"The entire team is working hard right now and we're seeing the results," Foegele said. "We're playing fast, we're playing hard and creating havoc for their defensemen."

Goalie Curtis McElhinney, in his second start since being claimed off waivers, earned his second victory, finishing with 22 saves.

"There's still a lot of room for improvement, which is good, but we're finding ways to win, which is even better," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said

In an interesting sequence in the second period, Svechnikov found himself battling Canucks rookie forward Elias Pettersson for the puck after a shot by Canes defenseman Jaccob Slavin.

Pettersson, the fifth overall pick of the 2017 NHL Draft, came into the game with five points in his first two games, but Svechnikov simply overpowered him. Svechnikov got the

goal, his second in as many games. Pettersson was sent sprawling. The Canes led 4-2.

After the game, Canes owner Tom Dundon presented Svechnikov with a framed photo and the puck to commemorate his first NHL goal -- the game-winner Sunday in the 8-5 win over Rangers. With teammates in the locker room demanding a speech, Svechnikov could only manage a few words.

"He'll have a bunch of more memorable moments, I guarantee it," Brind'Amour said.

Not a big part of the scoring Tuesday, Slavin had his best game of the season. His stick was active and his instincts good, making plays large and small.

"He's such a good player and he's way underrated," Brind'Amour said. "His time will come. He's an elite player. He took over the game, for me, on the back end."

Sven Baertschi had two goals and assist for the Canucks (1-2-0), who scored twice on the power play.

The Canes' Jordan Martinook called Sunday's game a "track meet" and Canes goalie Petr Mrazek often was left in tough positions in allowing the five goals. The game Tuesday seemed headed in the same direction until the Canes tightened up in the third.

Staal used his long reach to control the puck in the offensive zone, turning near the blue line and winging a shot toward the net. With Martinook in front of goalie Jacob Markstrom, Staal picked up his third goal of the season just 43 seconds into the game.

The Canucks were the more aggressive team after the Canes' quick strike, tying the score on Baertschi's first goal. But Pesce recreated the Staal goal -- a long shot with Markstrom again screened -- and Aho scored off a Ferland pass for a 3-1 lead.

The Canucks, on a 14-day road trip, used power-play goals from Bo Horvat and Baertschi -- Pettersson with an assist -- in the second to stay in the game. Those goals were sandwiched around Svechnikov's even-strength score.

Brind'Amour made one lineup change among the skaters, inserting defenseman Haydn Fleury for Trevor van Rimesdyk -- Fleury's first game of the season.



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Free-wheeling Hurricanes scoring lots of goals, having even more fun

By Luke DeCock

Raleigh

So many nights, Jordan Staal was left nearly speechless, alone in the Carolina Hurricanes' dressing room trying to explain away a baffling loss. And there he was again Tuesday night, after yet another helter-skelter win, asking the questions himself.

"When's the last time you've seen that?" Staal asked, rhetorically. Pedantically, the answer is Sunday afternoon, when the Hurricanes scored eight goals in four separate comebacks against the New York Rangers. Philosophically, the answer is never, at least in his seven-season tenure.

Dig a little deeper, and the history starts to echo a little bit, but as for living in the present, this is a Hurricanes team unlike any other in recent memory. Rod Brind'Amour has, quite deliberately, replaced the tight, organized – and, yes, passive – game of the Bill Peters era with a free-for-all style that doesn't mind giving up a scoring chance for two as long as a few more chances are created going the other way.

Tuesday's 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks was all of that, with a few of the Canucks' goals scored out of unforgivable errors that had nothing to do with the Hurricanes' aggression with the puck, but the math tends to work in your favor when you're scoring four or five times a game.

"It is definitely more fun, a style that every player likes to play," Staal said. "Everyone wants to step on the ice and feel like they can be the guy to help the team win. That's a good feeling. I feel like everyone's got that feeling throughout the lineup which has been great and everyone's contributing. Obviously, there's always breakdowns and ways to tighten up defensively, but I feel like even in our previous style there were always times of defensive lapses."

Through four games, the Hurricanes are 3-0-1 and have scored 17 goals despite a power play that has been anemic at best. It's less about changing the structure and more about tweaking the mindset, tipping the little decisions that make up the soft middle of any game toward offense and aggression instead of defense and caution, giving the proverbial green light to just about anything.

"There's going to be chances for the other team, but as long as we play our way, we get enough scoring chances to score goals and win games," said Sebastian Aho, with a point in every game so far.

On a team full of kids, from Warren Foegoal – er, Foegele – to Aho to Andrei Svechnikov, all of whom are thriving in the early going, why not let them run wild, with old warhorses Staal and Justin Williams setting the tone and playing with energy that belies their age?

"It's exciting," Foegele said. "I don't know if the coaching staff likes it that much, but we're playing hard and we're playing fast and it's a lot of fun."

On the contrary, the coaching staff likes it very much. This is all very much by design, for several reasons. It's fun, for the players and the potential ticket-buying public. And, even if no one wants to talk about it, it's a pretty good way to minimize the impact of the Hurricanes' biggest unknown.

If you're concerned about your goaltending, as the Hurricanes should be, why try to play for a 2-1 game that leaves no margin for error? When you score six or eight, the impact of a bad goal, any bad goal, is inherently minimized.

That wasn't as much an issue Tuesday as it was Sunday, but the same is true of defensive breakdowns, which should be less of a concern even if there were plenty of those Tuesday.

"It's a fine line, right?" Brind'Amour said. "We don't want to give up chances but you're also creating offense because you're giving up chances, if that makes any sense. We've just got to shore up the things that are costing us that we're not getting any offense out of anyway. Like giving up stretch passes. Or special teams."

Those last eight words covered it all Tuesday: A stretch pass that got past Dougie Hamilton led to Vancouver's first goal and the other two both came on the power play.

The Hurricanes have taken care of business so far, taking seven points from four games against one contender and three teams not likely to make the playoffs, the latter so crucial for a team without a history of banking points early in the season (or anytime). Winning the winnable ones, not letting a point leak through here and slip by there, is the first step toward making the playoffs. It's progress, for certain.

Now, the real test, three games on the road against elite teams. For now, to the extent they can in six days, they have a sense of who they are and what they want to be. By this time next week, after going to Minnesota and Winnipeg and Tampa Bay, the Hurricanes will have a better sense of just how good they are.

Jazzed up Carolina Hurricanes jumping at the chance to celebrate

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Justin Williams still likes to have fun.

He's 37 now, in his 14th NHL season and has played more than 1,200 games, whether regular-season or playoff. That's a lot of miles.

But if you can't have fun playing the sport you love, what's the use? That's the way the Carolina Hurricanes captain feels, and Williams said he senses the same from the other players.

When the Canes raced past the New York Rangers 8-5 on Sunday, it was Williams who led the unexpected celebration that followed at PNC Arena -- the players holding their sticks



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high while clapping, then suddenly dashing down the ice to hop into the glass. That's still the talk of the all-too-staid NHL, which oft times seems stuck in a time warp.

After the Canes' morning skate Tuesday at PNC Arena, with a game to play against Vancouver at night, Williams, who again will be at right wing on Jordan Staal's line with Warren Foegele, didn't quickly dress and disappear. He soon was battling it out with defenseman Brett Pesce at the bubble hockey game in the players' lounge -- one custom-made by owner Tom Dundon.

Williams said management had mentioned doing something a little different after wins at PNC Arena.

"Maybe the stick wave got a little stagnant, a little stale," he said. "We're trying to make things exciting here and fun. That's the main goal, so that's what it was."

ESPN noticed. So did TSN and NHL.com. Score eight goals and take a mass leap into the glass and people notice.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour certainly didn't mind. It came after a victory and was something extra for the 13,526 fans who came out on an NFL Sunday to see the game.

Williams said it wasn't completely impromptu, noting it was "planned a little bit" in advance and adding. "We're going to fine-tune things a little bit and make it a little more organized." But Williams promised the Canes would continue it. And have fun with it.

"Clean it up a little bit and add some wrinkles to it, but at the end of the day it's not hot-dogging or anything," he said. "It's just having fun with the people who came to the game."

Marketing folks call it connecting with the fans. Williams used that term, too.

"It's fun, doesn't take too long and people seem to enjoy it," he said. "We're hoping people stick around at the end of some Canes wins and we can have some fun together."

Defenseman Calvin de Haan was a slow starter at the post-game skate and said Tuesday he wasn't sure at first what was happening.

"No idea," he said. "It was cool. It was something different. It kind of seems like teams are starting to be a little more creative with that kind of stuff."

De Haan promised not to be a trailer on the next one, saying, "Hopefully next time around I can be one of the first into the glass."

Williams said he couldn't remember the last time he jumped into the glass. He's more of a stay-grounded, fist pumper.

"It's not really my thing," he said.

But he did show off a little vertical leap this time.

"Yeah, right," he said, laughing.



Recap: Canes Continue Hot Start, Top Canucks

Svechnikov tallies game-winning goal again

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes continued their hot start, defeating the Vancouver Canucks, 5-3, to win their third consecutive game.

Andrei Svechnikov recorded the game-winning goal for the second game in a row, as the Canes improve to 3-0-1 on the young season.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game.

One

The Hurricanes keep scoring and they keep winning. The Canes have now scored 17 goals through their first four games of the season. That's the third-highest total through the first four games of a season in franchise history.

"I just like the aggressiveness of our team. We're utilizing our speed. We're a fast team, and we're actually playing that way, too. We're being aggressive and going after teams, creating turnovers. We've given up a few maybe more than

in previous years, but when it comes down to the end of the game, we feel like we should be on top," Jordan Staal said. "It's been fun to play that way."

"We want to play that way offensively. That's the way we have to play," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We have good talent, and we have to use it to our advantage. Now we have to get better at the other end. I think there's a lot of room for improvement, which is a positive that we're still finding ways to get wins."

As Brind'Amour said, there's room for improvement, especially on the defensive side of the ice. The Hurricanes are playing an aggressive brand of hockey, but they don't want to completely compromise team defense.

The Canucks scored their first goal on a stretch pass, in which Sven Baertschi snuck behind the Canes' defense, deked and beat Curtis McElhinney. Vancouver's other two goals were both scored on the power play.

"It's a fine line. You don't want to give up chances, but you're also creating a lot of offense because you're giving up



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chances," Brind'Amour said. "We've just got to shore up the things that are costing us, that we're not getting any offense out of anyway, like giving up stretch passes, things like that and special teams."

Two

Once Sebastian Aho finally found the back of the net once in October, it was bound to happen again. After scoring his first goal of the season Friday night in Columbus - the first time in his now three-year career that he has scored in October - Aho tallied his second of the season in the first period to give the Canes a 3-1 lead. The play developed when Micheal Ferland drove the net and got a shot off. He then wheeled around the cage, corralled the loose puck and dished to Aho from short range in tight for the one-timer.

Aho now has points in each of his first four games of the season and leads the team in scoring with six points (2g, 4a).

"That kid's obviously a talent," Staal said. "He's starting to create even more and find the holes better. That line's been really good for us, as well."

Staal, just 43 seconds in, and Brett Pesce tallied goals for the Hurricanes in the first period before Aho stretched the team's lead to 3-1. Staal has three goals and five points in his first four games of the season.

Three

Andrei Svechnikov may be just 18 years old, but he's built to compete in the dirty areas of the NHL. Elias Pettersson, Vancouver's prized rookie selected fifth overall in the 2017 NHL Draft, learned firsthand the strength and skill of Svechnikov. Early in the second period, Jaccob Slavin put a shot on goal. Svechnikov drove the net and simultaneously knocked Pettersson to the ice and banged in the rebound, the hockey equivalent of dunking on someone.

That goal, the Canes' fourth of the game, proved to be the game-winner.

"He's getting better and better," Brind'Amour said. "There are still lots of little mistakes. More than anything, I think he just takes a little breath here and there, and you just can't in this league when you're out there. But he's finding his way."

Four

After a back-and-forth first two periods - the two teams combined for three goals in the first three minutes and change in the second period - things settled down a bit in the

third period. The team pointed to this as their best 20-minute segment of the game.

"It was an interesting first couple of periods. We didn't have our best start, and even in the second we were a bit off with a few penalties that kind of slowed down the game," Staal said. "I thought the third period was our best period. We kind of took over the game. We had the lead and continued to bring it to them. That's been the way we want to play, to continue to go at teams even when we're up."

"It wasn't what we wanted at the start. There's a lot of room for improvement, but we're finding ways to win, which is even better," Brind'Amour said. "I thought our third period was the best when we were up a goal, so that's a positive sign."

Warren Foegele tallied the Canes' fifth goal in the third, as he finished a pass from Justin Williams in one-time fashion. Foegele has now recorded five goals in his first six NHL games.

"[Playing two games last season] was huge for my confidence, learning to be more poised and calmed. Last year, I was so nervous for that pregame skate, more even than the game. Coming into this year, I was more comfortable with some familiar faces," Foegele said. "The entire team is working hard right now, and we're seeing results."

"He's really a fun guy to play with. You know what you're going to get every night," Staal said. "He's just a moose out there, to be honest. He hounds the puck."

"He's done a great job," Brind'Amour said. "He's what we want in a Hurricane. A young kid who does it right every shift. He's getting rewarded right now for it."

Five

The Canes fine-tuned their victory celebration. The team still lined up on the right blue line and clapped in unison, but this time it was led by Micheal Ferland at center ice. The mad sprint down the ice then commenced, and the team leapt into the glass.

"They're fine-tuning it. ... Ferls had a little issue with the beat," Brind'Amour said. "That's something they've created. Hopefully they can enjoy it and the fans can enjoy it."

Up Next

The Hurricanes will hit the road for three straight games, as they head north and west to Minnesota and Winnipeg before finishing the trip in Tampa Bay.

Projected Lineup: Canucks vs. Hurricanes

Fleury to make season debut on blue line

by Michael Smith

After earning five of a possible six points in their first three games of the season (2-0-1), the Carolina Hurricanes host the Vancouver Canucks in their lone visit to Raleigh this season.

Haydn Fleury is expected to make his season debut on the blue line, while Curtis McElhinney will return to the crease.

Based on lines in the morning skate, here is the projected lineup for the Hurricanes.

Forwards

Foegele-Staal-Williams
Ferland-Aho-Teravainen



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McGinn-Necas-Di Giuseppe
Martinook-Wallmark-Svechnikov

Defense

Slavin-Hamilton
Fleury-Pesce
de Haan-Faulk

Goalies

McElhinney
Mrazek

Scratches: Zykov (healthy), van Riemsdyk (healthy), Darling (lower body; injured reserve), Rask (hand; injured non-roster)

Note: Lineup subject to change prior to opening faceoff.

Preview: Canucks vs. Hurricanes

Off to hot start, Canes look to keep rolling

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes are off to their best start since the team arrived in North Carolina, having posted five points (2-0-1) through their first three games.

The Canes will look to keep the ball rolling when the Vancouver Canucks make their first and only appearance of the season in Raleigh.

Fun Hockey

There hasn't been a shortage of fun hockey for the Hurricanes in their first three games of the season, even in the 2-1 overtime loss to the New York Islanders on Opening Night. This team plays fast and aggressively, and it's a lot of fun to watch.

Sunday's divisional match-up with the New York Rangers took the fun to new heights, as the Hurricanes overcame four separate deficits (2-0, 3-2, 4-3, 5-4) to defeat the Rangers, 8-5. Warren Foegele (2g, 1a), Jordan Staal (1g, 2a) and Justin Williams (3a) each tallied three-point nights, while four other players chipped in with multi-point efforts.

"We can't expect to give up five goals and win hockey games. It's not going to be a recipe for success," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said on Monday. "At the same time, you can't reign them back too much, especially with a young group. They need to go, go, go and figure it out from there."

Fine Tuning

Considering both the Canes' playing style and their young group, mistakes are to be expected. Team defense has been a bit loose. But, these are correctable issues. So, instead of practicing Monday, the Canes went through video and put in an off-ice workout.

"We had a lot of teaching today on video. I thought that was more prudent than going out there and doing stuff on the ice. Tough first week," Brind'Amour said. "We went through special teams and 5-on-5 stuff. It's a good day to do it."

In an ideal world, Brind'Amour would spend less time with video instruction.

"We're still showing more than I would like. I just know the attention span of guys and how much they actually take in is probably a third of what you think they're taking in," he said. "There's so much to go over that you can't not go over it."

It's all a work in progress, though the results thus far have been positive.

"There are things we're doing that we need to shore up, but I see improvement in a lot of guys' games," Brind'Amour said.

Andrei 2000

Hurricanes rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov was one of the four players who registered a multi-point night on Sunday, and one of those points was his first-career NHL goal, a deft redirection of a shot off the stick of Justin Faulk.

Svechnikov became the first NHL player born in the 2000s to score a goal, and at 18 years and 195 days young, he's the third youngest player in franchise history to do so.

"That's my dream to score my first goal in the NHL," Svechnikov said after the game. "I'm super happy. I want to just keep going and score more."

The Opposition

The Vancouver Canucks opened the regular season with a home-and-home set with the Calgary Flames set over a span of four days. Each game was either team's home opener, and the home team won both games. The Canucks took game one, 5-2, while the Flames won a high-scoring rematch, 7-4. Tuesday's match marks the beginning of a five-game, near-two-week road trip for the Canucks.

ADVANCE AUTO PARTS KEYS TO THE GAME

1. McElhinney Back in Net

Curtis McElhinney made 31 saves in his Hurricanes' debut, helping the team spoil the Columbus Blue Jackets' home opener by a score of 3-1. Can he follow it up with another stellar performance in his second start?

2. Tighten Up

The Hurricanes surrendered five goals to the New York Rangers on Sunday, not typically a recipe for success. The Canes will need to tighten up their team defense and keep the slot clear of Canucks.

3. Stay Aggressive

At the same time, the Hurricanes don't want to sacrifice what's been an aggressive and potent offense. Stay hungry.

AT THE RINK

There is still time to assist areas impacted by Hurricane Florence, with a limited number of \$40 lower-level tickets still remaining. All proceeds benefit the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund. PNC Arena doors open at 6 p.m.

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Recap: Hurricanes Pick Up Decisive 5-3 Win Over Canucks

The Hurricanes continued to build on a historic start to the season with a win over the Canucks.

By Andrew Ahr

RALEIGH — The best start in Carolina Hurricanes franchise history continues. Five players scored goals and the Hurricanes stretched their point streak to four straight games with a 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks on Monday night at PNC Arena.

Jordan Staal continued his mean streak and got the Canes rolling just 45 seconds into the game when he used his big frame to spearhead a clean zone entry and stave off a few defenders as he curled up towards the slot. He threw a puck at the net while Jordan Martinook cut towards the slot and threw it at the cage through traffic. Staal would get the goal, but the opportunity for the puck to elude Markstrom was driven by Martinook getting to the front of the net and drawing a defensive body with him to create a screen.

But the Canucks answered just a few minutes later as Alex Edler carried the puck out of the defensive zone and hit Sven Baertschi with a pass after he shook off Dougie Hamilton. Baertschi walked in alone on Curtis McElhinney and beat him to knot it at 1-1.

The Hurricanes again claimed the lead 11 minutes into the period when Sebastian Aho linked up with Teuvo Teravainen above the circle and he dished it off to Brett Pesce, who found his first goal of the season with Aho in front providing a screen.

Aho then stretched their lead to two when Micheal Ferland found him with a beautiful and selfless pass. The budding star made no mistake. He ensured us that he wouldn't repeat his slow start from years passed and he's delivered on that thus far.

The Canes carried the 3-1 lead into the room.

Just 46 seconds into the second period, the Canucks cut the lead in half again when Bo Horvat netted one on the power play.

But Svechnikov responded just over a minute later to make it 4-2 and displayed why he was the second overall pick just a few months ago. Slavin fired one at the net that went hard off of Jacob Markstrom's pad, and Svechnikov shoved Elias Pettersson to the ground with a shooting motion, netting his second goal in two games in the process.

At this point the game was starting to shape up a lot like the Rangers game Sunday, with the Hurricanes on the other side

of the narrative. The Canucks again brought the lead to within one and Baertschi got his second of the night with a funky bounce that pinballed in behind Curtis McElhinney, bringing the score to 4-3. The second stayed mostly quiet for the next sixteen minutes as the Canes took a one goal lead into the final intermission.

The first half of the third period was relatively quiet as well with neither team conceded many high danger shots.

The Canes maintained the one goal lead until just under 14 minutes into the third, when Williams streaked into the high slot and found Warren Foegele who snapped it home short side to make it 5-3 Hurricanes. The team carried the two goal lead to the final horn and the Canes continued their exciting October campaign.

They Said It

Jordan Staal

"Yeah, [Warren Foegele] has played unbelievable to start, and he's really a fun guy to play with, you know what you're going to get every night. He's just a moose out there, to be honest. He hounds the puck better than I've seen in a long time. So it makes for a fun time chipping them in and watching him go at it, and then getting the puck back and then going to play offense."

"I like the aggressiveness of our team. I think we're utilizing our speed, I think we're a fast team and we're actually playing that way too. We're being aggressive and going after teams and creating turnovers. Obviously we've given up a few, maybe more than in the previous years. But in the end, when it comes down to the end of the game, we feel like we should be on top."

Sebastian Aho

"[Michael Ferland] is just a big body out there. You know, he can make some plays. I think he's way more skilled than people think he is. "

"We want to be even better, we want to keep building something here and get better every day."

Curtis McElhinney

"Yeah I think its one of those things as an organization the [Hurricanes] are obviously looking for stability. I know [Darling] got off to a pretty good camp here and he made a lot of good strides in the summer time to get ready for this season. And Petr, the same thing, obviously he's coming off a year where he wants to prove himself, that he's more than capable of #1 in this league. You know, I'm just trying to fit in



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as best I can, and I don't know what the long term approach is at this point, but for the short term its just to have fun and fit in a little bit"

Rod Brind'Amour

It's a fine line, right? You don't want to give up the chances but you're also creating a lot of offense because you're giving up chances if that makes any sense. We just have to shore up the things that are costing us, the things we're not getting any offense out of anywhere, like giving up stretch passes, and things like that. And special teams, that's an area that we have to shore up."

"[Warren Foegele] has done a great job. I mean, again, he's kind of what we want in a Hurricane, a young kid that just does it right, every shift. And he's getting rewarded right now for it."

"Well I can't blame [Curtis McElhinney] for anything, i din't think we gave hin a lot of support in certain areas, and a couple weird bounces. I think a few got deflected, but he's a battler too. There's just confidence right now in the net, both guys, its hard to explain it but we weren't worried about that."

"We looked at it, they're fine tuning [the goal celebration], [Micheal Ferland] had a little issue with the beat, but, again,

that's something they've created and hopefully they can enjoy it and the fans can enjoy it."

Game Notes

When the players got done giving interviews, Dundon called the team together in the locker room and presented Andrei Svechnikov with a framed encasing commemorating his first NHL goal. The team roared in approval and immediately began chanting "Speech!". It was an incredible moment for everyone involved and really highlights just how well this team seems to be gelling early in the season.

McElhinney picked up his second win in a Canes uniform in as many games tonight as he continues to make put together a good run in Raleigh. The goaltending storyline will be an interesting one in the coming weeks if he continues to impress.

Warren Foegele has been most impressive through four games this season as he picked up his third goal on the season tonight.

The Hurricanes are 3-0-1 and currently sit atop the NHL standings. These first four games have been nothing if not fun.

Checkers Corner: Out With The Old, In With The New

As the Checkers alumni thrive in the big leagues, the young guys take care of business on the road.

By Justin Lape

While Checkers alumni thrived for the Hurricanes at the NHL level, the current Checkers started off on the right foot. The team heads into week two undefeated after winning both of their opening weekend games.

The Checkers started the season in Rochester on Friday night where they dominated the Americans for a 6-2 win. Janne Kuokkanen opened the scoring with a 1st period goal. Nicolas Roy added two goals and an assist. Andrew Potrualski added a goal and two assists and brought a complete effort, playing well in all three zones. "I love Potsy. He does all the right things. His competitiveness has gotten way better than he started last year," coach Mike Vellucci said in high praise of the two-way forward.

Charlotte continued their strong play with a solid showing again on Saturday against the Americans, this time topping them 4-2. Morgan Geekie kicked off the scoring, earning his first goal of the season after a strong showing in Checkers camp and Hurricanes training camp. The forward has a underrated set of hands that thrive in tight spaces around the net. The Americans bounced back with two goals after Geekie's tally before the Checkers scored three unanswered goals to close out the game. Roy scored a pair to solidify the win for the Checkers.

Thought of the Week

This team, much like the Hurricanes, will only go as far as their goaltending takes them. The offensive production is there. The defense is strong. As stressed in our season

preview, Nedeljkovic must prove himself a vaulable asset in the organization this year. Yes, the season is young but he can't let goals in like this. Flukes happened too often with him last year and his save percentage is an important number to keep an eye on this season.

Player of the Week

Who else but Nicolas Roy? His six points (four goals, two assists) lead the league through two games. Roy, much like Hurricane forward Warren Foegele, was streaky over the course of the 2017-18 season. It was only a matter of time until the two found continued success.

Speaking of Foegele, Vellucci is anything but surprised by his immediate impact on the Hurricanes. "He deserves it. He competes every night and brings it every shift. The goals are great and the assists are great but its the work ethic that gets him those things," said the coach.

Looking Ahead

The Checkers don't play until the weekend, and they remain in New York for matchups against the Utica Comets (Vancouver Canucks) and Syracuse Crunch (Tampa Bay Lightning). The Checkers may fair better against a Comets team without star goalie Thatcher Demko. The 22-year-old is currently in the concussion protocol and the Comets will role with Richard Bachman and Ivan Kulbakov in net while they take it slow with Demko.

The Crunch feature defenseman Cal Foote that may otherwise be in the NHL, if the Lightning weren't as deep as a franchise as they are. He could cause the Checkers problems on Saturday night.

Update:



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Well, guess I'm not the only one to notice Nicolas Roy this week. The AHL has named him Player of the Week. This is the second consecutive season a Checkers player has won the award in the first week of the season.

After two dominant outings against Rochester, Checkers forward Nicolas Roy has been named the CCM/AHL Player of the Week.

The 21-year-old kicked off the season with back-to-back three-point performances against the Amerks, logging two goals and an assist in each game.

Roy, who was credited with the game-winning goal in both contests, matched the best two-game start in franchise history in terms of both goals and points, matching Warren Foegele's four goals in 2017-18 and Jon Matsumoto's six

points in 2011-12. Those totals also led the league after the first weekend and are currently tied for the lead along with former Checker Zac Dalpe, who has played one more game.

Additionally, Roy became the third player in franchise history to score both a power-play and shorthanded goal in a single game on Saturday, joining Brock McGinn in 2016-17 and Chris Terry in 2010-11.

Roy, a fourth-round pick by Carolina in 2015, is the ninth player in franchise history to earn AHL Player of the Week honors and the fifth forward to do so. This also marks the second consecutive campaign in which a Checkers player has been named Player of the Week for the first week of the season, with Foegele capturing the honor to start 2017-18.

THE ATHLETIC

'My dream come true': Why Andrei Svechnikov's first NHL goal always was going to be a family affair

By Sara Civian

Evgeny Svechnikov had been biting his tongue for the better half of 60 minutes.

He watched and he bit, and he watched and he bit, right up until the final horn of the USHL's Muskegon Lumberjacks game sounded. His brother would rack up 58 points in 48 games that season, but this particular night would not make it anywhere near a highlight reel.

So he sheepishly walked up to the team's then-general manager, John Vanbiesbrouck.

"You know, Andrei can't play center."

They both laughed. That was obvious, after Andrei Svechnikov's game playing a position as foreign to him as the English language.

Still, Evgeny just had to make sure the right people knew what was up. His power forward of a brother isn't a center.

The two had been through too much — and by then, both NHL prospects had come too far — to let a bad lineup decision get in the way of their dream.

"We didn't have much money," Evgeny said of their childhood in Siberian Russia. "We ate from the same plate. We did everything together."

Since Evgeny was 3 and a half years old and his little brother was born, they'd always had each other. And since as long as they can remember, they've held onto the idea of someday playing together in the National Hockey League.

No one in Andrei Svechnikov's camp is surprised that the versatile No. 2 overall pick scored his first goal in his third NHL game. No one's even surprised that it was the first stolen lead in an 8-5 thriller, or that Andrei had logged a handful of assists before he did the damn thing.

"I had no doubt," Evgeny said. "I had no doubt he was gonna do it."

As fast as this league moves, as bonkers as the rest of the Hurricanes' Sunday win was, the Svechnikovs aren't letting this particular goal go uncanceled.

"I've waited for this my whole life," Andrei said, sweat still dripping. "It's my dream. My dream came true."

"It's huge," Evgeny said of both the goal and their relationship. "It's everything."

The lack of shock value in Andrei's immediate success doesn't make it any less sweet. The first goal scored by a 2000s-born skater is "huge," it's "everything."

Especially to the big boys who spent too many childhood nights going halves on a single plate of food.

Igor and Elena Svechnikov weren't perfect, but what parents are? They always tried their best to provide for their family.

As a pediatrician stationed in the Russian Far East, Igor knew his career path would come with inevitable highs and lows. But nothing could've prepared him for the 1995 Neftegorsk earthquake. As catastrophic as it was unexpected, the earthquake killed 2,040 of the oil town's 3,977 citizens.

What was he supposed to do, as one of only two doctors in the region? Half the population was killed. Hundreds of others were critically injured. Devastated by what he had seen, drained by trying to fix the unfixable, he eventually left the medical field for good.

He, Elena and their firstborn, Evgeny, moved to the Altai Krai region of Siberia. Igor made an honest living selling cakes, Elena took on two jobs — receptionist at a hockey rink by day, custodial duties by night.

Then came their second boy, Andrei.



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If you ask Evgeny, there was “no doubt” Andrei would make it from the time he started dominating older competition at 5 years old. Evgeny was 8 when he fostered that opinion. Clearly he was on to something.

Igor and Elena trusted their sons’ talent enough to move to Moscow when Andrei was 9 and Evgeny was 13, so they both could get a shot at their dream.

“They moved from job to job every city,” Evgeny said. “They sacrificed so much for us.”

The scouts noticed, first drafting Evgeny in the QMJHL. The Red Wings took him 16th overall after one season, a 78-point 2014-15 season at that, with the Screaming Eagles. He returned to the Q the next season, adding exactly one point to his PPG average. Then he was off to the Red Wings’ AHL affiliate Grand Rapids Griffins.

As GMs do, Vanbiesbrouck had been keeping tabs on the Svechnikov brothers. He knew enough to know they’d both thrive playing close to each other — Muskegon is just more than 40 miles from Grand Rapids.

“With all that’s going on in the world, it was just nice to see them be a family,” Vanbiesbrouck said. “They really are a family. It’s hard to be a family away from home.”

And though Andrei barely spoke “a lick” of English, Vanbiesbrouck loved watching him thrive in that challenge.

“There’s a lot of non-verbal communication that happens in the game, just genuine hockey talk that isn’t words, just sense,” he said. “Without words is a great kind of thing sometimes.”

Without words, Andrei got his 58 in 48. Again, he was too much for even older competition. So he and Elena decided he’d try his hand at elevated competition in the OHL.

Without words, he got his 72 (40 goals, 32 assists) in 44 with the Barrie Colts.

So yeah, you’ll forgive the lack of utter shock when he got his one in three with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Still, Elena was there for it.

Come on.

She sat at a receptionist’s desk for hours each day for this. She swept the floors for this.

She wouldn’t miss it.

Though Evgeny insists he hasn’t quite “made” it in the NHL yet, he has 16 games with the Red Wings under his belt. He was on the road with the club in Anaheim, Calif., when Elena called him late Sunday night, and the visual counts for something.

“My mom was at the game, she called me right after he scored,” Evgeny said. “She said he did it. I don’t even know how to. ... I can’t even explain. It was like scoring my first goal. It felt the same. Since I was a kid, since he was a kid, we did everything together. Growing up, living together. We talk every day.”

Plenty have laughed at the notion that Andrei has waited a whopping 18 years on this planet for this moment, and that’s fine. Those who matter know how long and tough the ride from the Russian Far East, to Siberia, to Moscow, to Michigan, to Barrie, to Raleigh has been.

Evgeny knows — when he first signed with the Red Wings back in 2015, he sent his entire signing bonus to his parents who live in Kazan, Russia.

Head coach Rod Brind’Amour isn’t one for the mushy-gushy, but he was proud Andrei’s first NHL point came quieter in the previous game — an assist on the fourth line, a hard-work play.

“I’m just proud of the kid in general,” Brind’Amour said after his first win as coach and Svechnikov’s first point. “He’s a great kid. He wants to learn and he’s got a lot to learn, but he’s going to be a great player in this league. You gotta remember how young he is, and that’s something I have to keep reminding myself. He’s just a kid, and he’s out there in the NHL and he doesn’t look out of place. We’re very fortunate to have him.”

And perhaps he’s very fortunate to have them. Brind’Amour is a coach who’s hesitant to weigh down Svechnikov with expectations, he knows what it takes to win a Cup, and the team has the talent to maybe — just maybe — end its playoff drought.

Regardless, the Hurricanes are having more fun than they have in nine years, and it’s a great environment to flourish as a rookie.

“The guys believe in each other. You can feel it,” Brind’Amour said. “There’s a ton of work to do. We’re making mistakes that we shouldn’t be making. There’s a quiet confidence going on that, no matter what happens, we can come back. That’s a good feeling. We have a lot of good players, and that’s what makes you feel that way.”

Dougie Hamilton not influenced by opinions from people he doesn’t respect

By Scott Burnside

It was the 2010 Stanley Cup playoffs and the Canadiens were in the midst of a dramatic run to the Eastern Conference final, an eighth seed that would knock off the Presidents’ Trophy-winning Capitals and the defending champion Penguins before falling to the seventh-seeded Flyers.

Standing in the Canadiens locker room at their practice facility in Brossard, Quebec, Mike Cammalleri was chatting with Chris Stevenson and I. But the forward, who scored a pivotal goal seemingly every night with an improbable 13 goals in 19 games during that run, wasn’t talking about goals and the postseason.



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On this day, we were talking about shoes. Specifically, Stevenson's shoes, with the stylish Cammalleri interested in where they were purchased, the style and the brand.

It was in keeping with Cammalleri's personality, as he always had a striking ease in talking to the media, discussing things outside the box and beyond the game of hockey. And he seemed completely aware and comfortable with the fact that these traits made him different from most of his teammates.

He paused in our conversation to note the presence of a young P.K. Subban, who had been called up from the AHL for his first NHL playoff experience. Cammalleri wondered aloud how the young defenseman with the big game and big personality would fare in often staid Montreal.

Cammalleri proved prescient in his observations of Subban, as the smooth-skating Norris Trophy winner was sent to the Predators in 2016 for Shea Weber in one of the game's biggest deals.

At the end of the day, the Canadiens felt they would be further ahead by moving the younger Subban and his personality for a more traditional soul in Weber, the much-loved longtime captain in Nashville. The Predators, of course, went to the Cup final in 2017 and remain a Stanley Cup contender heading into this season.

Montreal? Not so much, although the currently injured Weber was recently named captain of the storied franchise.

That 2010 conversation was just a chat, not a "for the record" conversation, but it came to mind during a recent visit to the Carolina Hurricanes training camp, chatting with another player whose "fit in quotient" (our term, not to be found in the Oxford or any other dictionary) came into question following his trade from Calgary last June.

We speak, of course, of Dougie Hamilton — the gifted young defenseman around whom teams are built and on whom playoff dreams are hung.

Of course, that's what the Boston Bruins thought when they selected him ninth overall in 2011. But three seasons later, Hamilton was on his way to Calgary for a first-round draft pick and two second-round picks — a return that has not in any meaningful way helped propel the Bruins back to contender status. The trade happened after a 42-point campaign and was followed by seasons of 43, 50 and 44 points in Calgary.

Now Hamilton is in Carolina where he becomes the No. 1 guy on a deep, talented blueline corps that will be relied on heavily if the Hurricanes are going to end a playoff drought that began in 2010.

This time the return for Hamilton was significant: Noah Hanifin, the fifth-overall draft pick in 2015; Adam Fox, a top defensive prospect; and tough but talented winger Micheal Ferland, with Elias Lindholm going with Hanifin to the Flames.

If a trade is judged by the team that got the best player, the Hurricanes should be the runaway winners in this deal. And yet immediately the backstory in Calgary was that the Flames felt they were better off with a change in personality

in the dressing room. In short, they felt they were better off without Hamilton, in spite of his enormous skill set.

Hamilton began the current season with more than twice the number of points as any defensemen from his draft class and is tied for sixth in goals scored by defensemen over the past three seasons.

He was second in the NHL among defensemen last season with 270 shots, and through three games in this early season has 11 more shots and has now registered at least a shot on goal in 168 straight games.

When we first sit down with Hamilton, he indicated he'd prefer to stand.

Standing means, in general, less time answering questions.

But eventually Hamilton joins us at his dressing room stall and is, by times, engaging, optimistic and candid about how it has come to pass that he is with his third team at the tender age of 25.

He's asked about his first hockey memory and he recalls a video shot at an early game when he was more interested in jumping over the lines on the ice than following the puck.

"I remember when I was little I used to, well I don't remember it, it's a video that I saw, but I used to skate around and during the games and just jump over all the lines, so I didn't really care about the game, I would just skate around and jump over the blueline. Puck would be going the other way, I'd be jumping over the red line, the blueline, so I was just having fun," he recalled.

"But yeah, it's been, hockey's been huge part of my life and just watching hockey games when I was a little kid and dreaming of being in the NHL; it's cool to be able to do that," he said. "I think it's awesome. I haven't seen it in many, many years. It's probably I don't know even know whether it was camcorder or whatever those were. I don't even know where it is. Buried somewhere."

Of course when you hear Hamilton's name it's hard not to think of him in relation to museums in a kind of weird word association thing. That's because in the wake of the draft weekend trade there were reports that illustrated Hamilton's "fit-in quotient" by the fact that he'd reportedly rather go to museums than hang out with the guys.

Hamilton chooses his words carefully when asked if he was angry at being traded and whether the whole museum thing was hurtful.

"I think the biggest thing for me that I've learned is that the people that I respect as humans that's whose words kind of affect me," Hamilton said. "If I respect someone and they tell me that I'm doing something wrong and shouldn't be acting the way I act and stuff like that, then I'm going to change. But I think if I don't respect the person, then there's no reason to change or to listen to what their beliefs are and what they say about you. I think that's what I've kind of learned over the years. So I don't think too much into that kind of stuff."

As for being angry, again a pause, but in the end, no, not really.



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"I think for me, I'm looking at it as an opportunity," Hamilton said. "Opportunity to develop my game and get better. You see who you get traded for and it's two good players, young players, it shows Carolina wants me and you want to be somewhere where somebody wants you and wants you to succeed and wants you to improve and get better and be a big part of the team and, if the team doesn't really want you to do that, then you don't want to be there. For me, if that's what they want from me, then I'm thrilled to be here, so hopefully that's the case."

One source familiar with the situation in Calgary said the attributes are obvious: Hamilton's size and his skating ability. "He definitely has offensive flair that is better than most," the source said. "There's definitely big upside to his game."

But (and you knew this was coming, didn't you?) there were also elements that amounted to red flags for the Flames organization, the source said.

Hamilton was too sensitive to criticism, the source suggested. And he added that there was a definite disconnect between Hamilton and some of his teammates, including Hamilton's non-appearance at an end of season gathering.

"In today's NHL, you're not rushing to trade a defenseman that's going to get you 50 points a year unless there's something behind the scenes," the source said.

Fair enough.

But can't you say the same thing about any top talent who gets dealt?

Obviously the Hurricanes felt they were better off moving Hanifin at the age of 21.

Or former rookie of the year Jeff Skinner, who the Hurricanes moved in the offseason simply because he didn't fit with the culture that new head coach Rod Brind'Amour was trying to instill in his locker room.

Fit is a relative thing. But it's often the parting shots that end up getting the most ink.

Folks in Boston couldn't say enough bad things about Tyler Seguin when he was shipped off to Dallas.

That's the same Tyler Seguin who scored 40 times last season, inked an eight-year contract extension this offseason and has become the de facto captain of that team.

Ray Ferraro has been in plenty of locker rooms over the years – he played 1,258 regular season games and has established himself as one of the most insightful analysts in the game since his retirement – and thinks the notion of fitting in is sometimes overblown.

"I've been surprised that there is chatter around whether Dougie Hamilton fits with teams or not," Ferraro told The Athletic. "None of us know what he's like with teammates, but on the ice, how can you not like size, mobility, shot? Not always the most creative but certainly excellent passer, key in today's game. Teams seem to not like his lack of physicality versus size but that's old school thought for me."

"Unless the guy's a total asshole I don't think it really matters," Ferraro said, speaking generally, not about

Hamilton. "There are guys that are just outcasts because of their personality but that's the same in any business, I think. I'd like everybody to get along on a team. It doesn't necessarily work that way and even with that, some teams are great even though they're a little bit dysfunctional."

One thing seems clear: Hamilton is a smart guy, he's aware of his surroundings both in terms of his current situation and the places he's left behind. And smart people are often introspective and take stock of why things happen and what might need to change moving forward.

"I think for me, I'm only 25, so I think as a 25-year-old I still think I can improve a lot, so it's up to me to try and do that and to become and try to be the best player that I can be," he said. "I don't think I'm satisfied with where I'm at. I think I can get a lot better and I think opportunity allows you to do that, so if you don't get opportunity, it's hard to get better. In some ways if you can embrace the opportunity and use the opportunity, do well with opportunity, then you're going to get better. But that's how you learn. You got to be able to do that stuff then learn through it. I'm excited to have a new chapter and I think change is growth, and if you're in the same comfort zone all the time, you're happy with that; if you get change, then it allows you to grow. So I think it's good for me to have another change and a chance to grow."

In part because of Hamilton's arrival and the presence of top rookies Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas, there is a surprising amount of buzz surrounding the team.

And if there was lots of backbiting and innuendo in places like Boston and Calgary – and there clearly was – maybe Carolina is exactly the kind of place Hamilton will thrive.

It is a given that "fit" is always easier to come by when your team is successful.

In Carolina there is a melting pot of personalities with strong voices. And it would seem Hamilton is going to be given every opportunity to fit in, especially given the enormous changes in the organization in the past year in the playoff-starved market.

Jacob Slavin, part of the young leadership group, grew up in a Christian home and said his religion defines him as a person and a player.

"For me, I'm out there not for myself, I'm out there to glorify God," the talented 24-year-old said. "So that's a huge part of my life and it is the biggest part of my life, and so it's easy for me to get over those little things and not dwell on them too much because I know that game doesn't define me, that mistake doesn't define me."

Those beliefs and how he chooses to live his life don't make him less of a teammate, though.

"For myself? I'm not out there to judge any guys for what they're doing and so, for myself, it's just trying to be an example of Christ to them and love them where they're at," he said. "If they're at the bars hanging out, I'll go to the bars and hang out with them. I don't think drinking's a sin or anything. I hate the taste of it to be honest. That's just not what I grew up with and anything like that so it just doesn't, it's not appetizing to me, I guess. But I don't think there's anything wrong with it necessarily."



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As for Hamilton, Slavin said he didn't know much about the off-ice stuff but figures it shouldn't be hard for Hamilton to fit right in.

"Obviously I know on-ice he's a great player," he said.

"Once he gets comfortable, once we build the relationships, our locker room's a great locker room, ... we didn't really have any tense moments last year as a team. We're a very young team so everyone's just excited to be there and everybody gets along really well, too. So I think for him it'll just be just joining in on stuff and getting to know the guys well and just building those relationships.

"You don't have too many guys that are all about themselves on our team, which is a good thing."

And if Hamilton wants to make his way to a museum, Slavin is up for that, too.

"Me and Josh Jooris, we were in Washington D.C., last year and we went to the Museum of the Bible and then we went to an escape room together," he said.

He shrugged as though to say, not a big deal.

"I'm up for doing those kind of things, too. So exactly, I can run with Dougie," Slavin said with a smile. "I'll go with him to the Smithsonian. Then you get guys going to museum instead of going to the bars as a team and who knows what could happen. Start a new trend."

The Hockey News

Make Hockey Fun Again: Finally, we're seeing some swagger in the NHL

Auston Matthews and Patrick Kane put on a show in the final minutes of Sunday's tilt, while Justin Williams and the Carolina Hurricanes put a unique celebration on display following a home-ice victory. Let's hope these acts of showmanship are here to stay.

By Ken Campbell

Six days and 35 games into the 2018-19 season, we've seen some pretty wild stuff, a lot of goals and, well, a good amount of American League goaltending. We've had three 13-goal games, two of them on the same night and one of them in which the Toronto Maple Leafs blew four separate leads to win the game in overtime. We saw the Washington Capitals score seven goals in one night, then give up seven the next. Of the nine games that have gone beyond 60 minutes, two-thirds of them have avoided the dreaded shootout. Jonathan Toews looks like he wants to re-establish himself as one of the NHL's truly elite players again. It's been fun.

And even though it's been a little like an '80s revival with 221 goals in 35 games for an average of 6.31 per game, history tells us we probably shouldn't get used to it. Coaches will adjust, goaltending will get better and the game will tighten up. Count on it. Two seasons ago, NHL teams scored 234 goals in the first 36 games for an average of 6.5 goals per game, but ended the season averaging just 5.54, which is pretty much par for the course these days.

So we know the NHL is going to somehow choke the life out of offense, as it always does. But what remains to be seen is whether it will successfully choke the life out of some of the personality we've seen from players this season. The early results are encouraging, but once again, it would be unwise to simply assume it's going to continue in the long-term.

The height of the great theatre came Sunday night in Chicago during Toronto's wild 7-6 overtime win over the Blackhawks. With the score tied 5-5, Auston Matthews got what he surely thought was the game-winning goal with 1:02 left in the game and celebrated by doing a bit of hot-dogging, putting his glove up to his ear.

But just 33 seconds later, with Blackhawks goalie Cam Ward on the bench (which was probably the best place for him given how both goalies played), Patrick Kane tied the score and did a bit of tit-for-tat hot-dogging of his own, raising his glove to his ear and chirping the Leafs bench on the way back to his own. It elicited a wry smile, and probably the realization that it was a lesson learned, from Matthews. Here's how it played out:

But here you had the pre-eminent American-born superstar in Kane and the upcoming American superstar in Matthews basically trading haymakers in front of more than 21,000 people in the United Center and millions more on television. It was absolutely wonderful. Matthews finished the night with a goal and two assists to take over the NHL's scoring lead and Kane scored twice. There they were, two ridiculously talented players, basically playing their own personal game of Horse and indulging in the kind of back-and-forth we see far too infrequently.

A few hours prior to that, the Carolina Hurricanes were involved in a 13-goal game of their own when they defeated the New York Rangers 8-5 on home ice. Led by new captain Justin Williams, the Hurricanes had one of the most unique post-win celebrations you'll ever see, applauding the crowd, then skating from their own blueline to the other end of the ice and jumping into the boards. Williams then tweeted: "Enjoy the good times and have fun with it...let's celebrate more this year."

All great stuff and all welcomed, but let's hope the hockey world doesn't beat this spontaneity and showmanship out of the likes of Matthews, Kane and Williams the way it always does. Hockey needs this kind of stuff. Fans have been begging for years for players to show their true personalities and having the players do so can be nothing but good for the sport. Imagine you had attended your first NHL game in Carolina on Sunday. You watched your team score a ton of goals, win the game and celebrate like that. Chances are you're going back.



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So Auston Matthews, Patrick Kane and Justin Williams, keep on keeping on. Dismiss the ramblings of the bully windbag on Saturday night who will undoubtedly take you to task for actually exhibiting some emotion. Tune out the old-time hockey folk who believe that being happy about scoring or winning is tantamount to showing up and disrespecting your opponent. And, by all means, please dismiss the knuckle draggers who believe Lars Eller had a beating coming to him from Brad Marchand because he celebrated a little too enthusiastically and chirped the Bruins bench after scoring the seventh goal in a 7-0 game. Perhaps what he did was not great form, but it did not deserve to be responded to as though he had just steamrolled the Bruins' goaltender.

There is, or at least there could be, something happening here. Players coming into the league are, without a doubt,

bringing more swagger into the NHL with them. A lot of them have no problem showing their emotions and drawing a little more attention to themselves. It does not make them bad teammates or bad people or arrogant showboats. The old guard will be dragging into this new world kicking and screaming, and will do everything in its power to prevent it from gaining traction. We know that will happen. Young players and those with personality should not prevent that from peeling back the curtain a little bit and showing us what they're really feeling.

Ken Campbell, The Hockey News' senior writer, is in his second tour with the brand after an eight-year stint as a beat reporter for the Maple Leafs for the Toronto Star. The Sudbury native once tried out for the Ontario League's Wolves as a 30-year-old. Needless to say, it didn't work out.

Prospect Need to Know: Knight is the best goalie in the draft

The NTDP netminder just took down the Fighting Irish and hasn't been beaten yet this year. Learn about him and other top prospects in our weekly wrap

Spencer Knight

With college teams taking to the ice for a combination of real and exhibition games this past weekend, we've pretty much got everyone in the mix now. I'll wait until next week to bring NCAA kids into the fold, but there are still a lot of prospects making noise around the world right now. As expected, the U.S. National Team Development Program's under-18 squad has been deadly and you'll probably see even more NTDP kids than usual on the list this year. But they're not the only USHL-affiliated prospects with high ceilings. Let's get to the round-up.

Spencer Knight, G, U.S. NTDP (USHL): The top netminding prospect in the 2019 draft, Knight has lived up to reputation by going 4-0 with a .955 save percentage for the NTDP so far. The big Boston College commit's latest gem was a 36-save win over Notre Dame, the third-ranked NCAA team in the nation. NHL arrival: 2022-23

Nicolas Roy, C, Charlotte Checkers (AHL): The AHL is in full swing and Roy is making a serious dent right off the hop with four goals and six points in two games, tying him atop the league leaderboard and earning player of the week honors. The Carolina Hurricanes prospect has great size and plays a solid all-around game, so this uptick in offense is very positive news. NHL arrival: 2019-20

Shane Pinto, C, Lincoln Stars (USHL): One of the top scorers in the league with seven points in four games, Pinto is a North Dakota commit who keeps plays alive and does a lot of good work around the net. The 2019 draft prospect has a great work ethic and a nice frame at 6-foot-2, 185 pounds. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Ethan Haider, G, Minnesota Magicians (NAHL): Haider first came on the radar two years ago when he helped Maple Grove win sectionals to make the Minnesota State High School tournament and the kid has grown a few inches to 6-foot-2 now. The Clarkson commit and 2019 draft prospect is tearing up the NAHL so far, posting a .949 save percentage with two shutouts in six appearances. NHL arrival: 2023-24

Nicholas Porco, LW, Saginaw Spirit (OHL): When Porco gets a step on you, it's over. The 2019 draft prospect has breakaway speed and great hands to finish off plays. Porco has seven goals through his first eight games, tying him for second in the league. He's a 2019 draft prospect getting good reps on a solid Spirit team. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Jordan Spence, D, Moncton Wildcats (QMJHL): Spence's potential has soared in the past few years, breaking out last season in Jr. A. Now a rookie in the 'Q,' the offensive defenseman and 2019 draft prospect has six points in his first seven games for Moncton, using his skating, puck skills and a hard shot to produce from the blueline. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Joachim Blichfeld, RW, Portland Winterhawks (WHL): Blichfeld wasn't necessarily expected to return to Portland for an overage season, but the Danish import was assigned there by the San Jose Sharks and I'm sure the Winterhawks don't mind. The talented left winger is tied for the WHL scoring lead with 17 points in seven games, contributing in all situations. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Mikko Kokkonen, D, Jukurit (Fin.): He was the youngest player ever to make his Liiga debut a couple years ago, but that was admittedly a stunt by Jukurit. Now, the 2019 draft prospect is contributing for real with five points in 10 games, making him the team's top-scoring D-man. He's also getting decent minutes at 15:26 per game. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Alex Newhook, C, Victoria Grizzlies (BCHL): A shock snub for Canada's Hlinka-Gretzky team, Newhook has channelled his energies the right way by lighting up the BCHL again. The 2019 draft prospect and Boston College commit has 16 points in 12 games for the Grizzlies, putting him second in league scoring. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Trey Fix-Wolansky, RW, Edmonton Oil Kings (WHL): Short on stature but long on skills, Fix-Wolansky has been dynamite for the Oil Kings with 15 points through eight games. The Columbus Blue Jackets pick is a volume shooter and good playmaker who just needs to get stronger if he wants to produce at the next level. NHL arrival: 2022-23



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Aho's 2-point night leads Hurricanes past Canucks 5-3

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Sebastian Aho has earned a point in every game this season. So have the Carolina Hurricanes.

It adds up to the best start since the team left Hartford.

Aho had a goal and an assist, and the Hurricanes beat the Vancouver Canucks 5-3 on Tuesday night for their third straight win.

Warren Foegele scored an important insurance goal in the third period, Andrei Svechnikov, Jordan Staal and Brett Pesce also scored and Teuvo Teravainen had two assists.

"I think we've had a good start as a line," Aho said.

And as a team, too. They helped the Eastern Conference-leading Hurricanes improve to 3-0-1 — their most productive start since the move from Hartford in 1997 — under new coach and former team captain Rod Brind'Amour. They earned points in their first four games for the first time since 1994-95, when they were still the Whalers and opened 4-0-1.

"It's fun, right?" Foegele said. "High-scoring games, a bunch of young guys in here keeping it young, too. The group's been good, and that's what you want to see."

Sven Baertschi had two goals and an assist, and Bo Horvat scored on the power play for rebuilding Vancouver, which has lost the first two games of its six-game trip.

Curtis McElhinney made 22 saves for the Hurricanes while Jacob Markstrom stopped 28 shots for the Canucks in a game in which the first seven goals were scored in the opening 23 minutes, 24 seconds and the defenses tightened up before Foegele scored with 6:12 left to restore Carolina's two-goal advantage.

"It's always good to see when you have a lead and you continue to bring it to them," Staal said. "That's kind of been the way we wanted to play."

Vancouver has been outscored 12-7 during its two-game losing streak.

"If you score seven in two games, if you score seven in three games, I would like to get three wins," Markstrom said. "We've got to be better goalies, better (defensemen), better everything, better defense, and we get our goals but right now, today, I was not good. It's frustrating."

Aho, who has points in all four games, put Carolina up 3-1 after taking a slick touch pass from Ferland and beating Markstrom from close range with 2:09 left in the first.

"The usual — he creates some space and makes a play, and makes a really nice pass to me," Aho said of Ferland. "I think I had a pretty easy shot to put the puck in."

After Horvat pulled the Canucks within a goal in the opening minute of the second period, Svechnikov restored the two-goal lead when he crashed the net and stuffed in a rebound — giving the rookie points in three of his four career games.

Baertschi's first goal tied it at 1 at 6:12 after a long pass from Alexander Edler set up a partial breakaway chance. His second came on the power play at 3:24 of the second and pulled the Canucks to 4-3, capping a furious stretch in which the teams combined for three goals in a span of 2:38.

NOTES: Vancouver rookie C Elias Pettersson, who assisted on Baertschi's second goal, has six points in his first three games. ... D Haydn Fleury was in the Carolina lineup for the first time after he was a healthy scratch in each of first three games. Trevor van Riemsdyk was scratched instead. ... LW Tim Schaller and D Ben Hutton made their season debuts for Vancouver.

UP NEXT

Canucks: Continue their six-game road swing Thursday night at Tampa Bay.

Hurricanes: Begin a three-game road trip Saturday night at Minnesota.



Svechnikov, Foegele stay hot, Canes win third straight

Andrew Schnittker, Sports Editor

Continuing to ride the hot hands of their young guns, the Carolina Hurricanes topped the Vancouver Canucks 5-3 at PNC Arena Tuesday night.

Rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov scored the game winner for the Canes (3-0-1), and Warren Foegele scored for the third time in two games. Forward Sebastian Aho, who has recorded at least a point in all four games, had a goal and an



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assist, as did forward Jordan Staal. Defenseman Brett Pesce also scored against the Canucks (1-2-0).

It was a tale of two types of games for the Canes, as the team continued to play run-and-gun hockey through the first two periods before locking it down in the third.

"We just got to our game finally," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "... Defensively, we weren't great; special teams we weren't great. But I like the way in the third, when we had to buckle down, it felt like we were finally playing our game."

Goaltender Curtis McElhinney improved to 2-0 on the season after being claimed on waivers last week to replace the injured Scott Darling. He was solid in the win, stopping blank of blank Vancouver shots.

"I felt good," McElhinney said. "Obviously when the game's kind of back and forth a little bit and pucks are bouncing all over the place like they were, I think you're just trying to take opportunities to control it as much as you can. For me, that's just slowing the game down and freezing pucks when I do get an opportunity to do that."

Staal put the Canes up 1-0 less than a minute in, powering his way open at the point and firing one through a screen for his third goal of the season.

"I just like the aggressiveness of our team," Staal said. "I think we're utilizing our speed; I think we're a fast team. We're actually playing that way too. We're being aggressive and going after teams, creating turnovers. ... It's been fun to play that way as a player. A lot of the guys in the room are enjoying [playing] that way."

Canucks forward Sven Baertschi tied the game just over six minutes in; he got behind Canes defenseman Dougie Hamilton, took a stretch pass for a breakaway and faked out McElhinney for a slick finish.

"It's a fine line," Brind'Amour said. "You don't want to give up the chances, but we're also creating a lot of offense because you're giving up chances, if that makes sense. So we've just got to shore up the things that are costing that we're not

getting any offense out of anyway. Giving up stretch passes and things like that."

Point shots through traffic continued to be the Canes' friend in the opening frame, as Pesce slapped one home from the point through multiple bodies in front of Canucks goalie Jacob Markstrom to make it 2-1 with just under nine minutes left in the period.

Aho made it 3-1 with just over two minutes left in the period, as forward Micheal Ferland battled for position in front of Markstrom and set up Aho, who snapped a shot under the Swedish netminder's glove.

"I think [Ferland] tried to shoot at the net," Aho said. "The usual, he creates some space, makes a really nice pass to me and I had a pretty easy shot there."

The game continued to be defense optional early in the second; Canucks forward Bo Horvat sandwiched two power-play goals around Svechnikov's second of the season in the first 3:24 of the middle frame to make it a 4-3 game.

Svechnikov was in perfect position for his goal, potting the rebound of a clapper from defenseman Jaccob Slavin.

"[Svechnikov]'s getting better and better," Brind'Amour said. "There's still lots of little mistakes. More than anything I think he just takes a little breath here and there and you just can't in this league when you're out there. But he's finding his way, and I just always have to keep remembering he's new to this. And it shows at time, but for the most part it doesn't. He's been great for us."

Foegele gave Carolina some insurance with about six minutes left in the game, slamming home a pretty feed from Williams for his third goal of the season.

"We're all having fun and we all believe in each other," Foegele said. "I think those are two key things, so we've just got to keep working hard, believe in each other and no quit."

The Canes will now get three days off before opening a three-game road trip against the Minnesota Wild Saturday.



Shaya's 10 Thoughts: Oct. 9, 2018

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

1) The weekend for Charlotte couldn't have gone any better. There were contributions from almost everyone up and down the lineup. It's only two games but for the immediate future, the worry about goal scoring has subsided. Nic Roy stole the show, putting up four goals and two assists. His work in front

of the net on the power-play turned heads and his short-handed breakaway goal was of the epic variety. Also, Roland McKeown and Alex Nedeljkovic were both excellent. McKeown played with incredible confidence both nights. More on Alex later.



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2) The kids of hockey coaches are aware that they have to spend time away from their dads during the season. In the case of Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci, he does all he can to see his son Ryan play as much as possible, even though it's quite difficult because Ryan is playing in Michigan. After Charlotte's win on Saturday, Vellucci drove five and a half hours to Detroit to wake up and see his son play in a tournament at 8 a.m. that very morning. There's no doubt that being a good dad is more important than being a good coach, but Mike manages to do both at the same time.

3) Some, but not all, rookies coming into this league have less respect for the AHL than they should. Many of them left junior hockey as the best player on their team and think that playing in the minors is going to be easy or even beneath them. Judging by what I saw this weekend, winning both games aside, some of these young players have plenty to learn and should get used to the idea of playing in Charlotte.

4) A scout told me before Saturday's game that last year he felt Janne Kuokkanen was the best prospect on a team filled with incredible talent. After watching game one of the season, he might be right. However, consistency is what gets you to the next level, and we will find out if Kuokkanen can do it each and every night. If he can, he'll be in the NHL soon enough.

5) Last Sunday's contest between the Hurricanes and Rangers was a game that no one is soon to forget. This Hurricanes team genuinely looks like they are having fun and it was on full display postgame as led by their captain Justin Williams. Aside from the hockey, listening to John Forslund in mid-season form is amazing. He displays the absolute best delivery of big moments of any broadcaster in our sport. Period.

6) Checkers PR Director Nick Niedzielski tweeted that he thinks Alex Nedeljkovic will score at least three goals this season. After seeing Alex's near goals on Saturday, that prediction is actually reasonable. The attempts at the empty net shouldn't overshadow how well he played in game two. His lateral movement, position and rebound control were stellar. He was unphased by the late surge of Rochester in the third period Saturday when they were in full desperation mode for a goal.

7) The NHL "streamlined" goalie gear again. The fear of NHL goalies getting hurt on shots is becoming a reality. Flyers goalie Brian Elliott said "I've already sent a couple emails to Kay Whitmore (the NHL's vice president of hockey operations who literally signs off on every piece of goalie equipment). I'm getting bruised like crazy on my arms." The only thing stopping a goalie from being sent to the emergency room is his goalie equipment. I have seen the new chest protectors, someone is going to get hurt really bad in one of those.

8) Tomorrow marks the 25th anniversary of the death of the greatest economists and philosopher of history who ever lived: Ludwig Von Mises. Perhaps no one but a few will care about this but I can't let it go without mention. His writings changed nearly everything about the way I understand the world. He never received a Nobel Prize in economics, even posthumously, which says plenty enough for me. "Peace and not war is the father of all things" – LVM.

9) Heard this week that former Checkers defenseman Brendan Kichton has found a team to play for in Europe. Kichton battled one injury after another last season. He never complained or got down on himself. He simply worked as hard as possible to come back and play great hockey. He's an excellent defenseman and a gentleman as well. We wish him nothing but the best of luck this season. Also, congrats to another former Charlotte D-man, Phillip Samuelsson, for signing in Lehigh Valley. He had an excellent season for Charlotte last year and we'll see plenty more of him as a divisional opponent.

10) Finally... one of the following things will come true this season: either Andrew Poturalski will have the best statistical season of his career or the Buffalo Bills will win the Super Bowl. Both can't happen.

AHLTV was a huge success this past weekend. The reviews were exclusively positive. Tune in this Friday and Saturday as the Checkers visit Utica and Syracuse. Pre-game show starts at 6:45pm for both games. Download the Checkers app for iPhone or Android to listen on the ESPN stream as well.



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Aho, Svechnikov spark Hurricanes in win against Canucks

Carolina has points in four straight games to open season for first time since relocation in 1997

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Sebastian Aho had a goal and an assist, and Andrei Svechnikov scored in the Carolina Hurricanes' 5-3 win against the Vancouver Canucks at PNC Arena on Tuesday.

Jordan Staal also had a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes, who have earned points in four straight games to start a season for the first time since they relocated to North Carolina from Hartford in 1997. The Hartford Whalers opened the 1995-96 season with a point in five straight (4-0-1).

"It's fun, right? High scoring games, a bunch of young guys in here keeping it young too," said rookie forward Warren Foegele, who scored his third goal of the season. "The group's really good and that's what you want to see."

Sven Baertschi had two goals and an assist for the Canucks.

"I like how we played, got some pucks behind their defense," Canucks coach Travis Green said. "I think it was unfortunate that we came out of the [first] period with the score the way it was."

Staal gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead 43 seconds into the first period when he flipped a wrist shot from inside the blue line and over Jacob Markstrom's glove.

Baertschi scored his first of the season at 6:12 to make it 1-1. He took a stretch pass from Alex Edler and faked to the backhand before wrapping the puck around Curtis McElhinney.

"It wasn't what we wanted at the start and there's still a lot of room for improvement, but we're finding ways to win," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

The Hurricanes took a 2-1 lead at 11:17 when Brett Pesce scored on a long wrist shot. Aho had an assist to extend his point streak to four games.

Aho's second goal of the season put Carolina ahead 3-1 at 17:51. Micheal Ferland followed his own shot and fed Aho in the slot for a shot inside the post. Teuvo Teravainen got his second assist of the game.

"[Ferland] is a big body out there," Aho said. "He creates so much space on the ice. He can make some plays. He's way more skilled than people think he is."

The Canucks scored on the power play at 46 seconds of the second period to make it 3-2. Baertschi fed Bo Horvat in the slot for his second of the season.

Svechnikov, the No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, drove the slot to convert the rebound of Jaccob Slavin's shot to give the Hurricanes a 4-2 lead at 1:54.

Baertschi made it 4-3 at 3:24 when his redirect attempt at the top of the crease deflected into the net off Justin Faulk.

"It was a little loose at times, but as a goalie you're just trying to make that big save when the team needs it," said McElhinney, who made 22 saves and has won each of his starts since being claimed on waivers from the Toronto Maple Leafs on Oct. 1. "But the run support has definitely been there so far for me."

Foegele scored on one-timer from Justin Williams at 13:48 of the third to make it 5-3.

"He has done a great job," Brind'Amour said of Foegele. "He's kind of what we want in a Hurricane, a young kid that does it right every shift. He's getting rewarded for it right now."

Markstrom made 28 saves for the Canucks.

They said it

"I like that [Baertschi] scored a couple goals. I like that he played with a little more compete in his game. We talked to our team about that. We wanted to see a more competitive group come out tonight for 60 minutes, and I thought we took a step in the right direction." -- Canucks coach Travis Green

"[Foegele] is really a fun guy to play with; you know what you're going to get every night. He's just a moose out there. He hounds the puck better than I've seen in a long time." -- Hurricanes center Jordan Staal

Need to know

Horvat scored his sixth goal in eight games against the Hurricanes. ... Carolina has seven players with at least four points through four games.

What's next



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Canucks: At the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; SN360, SUN, NHL.TV)

Hurricanes: At the Minnesota Wild on Saturday (6 p.m. ET; FS-N, FS-CR, NHL.TV)

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1109086 Carolina Hurricanes

Jazzed up Carolina Hurricanes jumping at the chance to celebrate

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH-Justin Williams still likes to have fun.

He's 37 now, in his 14th NHL season and has played more than 1,200 games, whether regular-season or playoff. That's a lot of miles.

But if you can't have fun playing the sport you love, what's the use? That's the way the Carolina Hurricanes captain feels, and Williams said he senses the same from the other players.

When the Canes raced past the New York Rangers 8-5 on Sunday, it was Williams who led the unexpected celebration that followed at PNC Arena -- the players holding their sticks high while clapping, then suddenly dashing down the ice to hop into the glass. That's still the talk of the all-too-staid NHL, which oft times seems stuck in a time warp.

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After the Canes' morning skate Tuesday at PNC Arena, with a game to play against Vancouver at night, Williams, who again will be at right wing

on Jordan Staal's line with Warren Foegele, didn't quickly dress and disappear. He soon was battling it out with defenseman Brett Pesce at the bubble hockey game in the players' lounge -- one custom-made by owner Tom Dundon.

Williams said management had mentioned doing something a little different after wins at PNC Arena.

"Maybe the stick wave got a little stagnant, a little stale," he said. "We're trying to make things exciting here and fun. That's the main goal, so that's what it was."

ESPN noticed. So did TSN and NHL.com. Score eight goals and take a mass leap into the glass and people notice.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour certainly didn't mind. It came after a victory and was something extra for the 13,526 fans who came out on an NFL Sunday to see the game.

Williams said it wasn't completely impromptu, noting it was "planned a little bit" in advance and adding. "We're going to fine-tune things a little bit and make it a little more organized." But Williams promised the Canes would continue it. And have fun with it.

"Clean it up a little bit and add some wrinkles to it, but at the end of the day it's not hot-dogging or anything," he said. "It's just having fun with the people who came to the game."

This team knows how to have fun pic.twitter.com/xKF4mwwqNJ



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— Carolina Hurricanes (@NHLCanes) October 8, 2018

Marketing folks call it connecting with the fans. Williams used that term, too.

"It's fun, doesn't take too long and people seem to enjoy it," he said.

"We're hoping people stick around at the end of some Canes wins and we can have some fun together."

Defenseman Calvin de Haan was a slow starter at the post-game skate and said Tuesday he wasn't sure at first what was happening.

"No idea," he said. "It was cool. It was something different. It kind of seems like teams are starting to be a little more creative with that kind of stuff."

De Haan promised not to be a trailer on the next one, saying, "Hopefully next time around I can be one of the first into the glass."

Williams said he couldn't remember the last time he jumped into the glass. He's more of a stay-grounded, fist pumper.

"It's not really my thing," he said.

But he did show off a little vertical leap this time.

"Yeah, right," he said, laughing.

News Observer LOADED: 10.10.2018



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1109087 Carolina Hurricanes

Free-wheeling Hurricanes scoring lots of goals, having even more fun

BY LUKE DECOCK

RALEIGH—So many nights, Jordan Staal was left nearly speechless, alone in the Carolina Hurricanes' dressing room trying to explain away a baffling loss. And there he was again Tuesday night, after yet another helter-skelter win, asking the questions himself.

"When's the last time you've seen that?" Staal asked, rhetorically. Pedantically, the answer is Sunday afternoon, when the Hurricanes scored eight goals in four separate comebacks against the New York Rangers. Philosophically, the answer is never, at least in his seven-season tenure.

Dig a little deeper, and the history starts to echo a little bit, but as for living in the present, this is a Hurricanes team unlike any other in recent memory. Rod Brind'Amour has, quite deliberately, replaced the tight, organized — and, yes, passive — game of the Bill Peters era with a free-for-all style that doesn't mind giving up a scoring chance for two as long as a few more chances are created going the other way.

Tuesday's 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks was all of that, with a few of the Canucks' goals scored out of unforgivable errors that had nothing to do with the Hurricanes' aggression with the puck, but the math tends to work in your favor when you're scoring four or five times a game.

"It is definitely more fun, a style that every player likes to play," Staal said. "Everyone wants to step on the ice and feel like they can be the guy to help the team win. That's a good feeling. I feel like everyone's got that feeling throughout the lineup which has been great and everyone's contributing. Obviously, there's always breakdowns and ways to tighten up defensively, but I feel like even in our previous style there were always times of defensive lapses."

Through four games, the Hurricanes are 3-0-1 and have scored 17 goals despite a power play that has been anemic at best. It's less about changing the structure and more about tweaking the mindset, tipping the little decisions that make up the soft middle of any game toward offense and aggression instead of defense and caution, giving the proverbial green light to just about anything.

"There's going to be chances for the other team, but as long as we play our way, we get enough scoring chances to score goals and win games," said Sebastian Aho, with a point in every game so far.

On a team full of kids, from Warren Foegoal — er, Foegele — to Aho to Andrei Svechnikov, all of whom are thriving in the early going, why not let them run wild, with old warhorses Staal and Justin Williams setting the tone and playing with energy that belies their age?

"It's exciting," Foegele said. "I don't know if the coaching staff likes it that much, but we're playing hard and we're playing fast and it's a lot of fun."

On the contrary, the coaching staff likes it very much. This is all very much by design, for several reasons. It's fun, for the players and the potential ticket-buying public. And, even if no one wants to talk about it, it's a pretty good way to minimize the impact of the Hurricanes' biggest unknown.

If you're concerned about your goaltending, as the Hurricanes should be, why try to play for a 2-1 game that leaves no margin for error? When you score six or eight, the impact of a bad goal, any bad goal, is inherently minimized.

That wasn't as much an issue Tuesday as it was Sunday, but the same is true of defensive breakdowns, which should be less of a concern even if there were plenty of those Tuesday.

"It's a fine line, right?" Brind'Amour said. "We don't want to give up chances but you're also creating offense because you're giving up chances, if that makes any sense. We've just got to shore up the things that are costing us that we're not getting any offense out of anyway. Like giving up stretch passes. Or special teams."

Those last eight words covered it all Tuesday: A stretch pass that got past Dougie Hamilton led to Vancouver's first goal and the other two both came on the power play.

The Hurricanes have taken care of business so far, taking seven points from four games against one contender and three teams not likely to make the playoffs, the latter so crucial for a team without a history of banking points early in the season (or anytime). Winning the winnable ones, not letting a point leak through here and slip by there, is the first step toward making the playoffs. It's progress, for certain.

Now, the real test, three games on the road against elite teams. For now, to the extent they can in six days, they have a sense of who they are and what they want to be. By this time next week, after going to Minnesota and Winnipeg and Tampa Bay, the Hurricanes will have a better sense of just how good they are.

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1109088 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes win again, stopping Canucks for 3-0-1 start

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH-It's hard to say what excited Carolina Hurricanes fans most before Tuesday's game against the Vancouver Canucks, the thought of another Canes win or what might happen after it.

The Canes did a mad dash for a team leap into the glass at PNC Arena after beating the New York Rangers on Sunday, and said some other things were planned for wins on home ice. Many around the NHL noticed. Canes fans loved it and wanted more.

First things first: the Hurricanes did win the game, beating the Canucks 5-3. That had the crowd roaring. That's a 3-0-1 start for the season.

The aftermath: Micheal Ferland leading the players in some slow claps at center ice, then another dash down the ice and more glass-jumping.

Canes fans had a lot to like much of the game. Jordan Staal scored in the first minute, Sebastian Aho was throwing a fist-pump after scoring his second of the season and Andrei Svechnikov picked up his second NHL goal.

Warren Foegele, the rookie forward in constant motion, scored his third of the season and defenseman Brett Pesce scored his first.

"The entire team is working hard right now and we're seeing the results," Foegele said. "We're playing fast, we're playing hard and creating havoc for their defensemen."

Goalie Curtis McElhinney, in his second start since being claimed off waivers, earned his second victory, finishing with 22 saves.

"There's still a lot of room for improvement, which is good, but we're finding ways to win, which is even better," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said

In an interesting sequence in the second period, Svechnikov found himself battling Canucks rookie forward Elias Pettersson for the puck after a shot by Canes defenseman Jaccob Slavin.

Pettersson, the fifth overall pick of the 2017 NHL Draft, came into the game with five points in his first two games, but Svechnikov simply overpowered him. Svechnikov got the goal, his second in as many games. Pettersson was sent sprawling. The Canes led 4-2.

After the game, Canes owner Tom Dundon presented Svechnikov with a framed photo and the puck to commemorate his first NHL goal -- the game-winner Sunday in the 8-5 win over Rangers. With teammates in the locker room demanding a speech, Svechnikov could only manage a few words.

"He'll have a bunch of more memorable moments, I guarantee it," Brind'Amour said.

Not a big part of the scoring Tuesday, Slavin had his best game of the season. His stick was active and his instincts good, making plays large and small.

"He's such a good player and he's way underrated," Brind'Amour said. "His time will come. He's an elite player. He took over the game, for me, on the back end."

Sven Baertschi had two goals and assist for the Canucks (1-2-0), who scored twice on the power play.

The Canes' Jordan Martinook called Sunday's game a "track meet" and Canes goalie Petr Mrazek often was left in tough positions in allowing the

five goals. The game Tuesday seemed headed in the same direction until the Canes tightened up in the third.

Staal used his long reach to control the puck in the offensive zone, turning near the blue line and winging a shot toward the net. With Martinook in front of goalie Jacob Markstrom, Staal picked up his third goal of the season just 43 seconds into the game.

The Canucks were the more aggressive team after the Canes' quick strike, tying the score on Baertschi's first goal. But Pesce recreated the Staal goal -- a long shot with Markstrom again screened -- and Aho scored off a Ferland pass for a 3-1 lead.

The Canucks, on a 14-day road trip, used power-play goals from Bo Horvat and Baertschi -- Pettersson with an assist -- in the second to stay in the game. Those goals were sandwiched around Svechnikov's even-strength score.

Brind'Amour made one lineup change among the skaters, inserting defenseman Haydn Fleury for Trevor van Rimesdyk -- Fleury's first game of the season.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1109089 Carolina Hurricanes

'My dream come true': Why Andrei Svechnikov's first NHL goal always was going to be a family affair

By Sara Civian Oct 9, 2018

Evgeny Svechnikov had been biting his tongue for the better half of 60 minutes.

He watched and he bit, and he watched and he bit, right up until the final horn of the USHL's Muskegon Lumberjacks game sounded. His brother would rack up 58 points in 48 games that season, but this particular night would not make it anywhere near a highlight reel.

So he sheepishly walked up to the team's then-general manager, John Vanbiesbrouck.

"You know, Andrei can't play center."

They both laughed. That was obvious, after Andrei Svechnikov's game playing a position as foreign to him as the English language.

Still, Evgeny just had to make sure the right people knew what was up. His power forward of a brother isn't a center.

The two had been through too much — and by then, both NHL prospects had come too far — to let a bad lineup decision get in the way of their dream.

"We didn't have much money," Evgeny said of their childhood in Siberian Russia. "We ate from the same plate. We did everything together."

Since Evgeny was 3 and a half years old and his little brother was born, they'd always had each other. And since as long as they can remember, they've held onto the idea of someday playing together in the National Hockey League.

No one in Andrei Svechnikov's camp is surprised that the versatile No. 2 overall pick scored his first goal in his third NHL game. No one's even surprised that it was the first stolen lead in an 8-5 thriller, or that Andrei had logged a handful of assists before he did the damn thing.

"I had no doubt," Evgeny said. "I had no doubt he was gonna do it."

As fast as this league moves, as bonkers as the rest of the Hurricanes' Sunday win was, the Svechnikovs aren't letting this particular goal go uncanceled.

"I've waited for this my whole life," Andrei said, sweat still dripping. "It's my dream. My dream came true."

"It's huge," Evgeny said of both the goal and their relationship. "It's everything."

The lack of shock value in Andrei's immediate success doesn't make it any less sweet. The first goal scored by a 2000s-born skater is "huge," it's "everything."

Especially to the big boys who spent too many childhood nights going halves on a single plate of food.

Igor and Elena Svechnikov weren't perfect, but what parents are? They always tried their best to provide for their family.

As a pediatrician stationed in the Russian Far East, Igor knew his career path would come with inevitable highs and lows. But nothing could've prepared him for the 1995 Neftegorsk earthquake. As catastrophic as it was unexpected, the earthquake killed 2,040 of the oil town's 3,977 citizens.

What was he supposed to do, as one of only two doctors in the region? Half the population was killed. Hundreds of others were critically injured. Devastated by what he had seen, drained by trying to fix the unfixable, he eventually left the medical field for good.

He, Elena and their firstborn, Evgeny, moved to the Altai Krai region of Siberia. Igor made an honest living selling cakes, Elena took on two jobs — receptionist at a hockey rink by day, custodial duties by night.

Then came their second boy, Andrei.

If you ask Evgeny, there was "no doubt" Andrei would make it from the time he started dominating older competition at 5 years old. Evgeny was 8 when he fostered that opinion. Clearly he was on to something.

Igor and Elena trusted their sons' talent enough to move to Moscow when Andrei was 9 and Evgeny was 13, so they both could get a shot at their dream.

"They moved from job to job every city," Evgeny said. "They sacrificed so much for us."

The scouts noticed, first drafting Evgeny in the QMJHL. The Red Wings took him 16th overall after one season, a 78-point 2014-15 season at that, with the Screaming Eagles. He returned to the Q the next season, adding exactly one point to his PPG average. Then he was off to the Red Wings' AHL affiliate Grand Rapids Griffins.

As GMs do, Vanbiesbrouck had been keeping tabs on the Svechnikov brothers. He knew enough to know they'd both thrive playing close to each other — Muskegon is just more than 40 miles from Grand Rapids.

"With all that's going on in the world, it was just nice to see them be a family," Vanbiesbrouck said. "They really are a family. It's hard to be a family away from home."

And though Andrei barely spoke "a lick" of English, Vanbiesbrouck loved watching him thrive in that challenge.

"There's a lot of non-verbal communication that happens in the game, just genuine hockey talk that isn't words, just sense," he said. "Without words is a great kind of thing sometimes."

Without words, Andrei got his 58 in 48. Again, he was too much for even older competition. So he and Elena decided he'd try his hand at elevated competition in the OHL.

Without words, he got his 72 (40 goals, 32 assists) in 44 with the Barrie Colts.

So yeah, you'll forgive the lack of utter shock when he got his one in three with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Still, Elena was there for it.

Come on.

She sat at a receptionist's desk for hours each day for this. She swept the floors for this.

She wouldn't miss it.

Though Evgeny insists he hasn't quite "made" it in the NHL yet, he has 16 games with the Red Wings under his belt. He was on the road with the club in Anaheim, Calif., when Elena called him late Sunday night, and the visual counts for something.

"My mom was at the game, she called me right after he scored," Evgeny said. "She said he did it. I don't even know how to. ... I can't even explain. It was like scoring my first goal. It felt the same. Since I was a kid, since he was a kid, we did everything together. Growing up, living together. We talk every day."

Plenty have laughed at the notion that Andrei has waited a whopping 18 years on this planet for this moment, and that's fine. Those who matter



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know how long and tough the ride from the Russian Far East, to Siberia, to Moscow, to Michigan, to Barrie, to Raleigh has been.

Evgeny knows — when he first signed with the Red Wings back in 2015, he sent his entire signing bonus to his parents who live in Kazan, Russia.

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour isn't one for the mushy-gushy, but he was proud Andrei's first NHL point came quieter in the previous game — an assist on the fourth line, a hard-work play.

"I'm just proud of the kid in general," Brind'Amour said after his first win as coach and Svechnikov's first point. "He's a great kid. He wants to learn and he's got a lot to learn, but he's going to be a great player in this league. You gotta remember how young he is, and that's something I have to keep reminding myself. He's just a kid, and he's out there in the NHL and he doesn't look out of place. We're very fortunate to have him."

And perhaps he's very fortunate to have them. Brind'Amour is a coach who's hesitant to weigh down Svechnikov with expectations, he knows what it takes to win a Cup, and the team has the talent to maybe — just maybe — end its playoff drought.

Regardless, the Hurricanes are having more fun than they have in nine years, and it's a great environment to flourish as a rookie.

"The guys believe in each other. You can feel it," Brind'Amour said. "There's a ton of work to do. We're making mistakes that we shouldn't be making. There's a quiet confidence going on that, no matter what happens, we can come back. That's a good feeling. We have a lot of good players, and that's what makes you feel that way."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.10.2018

1109136 Minnesota Wild

Zach Parise, coach Bruce Boudreau press for solutions to sluggish start

By Rachel Blount Star Tribune OCTOBER 9, 2018 — 9:50PM

As the Wild worked Tuesday to solve its offensive woes, Zach Parise approached the problem with a wide lens. In order to score more, the winger said, players must lay the groundwork throughout the entire offensive sequence, rather than thinking only about the end result.

That was the theme of Tuesday's practice at TRIA Rink, on the third day of a four-day lull in the schedule. While the Wild's sluggishness has been blamed for an 0-1-1 start to the season, Parise pointed out some more specific flaws that have limited the Wild to two goals in two games. He said the forecheck is spread too widely; players have not been in sync when coming up the ice; and the team has lacked creativity with the puck during too little time in the offensive zone.

The Wild was outshot 82-51 in a loss at Colorado and shootout loss to Las Vegas. Beginning with Thursday's game against Chicago at Xcel Energy Center, Parise said the team must generate "way more" chances if it hopes to score more goals, and tending to those start-to-finish details should help.

"There are a lot of things that have to happen before a goal that we're clearly not doing well enough," said Parise, who scored the Wild's first goal of the season in a 4-1 defeat at Colorado. "These things are very fixable, but we have to pay a little more attention to them."

"We've got to be smarter out there. It's not as if guys are dogging it. Guys are working hard. But sometimes, we're not working together. Once we do that a little better, we'll be able to get up the ice cleaner and smoother, and move the puck better."

Improved communication and puck support also will help the Wild crank up their speed, Parise said.

Moving parts

Wild coach Bruce Boudreau kept together the new lines he unveiled at Monday's practice, and they will stay intact for at least the first part of Thursday's game.

Nino Niederreiter has been moved to left wing on the third line with Jordan Greenway and Charlie Coyle. Joel Eriksson Ek, who had held that spot, is now on the first line with Eric Staal and Jason Zucker, and Mikael Granlund has moved to right wing with Mikko Koivu and Parise.

The coach, a renowned line shuffler, left open the possibility of further experimentation — and hinted his patience might not last longer than 20 minutes.

"We'll see how they go in the first period," Boudreau said. "Then, who knows? I've been known to change."

Etc.

• Zucker said he is looking forward to having Eriksson Ek on the top line. "He's a big guy, and he can skate," Zucker said. "We're hoping to unlock some of the offensive talent that he has. We're excited to play with him."

• After devoting Monday's practice to defense and Tuesday's to offense, the Wild plans to work on special teams Wednesday. The team has yet to score with the man advantage on five chances.

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Flyers: Head to Ottawa on Wednesday.

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Shark Bait: San Jose spoils Flyers' home opener in 8-2 romp

By DAN GELSTON Associated Press OCTOBER 9, 2018 — 9:50PM

PHILADELPHIA — Joe Pavelski scored two of San Jose's four first-period goals, and Evander Kane also scored twice to spark the Sharks to an 8-2 win over the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday night.

Flyers fans were still buzzing from the pregame festivities for the home opener, which included rookie mascot Gritty rappelling from the rafters to the ice, when the Sharks pounced.

The Flyers turned over the puck at the point, Couture beat the odd-man rush and fired his first goal of the season past Brian Elliott. Pavelski made it 2-0 just 11 seconds later when he knocked in a rebound for his first goal of the season.

The Sharks, a Stanley Cup favorite, were just warming up. They had five goals in their first three games — including a 4-0 loss a night earlier to the New York Islanders — and then scored five goals through two periods.

With the Flyers set to play Wednesday at Ottawa, coach Dave Hakstol refused to pull Elliott despite the miserable performance in front of him. He faced 31 shots — 31! — over the first two periods. Flyers captain Claude Giroux and Sean Couturier missed open looks in the first that might have made it a game. Instead, they heard 20,000 fans voraciously boo them off the ice to end the period.

The Flyers might want to skip the replay of this clunker.

San Jose got some help late in the first when replay officials in New York awarded Pavelski his second goal for a 3-0 lead. The puck was in play when Elliott cleared Pavelski's shot until a whistle stopped the action. Sure enough, the review showed Elliott's glove was behind the line when he swatted Pavelski's puck and the no-goal was overturned.

Kane redirected a puck off his skate late in the first to make it 4-0. It was San Jose's first power-play goal of the season after a 0 for 12 start.

One of the main goals the Sharks had this offseason was improving a power-play unit that ranked 16th in the league last season at 20.6 percent. The Sharks know they have to return to the level they were at in 2015-16, when they ranked third on the power play on the way to the Stanley Cup Final.

The Flyers had the early (furry) candidate for rookie of the year when they unveiled Gritty in the preseason. After some initial confusion over what exactly the wild-haired, googly-eyed creature was, Gritty was embraced and made surprise visits on most major morning and late-night talk shows. On the concourse, the Flyers' arena host asked fans what they were most excited about for the opener, and it was near unanimous for Gritty. Sure enough, he swung like a pendulum as he descended from near the retired number banners, and the crowd went wild.

Kane added his second of the game and fourth of the season in the second to make it 5-1. Tomas Hertl, Timo Meier and Barclay Goodrow also scored in the third for an 8-1 lead. Aaron Dell stopped 31 shots.

Shayne Gostisbehere and Wayne Simmonds scored for the Flyers.

NOTES: The Flyers named Simmonds an alternate captain for the season, Andrew MacDonald will be an alternate captain for the Flyers on the road, and Couturier will be an alternate captain at home. Giroux will again wear the C, just as he has since 2013.

UP NEXT

Sharks: Play Thursday at New York Rangers.



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1109138 Minnesota Wild

Foligno scores twice as Blue Jackets beat Avalanche 5-2

By MITCH STACY Associated Press OCTOBER 9, 2018 — 9:05PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Nick Foligno had two goals and an assist and Sergei Bobrovsky made 25 saves to get his first win of the season as the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Colorado Avalanche 5-2 on Tuesday night.

Pierre-Luc Dubois, Artemi Panarin and Josh Anderson also scored for the Blue Jackets, who dealt the Avs their first loss.

Philipp Grubauer, making his Colorado debut after being acquired from Washington in June, had 30 saves. Nathan MacKinnon and Carl Soderberg scored in the second period, but Colorado was shut out in the third as Columbus broke a 2-2 tie and added a couple more.

Panarin found an opening from inside the left circle about five minutes into third period to give Columbus the lead. Foligno got his second of the night, a wrist shot from inside the left circle, with 8:28 left in the game. Anderson added an empty-netter from the other end of the ice with 2 minutes remaining.

Foligno got his first goal of the season 6:49 into the game when he took a pass from Alexander Wennberg from behind the line and found the net with a back-hander from the slot. Dubois got what he called "a pretty easy goal" halfway through the period, going off Grubauer's glove with a rebound while Columbus had a 5-on-3 advantage.

Early in the second period, MacKinnon got his third goal of the year when he pulled up and snapped a shot over Bobrovsky's glove from 40 feet out. Soderberg got a deflection goal — his 200th NHL point — on a power play to tie the game later in the second.

NOTES: Riley Nash centered the third line for the Blue Jackets after Brandon Dubinsky suffered a strained oblique muscle in practice Sunday and was put on injured reserve. ... Former Blue Jackets F Matt Calvert and D Ian Cole returned to Nationwide Arena for the first time since signing free-agent contracts with Colorado last summer. Calvert, who played eight seasons in Columbus, got a standing ovation during a video tribute. ... Colorado's Gabriel Landeskog was in the lineup after missing practice Monday with a lower-body injury. ... Lukas Sedlak made his season debut after being a healthy scratch in the first two games. ... D Scott Harrington played his first game of the season after being out with a concussion.

UP NEXT

Colorado: At Buffalo on Thursday.

Columbus: At Florida on Thursday.

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1109139 Minnesota Wild

Aho's 2-point night leads Hurricanes past Canucks 5-3

By JOEDY McCREARY Associated Press OCTOBER 9, 2018 —
9:00PM

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sebastian Aho had a goal and an assist, and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Vancouver Canucks 5-3 on Tuesday night for their third straight win.

Warren Foegele scored an important insurance goal in the third period, Andrei Svechnikov, Jordan Staal and Brett Pesce also scored and Teuvo Teravainen had two assists.

They helped the Eastern Conference-leading Hurricanes improve to 3-0-1 — their best start since the move from Hartford in 1997 — under new coach and former team captain Rod Brind'Amour. They earned points in their first four games for the first time since 1994-95, when they were still the Whalers and opened 4-0-1.

Sven Baertschi had two goals and an assist, and Bo Horvat scored on the power play for rebuilding Vancouver, which has lost the first two games of its six-game trip.

Curtis McElhinney made 22 saves for the Hurricanes while Jacob Markstrom stopped 28 shots for the Canucks in a game in which the first seven goals were scored in the opening 23 minutes, 24 seconds and the defenses tightened up before Foegele scored with 6:12 left to restore Carolina's two-goal advantage.

Aho, who has points in all four games, put Carolina up 3-1 after taking a slick touch pass from Micheal Ferland and beating Markstrom from close range with 2:09 left in the first.

After Horvat pulled the Canucks within a goal in the opening minute of the second period, Svechnikov restored the two-goal lead when he crashed the net and stuffed in a rebound — giving the rookie points in three of his four career games.

Baertschi's first goal tied it at 1 at 6:12 after a long pass from Alexander Edler set up a partial breakaway chance. His second came on the power play at 3:24 of the second and pulled the Canucks to 4-3, capping a furious stretch in which the teams combined for three goals in a span of 2:38.

NOTES: Vancouver rookie C Elias Pettersson, who assisted on Baertschi's second goal, has six points in his first three games. ... D Haydn Fleury was in the Carolina lineup for the first time after he was a healthy scratch in each of first three games. Trevor van Riemsdyk was scratched instead. ... LW Tim Schaller and D Ben Hutton made their season debuts for Vancouver.

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1109140 Minnesota Wild

Wild's Marcus Foligno: 'You feel like you got hit by a truck some nights'

By Sarah McLellan Star Tribune OCTOBER 9, 2018 — 9:45PM

As soon as Wild winger Marcus Foligno crashed into the boards Thursday in the season opener, he began to worry.

He wondered if his ankle was OK.

Could he feel his toes?

And he hoped this wasn't another setback early in the season, just like a year ago when he was socked in the face just three games into his Wild debut and suffered a facial fracture.

"You want to be healthy right off the bat and just find your groove," Foligno said. "Injuries can take that away from you."

Marcus Foligno is eager for a strong start this season after he was hurt early last year.

Although he was slow to stand up and had to be assisted off the ice, Foligno returned to the Wild's game against the Avalanche only a few minutes after he was tripped up — resuming a season that Foligno will try to make look like his finish in 2017-18 when he finally skated like the physical spark plug the Wild acquired him to be.

"That is the challenge, to do it for 82 games," he said. "Are you going to have a perfect season? No. But it does take a toll [on] your body. You wake up some mornings ... you feel like you got hit by a truck some nights.

"It's just the way it goes. That's the way I gotta play."

Being at full strength certainly helps that bid.

After getting his face smashed last Oct. 12 in a fight with the Blackhawks' John Hayden and undergoing minor surgery to fix it, Foligno was back in the lineup only two games later — with a cage — but acknowledged he didn't feel comfortable again on the ice until Christmas.

"Did I rush coming back?" he said. "I don't think I did, but maybe just mentally being prepared. It takes away from my game, too, to be physical. You have to back it up, and you can't because you have a cage on, so it's one of those things that floated in my mind — how to play the game. It's a new team, so you're trying to get back and show your toughness to the team and sometimes that hinders you."

Foligno had been added in the summer via trade, getting shipped to Minnesota from Buffalo along with forward Tyler Ennis and a draft pick for defenseman Marco Scandella, forward Jason Pominville and a pick.

He'd registered a career-high 13 goals the season before and ranked fifth in the NHL in hits with 279, contributions the Wild expected Foligno would provide.

But it wasn't until late in the season that Foligno consistently made an impact, with his performance peaking during his first career trip to the postseason. In a five-game series against the Jets, Foligno had a goal on four shots, five blocked shots and 16 hits.

"It was just not worrying about the little things," he said. "Don't sweat the small stuff. I think that's what kind of took over at the end. I just felt really good. I started getting some points, which was great, but just overall consistency of my game was there.

"I think it was just credit to me kind of controlling what I can control. It took me some time to figure it out, but even just getting comfortable in the room and things like that it helps. I just kind of found my groove there, but it was one of those things where we were in the playoffs. It was

exciting, so it was one of those things I showed what I could do and why they brought me here for that energy. It was a lot of fun to play."

Duplicating the spark the playoffs can ignite in October is probably tough, but Foligno has identified other ways to be effective than finishing his checks — like making a defensive stop or holding onto the puck to make an offensive play.

"That's where I gotta try to round out my game a little better," he said, "so I do have enough juice come playoff time."

What could help his execution is his life away from the rink, as Foligno is a new dad. His daughter, Olivia, was born in April.

"You have someone to play for," he said. "Not like it was hard to get up for an NHL game, but I think just having your daughter there now you're playing for her. Coming home, she takes away all the worries. Honestly, I think it's better mentally just to come back from the rink, and you don't have to focus on hockey. You focus on being a dad."

And with how rugged his role requires him to be, taking on a different persona at home might be just what helps Foligno sustain an edge in his game all season long.

"I can't talk baby goo-goo-gaga voice when I come here," he said. "So when I go home, I'm like, 'I gotta turn this off when I get to the rink.'"

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1109141 Minnesota Wild

After two goals in two games, it's still too early for Wild to panic

By DANE MIZUTANI | PUBLISHED: October 9, 2018 at 3:55 pm |
UPDATED: October 9, 2018 at 3:56 PM

No. It's not time to push the panic button on the Wild.

Not yet.

That's the feeling in the locker room despite a dismal offensive performance that has produced just two goals in two games.

"We are 0-1-1," forward Jason Zucker said, downplaying the fact that the Wild offense has stalled out of the gates. "We aren't out of the playoffs or anything like that. We obviously have some things we need to work on. We just need to make sure we realize that we're a good team. We're going to be just fine."

Still, there have been some concerning trends, albeit a small sample size.

The problem isn't just a lack of scoring; it's a lack of any kind of offensive pressure.

In fact, according to Natural Stat Trick, a website that tracks various NHL analytics, the Wild have had just 29 scoring chances through two games, worst in the league for teams that have played at least two games.

To put that in perspective, the Chicago Blackhawks, who will be in town on Thursday night, have 79 scoring chances through three games.

"We need to create way more," said veteran forward Zach Parise, who has potted the only goal among Wild players on the front line. "Not nearly enough time in the offensive zone. Not a lot of creativity with the puck. It's not as if we've played two games and we're getting robbed where we should have six goals or seven goals. We need to generate a lot more chances."

Parise says most of the problems stem from sloppy play in the neutral zone.

"There's a lot of things that have to happen before a goal that we're not doing well enough," Parise said. "Our puck possession, which has been a strength of ours in the past, is not there. We aren't playing with a lot of pace."

"It is (a small sample size)," Parise added. "At the same time, it's too much of the same stuff for two games in a row. That's what we're really trying to emphasize in practice. We need to make smarter plays with the puck, and I think a lot of it has to do with supporting each other and talking a little bit more. That's going to help us a lot."

In an effort to create more offense, coach Bruce Boudreau changed up his top three lines earlier this week. Hopeful that will jolt some life into the group, he says he's willing to make more changes during Thursday's game if need be.

"It's hard to tell in practice," Boudreau said. "We'll see how it goes in the first period (against the Blackhawks). Who knows? I've been known to change them."

That said, at this point the Wild seem to agree that the offensive struggles have less to do with line combinations, and more to do with overall execution from everyone involved.

"It's about preparing properly and knowing where we are as a group," forward Eric Staal said. "We know we haven't been good enough for two games and we have to get better. I don't think that's anything that anyone

is denying. As a group overall we need to get a little bit more on the attack and a little bit more aggressive."

"You never want to fall too far behind," Parise added. "It's only two games. That said, there are some things we definitely have to get better at and make the right adjustments in order to be able to score."

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The Wild have three practices before playing again Thursday night against the Chicago Blackhawks at Xcel Energy Center. There is plenty to work on, and a few early changes. During practice Monday at TRIA Rink in downtown St. Paul, coach Bruce Boudreau tweaked all but the fourth line after the Wild managed just one goal each in season-opening losses to...

Devan Dubnyk was on his game Saturday night. The only question was whether that would be enough for the Wild. It was and it wasn't. The Wild left their home opener at Xcel Energy Center with a point, but it was a bitter one after they came within 1 minute, 31 seconds of the season's first victory. With Vegas Golden...

Promising young forward Luke Kunin continues inching closer to being medically cleared to play in a game. Cleared for contact this week, Kunin took and passed Wild coach Bruce Boudreau's infamous skate test on Saturday morning. The question is whether he will stay with the NHL team when he is or be sent to AHL Iowa to get ready. "That's...

Zach Parise and Mikko Koivu started playing on the same line late last season, in part because Parise didn't join the Wild until January after recovering from back surgery. The veteran left wing and center have played together at times since Parise joined the team in 2012, but the two really clicked down the stretch last season – and started...

Luke Kunin has been cleared by doctors for full contact, he said, and practiced Friday with the Wild's third line during a short practice at TRIA rink. "We'll see how a good, hard week of practice goes and then we'll get together and go from there," Kunin said. "But I like where we're headed and I'm feeling good." Kunin, 20,...

DENVER — Nathan MacKinnon had a tap-in goal off a nifty pass from Mikko Rantanen, Semyon Varlamov stopped 20 shots and the Colorado Avalanche beat the Minnesota Wild 4-1 on Thursday night in the opener for both teams. Carl Soderberg scored, while Rantanen and J.T. Compher added empty-net goals for the Avalanche, who moved to 15-5-3 in home openers since...

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1109142 Minnesota Wild

Wild Walkthrough: A look at the early struggles getting the offense started

By Evan Sporer Oct 9, 2018

A few seconds shy of 100 minutes of 5-on-5 time into the Wild's season and, this pretty much paints the picture of the hockey that's been played:

The Wild have attempted 70 shots, versus 112 against.

The Wild have taken 39 shots on goal, versus 63 against.

The shot Matt Dumba scored on against the Vegas Golden Knights had a 1.7-percent chance of being a goal, according to MoneyPuck.com.

If you're sensing a theme here, it's that the Wild have left much to be desired by way of dictating play at even strength, generating offense, and most pertinently, scoring goals.

It's just two games, and maybe Minnesota can take solace in that they came against two 2018 playoff teams, but there were some pretty glaring themes that contributed to the lukewarm, vanilla start.

In addition to opening against back-to-back playoff teams, the Wild also lined up across from two very fast teams, and ones that played with possession through the neutral zone, something entirely amiss from Minnesota's 5-on-5 play.

It led to many abbreviated possessions and trips to the offensive zone: pucks that were flipped toward the goal line, only to be reversed and carried right back into Minnesota's end.

These numbers are very telling, particularly the shot metrics (SAT is shot attempts, SOG is shots on goal). Where Minnesota was at least doing a somewhat decent job of creating shot volume after carrying the puck into the offensive zone, the dump-ins totally took the wind out of those sails.

Just comparing the two, the Wild generated 0.11 shots on goal per dump-in, against 0.36 for when they carried the puck in with control.

Let's take a look at some of the differences in those possessions.

In this sequence, even though the Wild hit the line 3-on-4, Jared Spurgeon has his legs moving with a full head of steam. He's got Jason Zucker to the outside, which at least gives him an escape valve should the Avalanche press as soon as he cross into the zone.

Playing off Zucker, Spurgeon dips his shoulder a bit like he's going to drop a pass, and buys a little bit of outside space. He takes a shot off the wing that creates a big rebound in front.

So even when Colorado clears this puck, it's a quick reload by Minnesota and they're back on their way. Mikael Granlund makes a heady play at the defensive blue line, holding up the puck and drawing in two Avalanche skaters before fitting in a pass to a striding Dumba. Because the second Colorado forward is forechecking up ice, Dumba's momentum will immediately take him to the next level, giving the Wild a 3-on-2. It's those little passes like the one Granlund made that can help catalyze a rush and controlled entries.

Dumba gets another pretty good look off this sequence, redirecting a centering feed from Zucker that went just wide.

The Wild's two goals either came directly off a controlled entry, or had one recently prior.

On Zach Parise's goal against the Avalanche, the Wild had a controlled entry that pushed Colorado down to its own goal line. The Avalanche punted to center ice, only for Minnesota to quickly reload, taking

advantage of the good field position — with a well-placed dump-in — before going to work.)

And on Dumba's goal against Vegas, the field-position effect was really quite noticeable. The Wild were able to push the Golden Knights down into the circles, it created space to feed the blue line, and all of the moving parts helped set the screen for what was still a very low-percentage shot.

Dumba blocks a shot and immediately takes the space in front of him, leading the counter. The speed the Wild get from one end to the other carries pretty much all of the Vegas skaters with them; by the time Charlie Coyle pulls up along the wall, four Golden Knights are at or below the dots. Meanwhile, Jordan Greenway is getting ready to cut to the crease.

That's important, because amid Vegas trying to find its defensive footing with less time to think, Jon Merrill tries to put a body on Greenway. But in doing so, he creates a perfect screen for his goaltender, and that 1.7-percent shot manages to elude Marc-Andre Fleury.

Now, to talk about this concept in black-and-white terms isn't very fair. To argue that all controlled zone entries (or attempts at carry-ins) are "good," and everything else is "bad" is painting with a pretty broad brush and dumping things into two imprecise buckets.

But for Minnesota, these dump-ins weren't generating possession. Pucks were either thrown into areas where they couldn't be recovered, or puck-carriers weren't challenging defensemen at the offensive blue line. Either way, to borrow another football analogy, it led to many "one-and-outs" — the puck exited the zone as quickly as it entered.

It's difficult to say where exactly this play had a chance to be successful. But what adds another puzzling layer is that Colorado changed out a few skaters after it lost the faceoff. That afforded the Wild some extra neutral zone cushion.

Even with Jonas Brodin and Jared Spurgeon wanting to get off themselves, Brodin had tons of time and space to carry this puck, and give Minnesota a chance to string together a play, instead of handing the puck right back.

Or there was this decision by Joel Eriksson Ek, electing to attempt a self-pass(?) off the near boards, only to be guided out of his lane pretty easily by Nikita Zadorov and handing the puck back to the Avalanche.

At other times, the genesis of the problem was in the Wild's own end, where they had trouble executing that first pass, missing on the timing and slipping on the first rung of the ladder.

Think back to the Granlund play, where the Wild were able to get past that first speed bump and then hit the accelerator. If a team is aggressively deploying a forward on the forecheck, you have to get past that first layer to navigate transition life.

But on this play, Nick Seeler tries to fit a pass to Jordan Greenway that's very boom-or-bust. If Seeler connects, Greenway is off to the races (and so is Charlie Coyle, below the level of the puck at the bottom of the circle).

But to Seeler's left is a wide open Eriksson Ek, the little trap door Minnesota can lean on here to relieve some of this pressure and get out of the zone. (Yes, there's a defenseman behind Eriksson Ek, but if Seeler hits that pass, you have two supporting forwards — Greenway and Coyle — at the same level across the way.)

There were a few instances like this, a failure to launch, which was the pretext to dumping the puck in, when the Wild could have maintained possession if they executed a bit better.

This isn't the most ferocious Avalanche forecheck, and again, the Wild have an opportunity to hit a short horizontal pass to sidestep the pressure and get out into the neutral zone.



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But Nino Niederreiter misses this pass to Brodin, the Wild are forced to double back, and what could have been a neat exit became the Wild flinging the puck up ice — and a sure-fire turnover.

Here's another one, where with lots of time and space the Wild flub the play.

Devan Dubnyk leaves this puck on a tee for Dumba, with Max Pacioretty the first on the forecheck for Vegas. Minnesota has the ingredients to make a play and get out of its own zone.

But that Pacioretty pressure funnels the puck into an area where the Golden Knights have two oncoming forecheckers. On the opposite side, you can see the open ice and the green sweaters waiting in support. But Vegas dictated the puck's direction, and it quickly put the kibosh on a potential rush.

When you have trouble getting past that first level, it can affect your play in all three zones (like the Niederreiter-Brodin missed connection, where the Wild didn't immediately turn the puck over, but ended up handing it back in short order).

If you're unwilling to be creative in the neutral zone, not taking on defenders (within reason) and attempting to make plays, it's going to limit your offensive flexibility, and gives teams free attempts at puck recoveries.

This is all very correctable though. And again, it's only two games. There were moments of fluid puck movement in those two games, and clips the Wild can watch to reinforce how they'd like to play through. Likewise, some of this could possibly be chalked up to shaking off early-season rust. The Wild are already shaking up their lines as a result.

The teams the Wild are attempting to contend with in the West all are at their best when they're playing fast. If the plan is to gain the neutral zone and flip pucks toward the goal line, you better be really good at hunting them down, or really prepared to quickly transition to defense.

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1109238 Winnipeg Jets

Franchise scoring leader snipes for Kings

By: Jason Bell and Mike McIntyre

Posted: 10/9/2018 11:00 PM

Sensibly, no video tribute was flashed on the big screens Tuesday night for Ilya Kovalchuk, who demonstrated he's still got some touch.

The ex-Atlanta Thrashers sniper drove the net and redirected Drew Doughty's feed past Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck to give the Los Angeles Kings an early 1-0 lead on the Jets at Bell MTS Place.

It was the Russian-born forward's first NHL goal since April 25, 2013, when he played for the New Jersey Devils. He entered the game with a pair of assists generated Sunday in L.A.'s 4-2 victory over the Detroit Red Wings.

But the goal, Kovalchuk admitted after, lost its lustre in a 2-1 defeat.

"I prefer to win than score goals. It wasn't enough, so we will be better next game," he said.

Kovalchuk, 35, is back in the league following a five-year absence after signing a three-year, US\$18.75-million deal with the Kings in the summer. He scored 417 goals and amassed 816 points in 816 games with the Thrashers and New Jersey Devils before returning to Russia in 2013 to play for SKA St. Petersburg of the KHL.

Like it or not, Jets fans, Kovalchuk is still considered the Atlanta/Winnipeg franchise leader in goals (328) and points (615). Twice he ripped 52 goals (2005-06, '07-08) and hit the 40-goal mark three other times in seven-plus seasons with the Thrashers.

Those milestones won't be eclipsed any time soon. Bryan Little, the only Jet who can call Kovalchuk an ex-teammate, is 128 goals behind (200), while Blake Wheeler is 117 points behind (498). Wheeler does hold the franchise assist lead (325), 38 more than Kovalchuk, who led Russia to Olympic gold in February in PyeongChang and was named the tournament's most valuable player. Little is third with 275 helpers.

Nic Petan is back in town — but where he fits in the Jets' plans remains to be seen.

Winnipeg Jets' Nic Petan is back in the city and skating on his own.

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Winnipeg Jets' Nic Petan is back in the city and skating on his own.

The speedy, skilled forward left training camp on Sept. 18 following the sudden death of his father, Franc. Petan returned home to Vancouver to be with his mother and brother on an indefinite leave of absence granted by the Jets.

"Nic is currently in Winnipeg and skating on his own. My belief is he will be joining the team very soon, but I am not sure yet what that will look like for him in the short-term or the long-term," his agent, Joe Oliver, told the Free Press on Tuesday.

Petan has been deemed a non-rostered player whose salary is currently counting towards the cap. Once he's eligible to play, a decision will have to be made as the Jets would then exceed the 23-player maximum.

Petan would have to clear waivers in order to be sent to the Manitoba Moose, unless it was for the purpose of a short-term conditioning assignment, which might be allowed given the circumstances. Forward Marko Dano, who has been a healthy scratch through the first three games, also requires waivers to go down. Brendan Lemieux, who has also sat for the first three games, does not.

A quick look around the NHL scoreboard these days might have some observers doing a bit of a double-take.

7-6? 8-5? 8-2? 7-6 again?

Some of the results resemble low-scoring football games, rather than traditional hockey contests.

"I think early in the year, everybody comes in with a tremendous amount of optimism. Especially if they had some offence going last year. There's not a lot of people telling their fans 'We are such a great defensive team. Come out and watch us defend.' And then we get into these big number games and coaches are going 'Fellas, we are not winning 7-6 every night, that's an aberration, we've got to be better defensively.' So some of that takes over," Jets head coach Paul Maurice said Tuesday of the high-scoring affairs.

"Other than that, what's changed? The goalies' gear's changed. We don't know the effect on that. I think we have four No. 1's down now, I don't know if that's an effect. But you watch the number of No. 1 goalies out of the lineup. But I think a lot of it is let's see how many goals we can score, let's make some plays," said Maurice.

"So when you're making some of those higher-risk offensive plays because you're feeling it and this is the year you're going to score 50 even though you'd have five, the cost to that play not developing is something's going the other way. So when you watch, you see the puck go back and forth a lot more. It's exciting as hell if you're watching on TV."

Although it's probably not a lot of fun for coaches, offensive-minded players likely enjoy the wide-open style.



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"Obviously, there's a lot of young, skilled players but we're three, four games in for each team," said Jets centre Mark Scheifele.

"It's too early to tell. Obviously, it's good to see a lot of goals but it's too early in the season to talk about that."

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1109239 Winnipeg Jets

Jets avoid sin bin in 2-1 win over Kings

Mike McIntyre

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They say good things happen to nice people.

The Winnipeg Jets would certainly agree with that as they were practically choir boys on ice Tuesday night, mostly avoiding the sins of their very recent past on the way to a 2-1 victory over the Los Angeles Kings in their home opener at Bell MTS Place.

Cancel the anger management classes, at least for now.

"We were better with our sticks. A chunk of those are tripping penalties that we had taken, not checking with our feet, and we were reaching in on pucks. But we skated better (Tuesday), so we were able to look more, I don't know if disciplined is the right word, but we just didn't take the penalties that we took that were those stick ones you don't like," Jets head coach Paul Maurice said following the game.

Winnipeg improved to 2-1-0 with the win, while Los Angeles now has a 1-1-1 record.

It was a much-needed behavioural change for the Jets, who showed off their naughty side in splitting the first two games of the regular season. Winnipeg was short-handed a whopping nine times in St. Louis and Dallas, surrendering three power-play goals along the way. That's not exactly a formula for sustained success.

While Tuesday's game had plenty of physical play, Winnipeg managed to keep its emotions in check, save for a couple minor misdeeds in the third period. Fortunately for Mark Scheifele (delay of game for puck over the glass) and Tyler Myers (careless high-stick), their teammates bailed them out by killing off both infractions.

Winnipeg dominated five-on-five play for large stretches, while earning three power plays of their own simply by moving their feet, controlling the puck and keeping the Kings at bay while outshooting them 39-17.

Winnipeg Jets' Kyle Connor scores a power play goal on a pass from Blake Wheeler against the Los Angeles Kings goaltender Jack Campbell during the second period in Winnipeg on Tuesday.

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Winnipeg Jets' Kyle Connor scores a power play goal on a pass from Blake Wheeler against the Los Angeles Kings goaltender Jack Campbell during the second period in Winnipeg on Tuesday.

And it paid off, as Kyle Connor scored the game-winner in the second period while his team had the man advantage. It's the third goal in as many games for the sophomore winger. He poked home a puck that was probably going in anyways off the stick of Blake Wheeler.

"I hope he gets 40 of those, honestly," the gracious captain said of having his tally 'stolen.' "If he's not standing there, I don't make that play and the puck doesn't go in the net. Yeah, it may look like he taps it in, but to me that's his goal all the way."

Wheeler said the play showed the development of his young linemate, who led all NHL rookies last season with 31 goals.

"The truth is, you look at it and say that was an easy one, but he's in the right spot. The reason that play happens is they're obviously trying to do a little wrinkle to take away some of our one-timer options, and he sneaks back door and he's wide open," said Wheeler.

"He's just a really smart player. We saw once he got some confidence last year the level he can play at. He's just so dynamic and so quick getting in and out of space, he's just really tough to defend. He came into camp, he's been one of our top guys. You can tell the summer he worked on his game, got better. And I can't tell you how exciting it is to play with a guy like that every day."

Connor said he's taking it all in stride, not getting caught up in his numbers despite the strong start to his season.

"The same way I'm approaching the game, trying not to get too high or too low throughout the season. It's a long season here. But playing with confidence is a big thing for me," Connor said.

Winnipeg made Bell MTS Place a house of horrors for visitors last year, going 32-7-2 in its own barn. It was a huge reason for the squad's overall success. So winning their home opener is the kind of start the Jets were looking for, even if it wasn't the most entertaining game.

It didn't start off so hot, as Ilya Kovalchuk got the visitors on the board just over six minutes into the game. He snuck behind the Winnipeg defence and deflected a perfect Drew Doughty pass past Connor Hellebuyck on the Kings' first shot of the game.

But Scheifele tied it a few minutes later, converting a nifty feed from Brandon Tanev. Josh Morrissey paid the price to get the play started, absorbing a heavy hit from Jeff Carter to get the puck to Tanev, who had jumped on the ice seconds earlier for Scheifele's usual wing-man, Wheeler. It was the first goal of the season for Scheifele.

"Just kind of spun off and saw him out of the corner of my eye and he made a great finish on the play," said Tanev.

Winnipeg wanted a good response after the dud in Dallas Saturday night, especially with a game in Nashville on Thursday night looming. The potential for a rocky start to the season was certainly there.

"We didn't have a great game in Dallas but it's good to respond and get back out there and play aggressive, getting in shooting lanes and doing the job," said Tanev. "It was a good response from our group. Our leaders did a great job of getting us ready before the game and we came out to play right from the puck drop."

Los Angeles is without No. 1 goalie Jonathan Quick, who's out week-to-week with a lower-body injury. But they can't blame their goaltending for Tuesday's loss. Jack Campbell was sensational in making 37 saves.

Hellebuyck had a much quieter night, facing just 17 shots. That was a dramatic decrease in his workload, as opponents fired 77 pucks at Hellebuyck in the first two games.

"Just followed the puck when it was in our end. The guys were really good in front of me, so I could just enjoy the game," said Hellebuyck. "We were very good. In our own zone, we were very detailed and they made it very easy on me."

After the quick trip to play the Predators, Winnipeg returns for a season-long six-game homestand starting Sunday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

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1109240 Winnipeg Jets

Jets coach mulling elimination of morning skates

Mike McIntyre

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It's no secret most professional athletes are creatures of habit. They have their daily routines — and superstitions — which help prepare them for the task at hand.

Maybe it's driving the same way to the rink every day. Or wearing a lucky T-shirt or pair of socks. Or taping their stick a certain way.

So it was somewhat surprising to hear Winnipeg Jets head coach Paul Maurice say recently the team is considering a fairly dramatic change to its typical pre-game preparations.

The morning skate, a long-standing tradition in the hockey world, may soon go the way of the dodo bird around these parts.

"Given the choice, I'd prefer if we could eventually get into a routine where they didn't skate in the morning and felt good about their game," Maurice said Saturday morning in Dallas, where only six regulars hit the ice to get ready for the second game of the season.

They weren't feeling very good about their game a few hours later as the Stars smoked them 5-1. It's worth noting everyone was present and accounted for Tuesday morning as the Jets prepared for their home-opener against the Los Angeles Kings.

But Maurice said nothing has changed, and they'll continue to assess the need for a morning skate on a case-by-case basis. That's just fine with his players, who welcome the chance to work in some additional rest during the rigours of an 82-game regular season.

"I think you're regimented. I think no matter what your profession, people will get into routines and things that they're comfortable with. I think it's just been a part of what hockey players have done for a long time. Is it ideal? Probably not," captain Blake Wheeler said Tuesday.

"There's probably ways around it, and better ways to manage that time. I think that's something we're trying to work on, just trying to find that balance of when's the right time to go out there, when's the right time to maybe do some things off the ice to obviously be 100 per cent for game time. That's what your aiming to."

According to hockey folklore, morning skates were introduced in the 1970s as a means to allow players to shake off the, er, cobwebs, of the previous night. In essence, party all night, then flush it out of your system with a vigorous workout.

But given the peak physical condition most athletes now keep themselves in year-round, it would appear to be an outdated principle.

Columbus Blue Jackets head coach John Tortorella was the first NHL bench boss to wipe out morning skates on a regular basis during the 2016-17 season, when his team went on a run of 16 consecutive victories. The Pittsburgh Penguins and New York Rangers have also put them on the extinction list.

Jets defenceman Tyler Myers said at least making the skates optional allows players to find the best way to prepare for each game.

"Personally, I think it varies with each guy. Some days I like going out, some days I don't. Some days you don't have a choice," he said Tuesday with a laugh. "It doesn't affect me either way. I think it depends on each guy on any given night. You know, if guys want to get out there, feel their hands a little bit, that's fine. If some guys feel like they have to get a little bit more rest in the mornings, for me I don't really care."

Teams are trying to find every way to gain an advantage these days, with some bringing in so-called "sleep doctors" to help map out the best times to travel. Wheeler said with advancements in sport science, there shouldn't be any concern about players not being ready to play even if they don't hit the ice in the morning.

"There's other ways to do that. Especially when you're playing a lot of hockey in a condensed period of time. You know, all of a sudden you add in morning skates and maybe a practice on an off day on top of maybe back-to-back games or three-in-four, and all of a sudden you're skating four or five extra times outside of the game where maybe you don't need to," said Wheeler.

"I think it's just about trying to look ahead on the schedule, be smart about it. And obviously the aim is when it's game time, you want to be feeling 100 per cent."

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1109241 Winnipeg Jets

Top Jets line's shot-attempt differential? Don't worry about it

By: Andrew Berkshire | Posted: 10/9/2018 7:00 PM

After two games in this young NHL season, the Jets are a middle-of-the-pack team in terms of shot-attempt differential at 5-vs-5, also known as Corsi, at 50.3 per cent. It's far too early to draw conclusions about what that means, as they were 10th in that statistic last season at 51.5 per cent, which isn't far off from where they have been so far.

Two games as a sample is essentially useless for any long-term analysis, but I have seen some worrying over the fact that the Jets' top line has been their worst in shot-attempt differentials, with the Jets controlling just 43.5 per cent of the shot attempts while Blake Wheeler, Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor are on the ice.

That number is more than nine per cent worse than how the Jets perform in terms of shot attempts when that group isn't on the ice, which sounds pretty bad when you consider the weight of expectations for that line. Even if it were a larger sample size, I'm not sure it's something to worry about.

Last season in 611 minutes together, that top line was 1.4 per cent worse in shot-attempt differential than the Jets were when they were off the ice, which is not how you want a top line to perform, but they were so strong in other metrics that it more than compensated for being outshot.

It should be noted that so far this year, Scheifele has been dominant by every category, but the important thing here is that this combination of players, for some reason, doesn't really dominate Corsi the way a lot of top lines do, and never has.

For a nearly a decade, Corsi was the gold standard by which people could easily define good two-way play, but as the league has trended more towards parity overall, and the acceptance of that statistic leads teams to chase players who could drive shot-attempt metrics, it has become more difficult to view it in isolation.

The Jets' top line is something relatively unique around the NHL — they get outshot in volume, but they make up for it in quality of chances. Both Wheeler and Scheifele are elite-level playmakers at 5-vs-5, while Connor and Scheifele are elite-level scoring chance and goal producers at 5-vs-5.

What that means is that while other teams may get more shots than the Jets while the top line is on the ice, the Jets are still going to score more. Their ability to generate high-quality chances is nearly unequalled, and they're actually just as efficient at clogging up the passing lanes in their own zone and forcing opponents to shoot from the perimeter, which they do, a lot.

The Scheifele line meanwhile, fires the puck around the offensive zone like it's laser guided, with most of their shots immediately preceded by passes, forcing the goaltender and the defensive structure of the other team to be in transit while the shot is happening, breaking down defences and exposing goaltenders.

That holds true of not only their scoring chances, but their shots from the perimeter as well, which provides a shooting percentage boost no matter where the line shoots from.

And where does the line shoot from? Well thanks to Connor's nose for the net and Scheifele's ability to find himself free of checks in between the faceoff dots, more often than not they're shooting from the inner slot area, where expected shooting percentage is about 22 per cent.

Even if the top line does struggle a bit to start the season, and an argument could be made based on this tiny sample that Wheeler and Connor could be better offensively at 5-vs-5, the nice thing about the Jets is that they can insulate a struggling line.

The line of Patrik Laine, Bryan Little and Matthieu Perreault are all in the 60 per cent range in Corsi, high-danger chances and slot-pass differentials, while the Jets' fourth line of Andrew Copp, Adam Lowry and Brandon Tanev hasn't been on the ice for a single high-danger chance against yet. That's a luxurious amount of depth.

If the top line continues to be nine per cent below team average, that's still a bit of a problem, but we're two games into the season and talking about a line that has consistently demonstrated an ability to outscore its opponents by creating quality opportunities, both getting to the right areas of the ice and generating more pre-shot movement than other lines are capable of.

Long story short, I wouldn't worry.

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1109242 Winnipeg Jets

Jets eager to make happy home a horror for others

Mike McIntyre

Posted: 10/9/2018 12:58 PM

The Winnipeg Jets hope a little taste of home cooking will help get their game back on track.

Bell MTS Place was one of the most difficult venues for visiting NHL teams to play in last year, and the Jets will look to pick up where they left off when they host the Los Angeles Kings tonight in their home-opener.

"There's a little bit more buzz, for sure. Again, excited to get back into our rink, to get back going. When you play on the road and you hit a post, nobody cares, but when you play at home and you hit a post, you get a pretty good jump from the crowd and anything that's around the net is exciting, so you get that boost," coach Paul Maurice said following the morning skate.

Winnipeg (1-1-0) beat St. Louis last Thursday to kick off the season, but then came out flat in a 5-1 loss in Dallas Saturday night.

"I'm going to be really careful about attaching any panic or concern on any area after two (games). We split on the road (against) two good teams. And we'll try to be a real good team at home here now," said Maurice.

Los Angeles (1-0-1) is off to a strong start but is without No. 1 goalie Jonathan Quick, who is out week-to-week with a lower-body injury. Jack Campbell is expected to get the start.

Winnipeg will ice the same lineup from the first two games, including Connor Hellebuyck in net. That means defenceman Dmitry Kulikov and forwards Marko Dano and Brendan Lemieux will be the scratches.

Jacob Trouba missed practice Monday and this morning's skate while attending to a family matter in Michigan but will return in time to play, said Maurice. Adam Lowry is also good to go after sitting out Monday's on-ice workout.

Maurice said he's looking for more disciplined play from his team, which gave up three power play goals in five opportunities against the Stars.

"We don't like the stick penalties where we're tripping guys. There's a big volume of that. We were eager to get on the puck, not with our feet but with our sticks. We want to clean that up a bit. When you look at (the fact) we opened with two games in the Central (Division), you'll find a big majority of the Central find themselves in the Top-10 in penalties. It's a certain kind of game, very physical," he said.

"But we want to make sure that we're really good with our sticks. There were two (minors) I don't like (the calls) but that's going to happen regularly. There's the batted one (puck) into the stands. We got a couple of physical penalties we can be smarter with."

Although scoring is up early in the NHL season, the Kings traditionally play a more defensive-style game which centre Mark Scheifele said his squad will have to be patient with.

"They're a good team. They play solid. They play great defensively. They've got some great players up front and on the back end. We know it's going to be a tough game," said Scheifele.

"You just can't overcomplicate the game. You can't try to do too much. You can't try to make a play every time you touch the puck. You have to play the simple way for the 60 minutes. If it takes 59 minutes to get one, it takes 59 minutes. But it all starts defence first against a team like this."

Winnipeg went 32-7-2 at Bell MTS Place last season, a huge part of their overall success. They'll hit the road after this one for a quick stop in Nashville Thursday night, then come back to start a six-game homestand Sunday against Carolina.

"Obviously, you're going to have more energy. You got to get the juices going for a home opener. It's always a fun game. We know our fans are going to be rocking the building tonight. We're excited to get going," said Scheifele.

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1109243 Winnipeg Jets

Back to form: Jets find legs and win home opener

Ken Wiebe

It can be a rather uncomfortable position to be in, yet the Winnipeg Jets managed to find a way to hang in there.

After falling behind early in the home opener against the Los Angeles Kings, the Jets evened the score on a goal from Mark Scheifele, took the lead on a power-play marker from Kyle Connor and held the majority of the offensive-zone time.

The shots on goal were lopsided, with the Jets up 33-9 through two periods

Yet it was only a one-goal game.

Despite the fact the ice was mostly tilted in the Jets favour, the Kings found a way to hang around, even without goalie Jonathan Quick and forward Dustin Brown sidelined with injuries.

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck, who had been under siege during the first two games of the season after facing 77 shots on goal, was probably bored.

But he found a way to stay mentally sharp and stood tall when the Kings third-period push came, finishing with 16 saves in a 2-1 victory for the Jets.

"I prepared the right way and I know what I'm doing," said Hellebuyck. "I just knew that at some point, I was going to get some action. It was nice to get a little flow before it happened.

"The guys were really good in front of me, so I could just enjoy the game."

This was more of an identity game for the Jets, who used their speed throughout the contest to make life difficult on the Kings, especially in the offensive zone.

The Jets were also much more detailed in the defensive zone, limiting the number of high quality scoring chances against.

"That's kind of the game we want to play," said Jets captain Blake Wheeler, who set up the game-winning goal. "Quick transition and try to spend as much time in the other end as we can.

"(Playing with the lead is) a spot we got really comfortable in. A lot of times last year we were able to extend that lead last year. We did it in the first game as well."

The Jets, who improved to 2-1, are back in action on Thursday at Bridgestone Arena, when they face the Nashville Predators for the first time since knocking them out in Game 7 of the Central Division final.

Managing expectations

Opposing teams and head coaches have been complimentary to the Jets so far this season and you can expect that trend to continue — it's not just the pundits who hold them in high regard this season.

"There's a lot of good teams in the league and Winnipeg is one of them," said Kings head coach John Stevens. "A lot of people are talking about Winnipeg as one of the top teams in the West if not the league — and rightfully so. They've got size, they've got skill, they play hard and they've got a defence that's very active and they've got size back there and they've got good goaltending. It's a team that's been together for a while now that's really matured and had a little taste of success and I'm sure they're hungry for more. Some of their young players have really taken a leadership role here. They're as good a team as you're going to see in

the league, with a lot of depth up and down the lineup that plays extremely hard."

When it comes to managing and dealing with expectations, the Kings understand what it's like to be a perennial contender.

"Expectations can be a burden or it can be a privilege, depending on how you look at it," said Stevens. "The fact that you have expectations means that they've got a really good team and that they're expected to win. Sometimes when you're expected to win, it's hard. But if you just commit to the process, like they've done, they've done a really good job of continuing to get better all the time. They got into the playoffs last year and had some success and I'm sure they want to build off that.

"Expectations can be a really good thing, they can be a really good motivator. I'm sure they've got high expectations for themselves. So the expectations on the outside, just like everybody else ... we have high expectations and those are the ones that probably mean the most."

Welcome back

For Kings forward Ilya Kovalchuk, it was the first game at BellMTS Place since departing for the Kontinental Hockey League in 2013.

Kovalchuk spent five seasons there, but signed a three-year deal worth \$18 million this summer as the Kings looked to add another offensive element to their team.

"He gives us a weapon we didn't have before," said Stevens. "It is an adjustment coming over after being gone for a while. He's just learning the small ice again and the time and space. He loves to work and he loves to put in extra time. He still skates really well and probably the one thing that's overlooked is his ability to make plays because he's so good with the puck, looking people off and opening up space. He's a really well-trained guy that is still capable of playing at a high level."

Kovalchuk is playing on the top line with Kings captain Anze Kopitar and Alex Lafallo and he delivered the first goal of the contest, redirecting home a cross-ice feed from Drew Doughty.

Kovalchuk had three shots on goal in 23:03 of action and was probably the Kings most dangerous forward, rattling a shot off the crossbar during the third period as Los Angeles searched for the equalizer.

Early wake-up call

Doughty was on the receiving end of a big hit from Jets defenceman Jacob Trouba a couple of shifts earlier.

The Kings blue-liner had his head down as he skated in the offensive zone and Trouba caught him with a heavy shoulder-to-shoulder check that sent Doughty to the ice.

Trouba is at his best when he plays with an edge and this was a prime example of that.

Doughty didn't shy away after getting hit early as he caught Brandon Tanev with an open-ice hit before the first period came to a close.

Goals aplenty

Several teams have been putting up big numbers in the early stages of the season, as scoring is slightly on the rise.

Might this be a sign of things to come or simply an aberration?

"Early in the year, everybody comes in with a tremendous amount of optimism. Especially if they had some offence going last year," said Jets head coach Paul Maurice. "There are not a lot of people selling their fans 'We are such a great defensive team. Come out and watch us defend' And then we get into these big number games and coaches are going, 'Fellas, we are not winning 7-6 every night, that's an aberration, we've got to be better defensively.' So some of that takes over. Other than that, what's changed? The goalie's gear's changed. We don't know the affect on that. I think we have four No. 1 (goalies) down now, I don't know if that's an affect. But you watch the number of No. 1 goalies out of the



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lineup. But I think a lot of it is let's see how many goals we can score, let's make some plays. So when you're making some of those higher-risk offensive plays because you're feeling it and this is the year you're going to score 50 even though you'd have five, the cost to that play not developing is something's going the other way. So when you watch you see the puck go back and forth a lot more. It's exciting as hell if you're watching on TV."

Apparently, it's not quite as fun for the coaching staffs.

Scheifele said it's too early to draw any conclusions on whether or not the goal-scoring spree will continue.

"Obviously, there's a lot of young skilled players but we're three, four games in for each team," said Scheifele. "I saw some stat from TSN the other day, everyone thinks there's always these big-scoring games but at the exact same time, I think it's after 34 games or whatever, I think we're one goal ahead of last year. It's too early to tell. Obviously, it's good to see a lot of goals but it's too early in the season to talk about that."

Five things we learned

Powerful stuff

For the second time in three games, the Jets potent power play was able to strike and this time, it provided the game-winner. As the Kings worked to try and limit the open slot opportunities, Jets captain Blake Wheeler set up Kyle Connor for a tap-in that Alec Martinez got a piece of. That gave Connor three goals (and four points) in three games to start the season.

Discipline returns

Jets head coach Paul Maurice was more concerned with the volume of minor penalties taken than with actual discipline from Saturday's 5-1 loss to the Dallas Stars. Well, the Jets were only shorthanded twice on Tuesday in the home opener. Mark Scheifele was called for delay of game after shooting the puck over the glass in the defensive zone after a scramble in front and Tyler Myers received a high-sticking minor for clipping Kings forward Trevor Lewis late in the third period. The Jets survived both power plays and improved to 2-1.

Staying focused

It was one of those nights when Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck had to be sharp mentally because he didn't have a lot of work, finishing with 16 saves. That was a sharp contrast from the first two games, when Hellebuyck faced 77 shots on goal.

What a move

Jets winger Brandon Tanev is known for his shot-blocking ability and skating ability, but on Tuesday he made a nice move along the boards to spin away from Kings defenceman Jake Muzzin before making a cross-ice pass to Mark Scheifele.

Sound backup plan

With Kings starter Jonathan Quick on the shelf, Jack Campbell acquitted himself well and was one of the big reasons his team was in a one-shot game, turning aside 37 of 39 shots he faced. The 2010 first-round pick (11th overall) of the Dallas Stars took a little longer to become an NHL regular, but he's off to a good start this season.

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1109244 Winnipeg Jets

Far from pretty, but Jets get the job done in home opener

Paul Friesen

If this hockey thing doesn't work out for Blake Wheeler, maybe he can make a living as a soothsayer.

The Winnipeg Jets captain made a prediction of sorts before the Jets home opener against the L.A. Kings, Tuesday, one you'll never find in a course on public relations or marketing.

"Our fans might not have a whole ton to cheer about," Wheeler said. "But that means we're doing the right things, especially against a team like this."

Promoter Blake obviously wasn't concerned with selling tickets or drumming up interest.

His only concern was getting the W.

The Jets did just that, eeking out a 2-1 win that won't rank among the most exciting home openers in franchise history.

But when you have a losing history in them, nobody cares.

And when you're coming off a 5-1 defeat on the road, you go back to basics.

Don't try to paint a masterpiece. Just slop some colour on the canvas.

Not that the Jets weren't full value for the two points.

Through two periods, after all, shots favoured them by a ridiculous 33-9.

Yet they led just 2-1, which is how it ended.

"That's kind of the game we want to play," Wheeler said. "Quick transition and try to spend as much time in the other end as we can."

The temptation through 40 minutes might have been to get impatient and crank up the risk-taking.

Wheeler said it wasn't tempting for his team.

"We've been through that a little bit last year," he said. "It's a spot we got really comfortable in. A lot of times last year we were able to extend that lead. We did it in the first game (this year) as well. They turned it on a bit in the third period. We had some problems with their forecheck, couldn't get the puck out clean. You've got to give them some credit sometimes, too."

And so the second-most anticipated season in Winnipeg hockey history — the year the team returned is still No. 1, isn't it? — is now well underway, the Jets having played three very different games, winning two.

The win pushed the Jets record to .500 in eight home openers, as they've won four of the last six.

With this team, that should be the norm for a while.

FIRE DRILL ENDS SAFELY

Midway through the third period, what sounded like a fire alarm went off somewhere in the building.

It was good timing, as the Jets were running a fire drill of their own behind their own blue line.

As much as Winnipeg deserved the win, the Kings did all but tie it up in that third, Ilya Kovalchuk ringing one chance off the cross-bar behind Connor Hellebuyck.

Hellebuyck acknowledged after the game it was hard not to let his mind wander during the first two periods.

He stayed sharp enough to come up big in that third, though.

PAYING THE PRICE

Brandon Tanev's pass drew most of the ooh's and aah's on the Jets' first goal, but defenceman Josh Morrissey had an equal and more gritty hand in it.

Morrissey pinched to keep the puck in the Kings zone, and paid the price, taking a wallop from L.A.'s Jeff Carter.

Tanev took over from there, and Mark Scheifele finished it off.

Morrissey's play is the kind that often goes unrewarded, and some players don't always bother making it, especially in the first period of a game in early October.

UP AND COMING

While we're still waiting for Jack Roslovic's line to chip in, offensively, the young centre showed flashes of what's to come in his career.

Roslovic went end-to-end on a first-period rush, turning Dion Phaneuf inside out, but couldn't beat Jack Campbell in the Kings net.

Roslovic also set up Perreault in the high slot and Scheifele for a quality chance on a Jets power play, but wasn't rewarded.

Phaneuf turned Adam Lowry inside-out in the second, but in an entirely different way: by spearing him below the belt.

Lowry made it to the bench doubled over in pain, a look in his eyes every guy could understand.

The refs missed it, but I was curious to see if Lowry would exact some sort of revenge later in the game.

He didn't.

GETTING PHYSICAL

As to be expected in their home opener, the Jets brought an edge to the game, the hit highlights including Jacob Trouba on Drew Doughty and Lowry on Alex Iafallo.

Doughty was a hitting machine for the Kings all night, Scheifele probably his favourite target.

His hip check of No. 55 along the boards in the third period was perfectly old-school.

For a defenceman as talented as Doughty, he sure brought his own edge to this one.

NEXT UP

A Thursday date in Nashville is next, a nice early-season reminder of last spring's playoff magic.

"It's going to be intense," Hellebuyck said. "It's going to be crazy and their fan base is insane. We've got to prepare the same way and go in with the right mindset."

If those Preds fans don't have much to cheer about either, the Jets will be happy.

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1109245 Winnipeg Jets

On what makes Mark Scheifele such a special passer and why the Jets need him to keep it up

By Murat Ates Oct 9, 2018

The first time Mark Scheifele assisted on one of Kyle Connor's 35 NHL goals, Connor didn't even pump his fist after scoring. He just turned around, pointed straight at his centremen, and smiled in a way that showed the world he was just as impressed as we were.

The pass was smooth – a backhand from behind the goal line that handcuffed Columbus Blue Jackets forward Lukas Sedlak – and the result was clinical. Connor snapped a one-timer far side, it eluded a stunned Jonas Korpisalo, and it was a sign of things to come for Winnipeg's top line.

Watch the highlight here and notice two things:

Scheifele's shoulder check just as he picks up the puck. He takes stock of his time and space, then waits.

Connor's cut from the top of the circle toward the faceoff dot. He's moving throughout the entire clip, but is open for less than a second.

I asked Scheifele how he knows where his teammates are in any given moment – especially when he's also busy trying to spin off a check.

"A lot of it is before you turn," Scheifele told me this week.

Then he took me through his mental checklist.

"Once you touch that puck, you understand how much space you have. Was it off a rush? Is it off of long zone time? A lot of it is knowing where guys were when you touched that puck and understanding how quickly you can get that under control to make the play."

In the example of Winnipeg's first ever Scheifele-to-Connor goal above, Scheifele has time but Connor is cutting quickly. It's Scheifele's shoulder check and his instant assessment of the offensive zone that gives him the information he needs to bide his time.

Perhaps the most telling aspect of Scheifele's strength in tight spaces is that sometimes his teammates can't help but talk about just how good he is.

Last week, Adam Lowry was explaining a couple of things to me for an upcoming piece when he interrupted himself to celebrate Scheifele.

"Look at what Scheif's so good at," Lowry told me. "He's so good at drawing a defender on his hip and then he spins off him. Now he's got the guy two or three feet behind him. From there, he's able to create more space just because he's created a little space for himself."

Why is that so important?

"To be able to make a play, you don't need five feet of ice," Lowry continued. "You only need a foot. Whether you can saucer it over his stick or put it between his stick, but you need to create that separation somehow."

And that's exactly where Scheifele excels.

"It's a game of inches," Scheifele said. "All you need is the length of that puck. That's all the space you really need. Every single time you move, you want to create a little more space for yourself. ... You have to switch it up. You have to head fake, you have to shoulder fake, you have to stutter step – there's all that that goes into trying to manipulate those d-men to give you an extra foot of room."

By the end of the season, Scheifele's 18 primary assists at 5-on-5 ranked him 22nd in the NHL. Recalling that he missed 22 games to injury, Scheifele actually posted the league's eighth-most primary assists per 60 minutes of 5-on-5 play.

For a quick look at some key numbers, we can turn to passing data tracked by Corey Sznajder. Here's a visual by CJ Turtoro based off of Sznajder's data:

Last season, Scheifele was in the top 10 percent for one-timer shot assists and low-to-high shot assists, too – just like his pass to Connor that we opened this article with. Since breaking into the NHL, Scheifele is in the league's top 5 percent in one-timer shot assists per 60 minutes and secondary/tertiary shot assists per 60 minutes.

Last season, Scheifele shared that he thinks that taking a pass in the right lane is an underappreciated skill.

"What people don't understand sometimes is the shooter has to put himself in a good spot," he said last season, "So that the passer can make the right pass."

This week, Scheifele told The Athletic that Connor is among the best there is at putting himself in the right spots at the right times – and so is Blake Wheeler.

"They time out when they're going to get open," Scheifele told The Athletic. "If you're sitting there open for three seconds before they get the puck, eventually you're going to get covered off."

In short, timing is everything.

"You have to time that lane. You have to time when that guy's stick's out. You have to time when you're hopping into that hole. Both of those guys understand that really well."

What's the key to making that cut from a shooter's perspective?

"Lots of movement," Connor explained. "You know you want to give a guy space if he's going to beat his man and vice versa if you have the puck. Just moving in behind and finding the open area."

This brings us back to Connor and his importance on Winnipeg's top line.

From the moment he was recalled from the Moose last season, Connor has demonstrated the ability to find those open spaces at a first line level in the NHL. As we showed last week, Connor's primary points per 60 minutes of 5-on-5 play is well within first line production levels.

With 31 goals last season and two goals in two games so far this season, Connor's job is very much to finish plays. Still, watch what happens (with a little help from Scheifele) when defensemen are forced to respect Connor's shot:

This goal was from Game 5 against Nashville during last season's playoffs. Evan Sporer wrote a fantastic breakdown of the play here at The Athletic in which he praised Scheifele's ability to create space for Connor, then slam on the brakes to become a shooting option.

In the clip above, note that the last thing P.K. Subban does before Connor makes his pass is turn away from Scheifele and toward Connor. When a guy can shoot like Connor can, you have to respect the danger from his shot. When you have to respect the danger from his shot, he gets more room to pass.

It's a fine line and one that Connor walks extremely well.

"If you create space for yourself, they're not just going to let you go to the net," Connor explains. "Someone else will have to leave their man and that's when it opens up. And that's where the other guy will be wide open. ... Because if he doesn't come at you, then you essentially have a breakaway, right?"

Recall of course that this is what happens when no one comes at Connor.

What does this all mean?



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In a hockey season which is only two games old, Jets Coach Paul Maurice has been adamant about maintaining two of his lines while shuffling the other two.

When asked about shuffling wingers between Bryan Little's and Jack Roslovic's lines, Maurice had this to say.

"I don't have any of those guys on playing Adam Lowry's line and I really, really like Mark Scheifele's line so there's not a lot of centremen to move them around with."

It was matter-of-fact and, as I speculated in last week's Q&A, I believe Maurice feels like he has two important lines solved and therefore set in stone. If Winnipeg is going to go to war with Scheifele's line intact, Jets fans are going to want to be confident in its ability to keep producing.

For Scheifele's part, he trusts his wingers to keep making critical reads.

"You've got to read when the guy has full control – when he has that extra foot of space to be able to make a play. That's when you get that chance to feed that guy in the slot, feed that guy back door or whatever it is."

It's early, but the returns from Winnipeg's top line have been good. If the Jets are to have the season that so many pundits expect, Scheifele is going to need to stay front and centre in their success.

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1109211 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning coach Jon Cooper's fight against pediatric cancer continues

By Nick Kelly Published: October 9, 2018

TAMPA — Jon Cooper stands next to the gray post, hidden from the sight of most who gaze toward the platform in the front of the Lexus Lounge, waiting for his cue.

The emcee then announces his name and hands Cooper the microphone. The couple hundred people in attendance for the kickoff dinner for Coop's Catch for Kids meet his entrance with applause.

"Wow," Cooper says. "I can't believe this is Year 3."

He also had trouble believing how many faces looked back at him, there at Amalie Arena on Monday to raise money for the fight against pediatric cancer.

Longtime ESPN commentator Dick Vitale sat in a leather chair two feet away. Rays manager Kevin Cash stood in the middle of the crowd. Next to Cash, many Lightning players watched their coach speak. They all made up what Cooper and Vitale described as the event's largest crowd to date.

"The humbling part of this whole experience is the people who come and show their support," Cooper said. "You're passionate about a cause but to watch all the people come and support you and your passion for that cause as well, it's so rewarding."

It's not by accident. Ask anyone involved in putting together the two-day, which included fishing on Tuesday, and they will tell you attendance grows each year because of Cooper's passion in doing everything he can to fight pediatric cancer throughout the year.

"We're seeing him blossom into a real Tampa Bay icon," said Charley Belcher, Monday's emcee and a Fox 13 reporter whose daughter beat leukemia.

Said Vitale, "You know he can coach, but he is a quality human being. He cares about giving back."

That became clear when Vitale and Cooper met a few years ago at one of Vitale's annual galas. Cooper called Vitale shortly after. He wanted to do something like that and asked if Vitale could speak at it.

Vitale said yes and has said yes each year.

"I come here because I know what he's doing," Vitale said. "He's helping kids. To me, there's nothing greater in life than if you can bring a smile to someone's face."

Cooper has certainly brought a smile to Weston Hermann's face on multiple occasions. Vitale introduced Cooper to Hermann, a 12-year-old Parrish boy whose brain cancer is now in remission, after learning how much he loved hockey.

Vitale called Cooper and asked if he could get a Lightning shirt with Hermann's name on it.

"Better than that, why don't we get the kid to a Lightning game and I will let him skate with the team," Cooper responded.

Not long after, Hermann took part in a Lightning morning skate. He was also the star of last year's Coop's Catch. Now closing in on a year in remission, Hermann was a featured guest again this year.

Cooper's reasoning for giving kids fighting cancer experiences they won't forget is simple.

"I'm 51 years old, so I can look back and have 51 years of experiences to conjure up memories and all of the fun I have had," Cooper said. "I sit there and think about the young child who is 6 or 8 years old and may not be given that opportunity."

Not a bad day for our 3rd annual #CoopsCatchForKids! 💎💎 Thank you to our @tblightning players, all of our fishing crews, and the tournament's partner Heritage Insurance for continuing to help support the fight against pediatric cancer. pic.twitter.com/TgFOTbJUUC

— Lightning Foundation (@LightningFDN) October 9, 2018

"We have a chance to reach out and affect people's lives and change some things," Ryan Callahan said. "He wants us to do that, and I think he leads by example with it."

Cooper leads by example as he's inspired by Tony Colton, who died from cancer at the age of 17 in 2017. Colton did everything from serving as a spokesperson for the Pediatric Cancer Foundation to lobbying on Capitol Hill during his seven-year battle, and got Cooper's attention at the 2015 Sneaker Soiree in Tampa.

Colton soon became the inspiration for Coop's Catch.

He continues to inspire Cooper today as the coach grows support and funds for the fight against pediatric cancer. Cooper's legacy in Tampa might be growing because of these efforts, but that's not his goal. All he is trying to do is fulfill a promise he made to Colton in his hospital room during his final days.

"I will do everything in my power," Cooper told him, "to continue the fight."

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1109251 Websites

The Athletic / Ranking the top prospects for the 2019 NHL Draft

By Corey Pronman Oct 9, 2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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We're about a few weeks into the start of the junior season and, after getting views of these players at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup and their junior teams, here is my early stance on the top prospects for the 2019 NHL Draft.

My way too early assessment of the 2019 NHL Draft is that this is an above-average draft class. The class has a significant number of forwards who I think can be impact players. The talent up front, and particularly down the middle, is very strong; however, I don't think this is a great draft if your team wants a defenseman.

I split players up into tiers. Here is how you should interpret them:

Special prospect: Projects to be one of the very best at their position in the league.

Elite prospect: Projects to be top 10-15 percent in the league at their position.

High-end prospect: Projects as a legit top-line forward who can play on PP1/top-pairing defenseman.

Very good prospect/first-round grade: Projects as a top-six forward/top-four defenseman.

SPECIAL PROSPECT

Jack Hughes, C, USNTDP-USHL

Hughes is one of the best skating forwards I've seen in the past decade. I'm not sold he's Connor McDavid/Nathan MacKinnon level, but he's one small notch below. He brings elite speed to go along with elite puck skills and great vision. He's the ultimate playmaker who drives play like few others. His physicality remains his biggest weakness as a small, slight center, but everything else about his game screams top level player. He's not a generational prospect, but projects to be an average/quality first overall prospect.

ELITE PROSPECT

I didn't want to create another tier, but in the elite prospect group, I would say the No. 2-4 prospects have a mild separation from the rest. Further, I don't think the gap between Kaapo Kakko to Jack Hughes is that large and, if Kakko continues to play at the level he's shown all season, he could start to generate a debate.

Kaapo Kakko, LW, TPS-Liiga

Kakko's been playing a major role for TPS to start the season, being a top-line forward for his Liiga team. His skill level and playmaking are high-end and border on elite. He can beat defenders 1-on-1 with ease, maneuvers very well in small areas and can create offense out of nothing. He won't wow you with physicality or speed, both are about average for me and he needs to bulk up quite a bit, but he has the potential to be a premier playmaker off the wing in the NHL due to his skill. He also has a very good shot and can beat goalies from a distance.

Kirby Dach, C, Saskatoon-WHL

Dach has the kind of tools you dream of when thinking of an ideal prospect. A 6-foot-4, right-handed center, with high-end puck skills and hockey sense who can skate competently is the kind of prospect you can easily see impacting the NHL. He's been on fire to start the WHL season, and I've been very impressed by his offensive creativity and ability to see the ice.

Matt Boldy, LW, USNTDP-USHL

Boldy's development has been something to behold as a guy who wasn't considered a top guy in his age group a few years ago is now considered one of the very best prospects in the 2019 class. His skill level is very high and his hockey IQ is elite. His creativity is ridiculous and his ability to make unique plays with consistency is quite noticeable. Since first coming into the USNTDP, he's shot up two inches to 6-foot-2, and his skating, considered a weakness by some scouts I talked to last season, hasn't seemed that affected — if anything, it's improved.

Trevor Zegras, C, USNTDP-USHL

When I talk to my USA based sources about Zegras, the word Clayton Keller gets thrown around quite a bit. He's got a ton of high-end tools. His speed, puck skills and vision all get plus grades. He can drive play and create chances with frequency but needs to bulk up and be better in battles. He'll be the No. 2 center on the NTDP behind Hughes, but a careful observation of his abilities will reveal a player who can be a game breaker in the pros.

Vasili Podkolzin, RW, St. Petersburg-MHL

Podkolzin is a very fun player to watch. He's very skilled and can make unique plays as a puck handler and passer, but it's the energy he brings to every shift that is noticeable. He's a fierce competitor, who battles hard for every puck and always believes he has a lane to take pucks to the net. His stride is a little weird but powerful, and he can get up the ice with above-average speed.

HIGH-END NHL PROSPECT

Dylan Cozens, C, Lethbridge-WHL

Cozens is a unique player as a 6-foot-3 center with truly elite speed. There are few defenders who can stop him when he comes powering through the neutral zone. You take those physical elements and add in good hands, vision, work ethic and finishing ability, and you have a complete player. Cozens will play a major role on what is expected to be one of the top teams in the CHL.

Alex Turcotte, C, USNTDP-USHL

Turcotte is a very well-rounded center prospect. He can beat defenders with high-end speed, barreling down on the rush. He has great hands and can break guys down 1-on-1, he can make plays at a quality level and he's a good two-way center. Turcotte may not be the biggest guy, but he competes hard. Whoever drafts him will be getting a player that can be relied upon in any situation and be relied on to play any style of game.

Bowen Byram, D, Vancouver-WHL

Byram is the top defenseman available in this class and projects to be a top pairing all-situations type of player. He's a very good skater, with good hands and can break a shift open, but his best trait is his hockey sense. His vision is fantastic, and he can really stand out with his offensive instincts. Defensively he's solid, too, and projects to handle tough minutes fine. I expect him to have a big year in the WHL.

Daniil Gutik, LW, Yaroslavl-MHL

Gutik is one of my favorite prospects to watch in the draft class. He's got big-time skills, he can dangle with nearly anyone in his age group and make big-time plays; and at 6-foot-3, that's quite desirable. He has a lot of work to do in terms of adding speed to his game and improving his compete level off the puck, but he also can take over a shift and be a guy who runs your power play off the half-wall.

Ryan Suzuki, C, Barrie-OHL

Suzuki, a former first-overall OHL pick, has been on a tear to start his second OHL season. He reminds me at times of his brother with his fantastic offensive instincts, but he's a better skater who can play with pace and skill, while having a quality all-around game. I see Suzuki as a guy who can log significant minutes down the middle as a NHLer and be one of his team's better playmakers.

VERY GOOD NHL PROSPECT/FIRST-ROUND GRADE

Raphael Lavoie, RW, Halifax-QMJHL

Lavoie is a player with a very intriguing skill set who has improved massively in the past 12 or so months. He's 6-foot-4, has very good puck skills and skates quite well for a player his size. He can break a shift open like few players his size can. He's not a perfect player by any means — for example, I'm not sure I'd call him a dynamic playmaker —



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but he competes well and I think there's some two-way potential in his game with more attention to his defensive positioning.

Peyton Krebs, C, Kootenay-WHL

Krebs is the former first-overall WHL Bantam pick in a WHL class that looks very good. He is a great skater who also plays quick with high-end offensive instincts and makes a ton of plays. He's not an incredibly flashy player, but Krebs can be a very solid all-around forward for an NHL team while contributing a lot of offense.

Cole Caufield, RW, USNTDP-USHL

Caufield is going to be an often-discussed prospect this year due to his size, at just under 5-foot-7, and his incredible goal-scoring ability. His release is off the charts good, and he's got great offensive instincts. There will be questions about whether his skills/playmaking/speed are dynamic enough at his size to be a top-six forward in the NHL, but those questions were asked of Alex DeBrincat, too, and I think Caufield is a better skater.

Nick Robertson, LW, Peterborough-OHL

Robertson is one of the youngest players in the draft, and thus he may not have off the charts numbers this season (not to mention he's currently hurt). But his skills are very intriguing. His hands and shot get plus-plus grades, and he can create offense in numerous ways. The main issue with Robertson is, unlike his brother, Jason, a second-round pick by the Stars in 2017 who is well over six-foot, Nick is barely 5-foot-9.

Anttoni Honka, D, JYP-Liiga

When I've watched Honka, I see a defenseman who can control the game from the back end. His skills and skating are very good, and he can make tough offensive plays and rushes. But what stands out to me is his offensive brain. He understands how to create chances at a high level with his vision and patience. He also gets shots through quite well. Honka is small, though, and he'll need to get better defensively.

Alex Newhook, C, Victoria-BCHL

Newhook was one of the best players in Canadian Jr. A last season and likely will be the best player at that level this season. He's not the biggest player, but he's a center with high-end skating ability and vision who has the capability to drive a line at the pro level. His skills don't blow you away, but they're quite good, and he has a lot of offense in his game.

Philip Broberg, D, AIK-Allsvenskan

There are very few 6-foot-3 defensemen who can skate like Broberg. When he gets a head of steam, he's impossible to strip the puck from. He's taken a regular shift so far this season versus men and has looked decent, albeit not amazing. The question with Broberg is how much offense he has. The physical tools are off the charts but the skills and vision are very average.

Yaroslav Likhachyov, LW, Gatineau-QMJHL

Likhachyov is a player that will require a lot of projection. He's very young as a September 2001 birthdate, small and slight, but he's got a ton of skill — he's up there with the best in the class in that regard. He was very good at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup and has been good but not amazing to start his QMJHL season. He'll need time to get quicker and stronger, but he has premier playmaking ability.

Players in the conversation (alphabetical order):

Vladimir Alistrov, LW, Edmonton-WHL

Maxim Cajkovic, RW, Saint John-QMJHL

Ryder Donovan, C, Duluth East-US High School

Albin Grewe, LW, Djurgarden-J20 SuperElit

Nils Hoglander, LW, Rogle-SHL

Simon Holmstrom, RW, HV71-J20 SuperElit

Henri Nikkanen, C, Jukurit-Liiga

Blake Murray, C, Sudbury-OHL

Phillip Tomasino, C, Niagara-OHL

Michal Teply, C, Liberec-Czech Extraliga

Elmer Soderblom, LW, Frolunda-J20 SuperElit

Matthew Robertson, D, Edmonton-WHL

Alex Vlasic, D, USNTDP-USHL

Cam York, D, USNTDP-USHL

Top 5 Goalies

This is a quality goalie class. I don't know if I'll get there by June, but I expect Spencer Knight to be a first-round pick.

Spencer Knight, USNTDP-USHL

Taylor Gauthier, Prince George-WHL

Cameron Rowe, USNTDP-USHL

Hugo Alnefeldt, HV71-J20 SuperElit

Dustin Wolf, Everett-WHL

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The Athletic / The worst team I ever covered: NHL writers on pissed players, disastrous trades, and a butt goal

By Richard Deitsch

There's an old sportswriting axiom that states the best stories reside in the losing locker room.

I've never bought that as an absolute, but for this week I am embracing the insufferable, the miserable, the worst of the worst.

When I worked at Sports Illustrated, one of my titles was special projects editor, and part of that charter was to get the staff involved in projects across multiple sports. One of those projects was a series on the 25 Most Hated Teams in Sports History. That ended up spawning additional pieces, including the worst NBA teams our writers had covered during their careers.

Since then, I've always wanted to do a similar project, and this week The Athletic will unveil essays from some terrific sports media people (including from some colleagues at The Athletic) on the worst team they've covered as a professional.

Below, the list of insufferable teams and the person who covered (endured) it.

NFL (Monday)

1990 Denver Broncos (Adam Schefter)

1994 Dallas Cowboys (Dale Hansen)

2000 & 2001 San Diego Chargers (Jim Trotter)

2003 New York Giants (Tara Sullivan)

2010 Denver Broncos (Lindsay Jones)

2012 New York Jets (Kimberley A. Martin)

2012 Philadelphia Eagles (Les Bowen)

2016 Jacksonville Jaguars (Ryan O'Halloran)

2017 Indianapolis Colts (Stephen Holder)

NHL (Tuesday)

2003-04 Pittsburgh Penguins (Trenni Kusnierek)

2005-06 St. Louis Blues (Jeremy Rutherford)

2007-08 Atlanta Thrashers (Craig Custance)

2009-10 Toronto Maple Leafs (James Mirtle)

2010-11 New York Islanders (Katie Strang)

2011-12 Columbus Blue Jackets (Aaron Portzline)

2013-14 Vancouver Canucks (Jason Botchford)

2014-15 Buffalo Sabres (John Vogl)

MLB (Wednesday)

1986 California Angels (Gene Wojciechowski)

1988 Baltimore Orioles (Richard Justice)

1993 New York Mets (Frank Isola)

1995 Oakland A's (Pedro Gomez)

1998 Florida Marlins (Dave O'Brien)

2002 Chicago Cubs (Teddy Greenstein)

2012-16 New York Yankees (Marly Rivera)

2018 Kansas City Royals (Rustin Dodd)

NBA/WNBA (Thursday)

1992-93 Washington Bullets (David Aldridge)

1998-99 Cleveland Cavaliers (Jason Lloyd)

2005-06 Portland Trail Blazers (John Canzano)

2005-06 New York Knicks (Howard Beck)

2007-08 Golden State Warriors (Tim Kawakami)

2008-09 Los Angeles Clippers (Lisa Dillman)

2011 Tulsa Shock (Kelly Hines)

2013-14 Los Angeles Lakers (Dave McMenamin)

2014-15 Brooklyn Nets (Tim Bontemps)

2015-16 Philadelphia 76ers (Derek Bodner)

Colleges (Friday)

1994 Kentucky Football (Pat Forde)

1997 Maryland Football (Seth Emerson)

1999-2000 Northwestern Basketball (Mark Lazarus)

2002 Stanford Football (Jon Wilner)

2002-03 Villanova Basketball (Dana O'Neil)

2008 Washington Football (Ted Miller)

2014 Michigan Football (Angelique Chengelis)

2015 Idaho Football (Michael Shawn-Dugar)

Let us know in the comments below if you have a particular team that stands out as the worst for you. And, please, enjoy the misery:

Trenni Kusnierek, NBC Sports Boston

Have you ever covered a team that endured an 18-game winless streak? If you haven't, I'm not sure you can claim the title of "Worst Team I Ever Covered."

Welcome to the 2003-2004 Pittsburgh Penguins season. It was my second year as the team reporter for FSN Pittsburgh (now Root Sports). You will definitely recognize some names on their staff and roster. Mario Lemieux was the captain, Marc Bergevin was an alternate captain, and Eddie Olczyk was the head coach. Yet this team still managed to endure a streak someone at the time called "the Bataan Death March."

Yep, the Penguins went 0-17-1. In the span of 18 losses, only once did this team even get to overtime. That lengthy losing streak began with a 3-1 home loss on January 13, 2004, against the Tampa Bay Lightning. The Pens didn't win again until February 25 at the Phoenix Coyotes — and it took overtime to finally notch a victory.

This team didn't just lose; they lost in epic fashion. The black and gold set the NHL record for the longest home losing streak at 14. They were 30th in the league in goals allowed and allowed the most power play goals in the NHL that year. For good measure, they also allowed the most short-handed goals that season.

Despite all those ugly statistics, the guys were still fantastic to be around. Eddie O was a rookie coach who was my broadcast partner the prior season. I may be forgetting something, but I don't think he had a major meltdown the entire time. Bergevin was a practical joker who always kept the mood light. (The previous season he put rocks in my suitcase. A fact I



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discovered after lugging said suitcase up three flights of stairs following a 4 a.m. arrival from a road trip that ended in Phoenix. When we ran into each other at the Winter Classic at Gillette Stadium a few years back, Bergy still denied it with a sly smile.) Steve McKenna gave me some of the best book suggestions I've ever received while working as a sports reporter. And at the end of the day, I got to watch Mario (bleeping) Lemieux night in and night out.

I assure you it is much harder to cover a team that loses all the time than one that wins. Especially when you are covering TWO AT THE SAME TIME. I also covered the Pittsburgh Pirates (72-89) that year.

Jeremy Rutherford, The Athletic

My editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch asked if I'd be interested in covering the 2005-06 Blues. Finally, my break. He must have seen something in my writing or reporting that made him think I'd be a good fit on a pro beat. It wasn't long before I learned it wasn't any of that. What my editor saw was how bad the Blues were going to be, so did everyone else on the staff, and as a native St. Louisan looking to move up the ranks, I was the only one interested.

Let me take you back to the NHL hockey scene in St. Louis in 2005-06: The league was just coming off a year-long lockout that alienated fans, Al MacInnis was retiring, the Blues were being sold and Chris Pronger and his \$9.5 million salary were being traded to help facilitate the team's sale. If that didn't soil interest early in the year, maybe it was the two victories in the first 15 games. Poor Dallas Drake, as respected a player the NHL has ever saw, who was named captain in his 14th season in the league and now he was answering to a rookie reporter every night about why the MacInnis-less, Pronger-less Blues were meaningless. Head coach Mike Kitchen, who replaced the fired Joel Quenneville, yes the same Joel Quenneville that would go on to win three Stanley Cups with the Chicago Blackhawks, could do nothing to change the course of the season. And just when the Blues thought they were at rock bottom, they played the New York Rangers on Dec. 10, 2005.

That's the night the Rangers' Martin Rucinsky shot a puck that went off the glass behind the Blues' net, bounced back over the crossbar, hit goalie Patrick Lalime in the butt and went in for a 5-4 victory in overtime. It was the worst goal I had ever seen, but don't take it from me because it was only the 26th game I'd ever covered. Take it from this guy: "That was the worst goal I've ever seen," said the Rangers' Jaromir Jagr, who was in his 15th NHL season at the time.

In January, the Blues traded Doug Weight to Carolina, where he became the latest Blue to leave a franchise still looking for its first Stanley Cup and win one elsewhere. Meanwhile, the Blues endured a 13-game losing streak, won just one of their last 19 games, finished with the second-lowest point total (57) in team history and saw their 25-year playoff streak come to an end.

The franchise was finally sold to a group led by Dave Checketts, who made a popular choice by hiring John Davidson as president of hockey. Things were looking up, as the Blues had the No. 1 overall pick in the draft for the first time in their history. They chose Erik Johnson over Jonathan Toews, Nicklas Backstrom and Phil Kessel, and par for the course — pardon the pun — Johnson would be injured in an accident on the golf course and later traded.

If that wasn't enough to show it wasn't the Blues' year, the St. Louis Cardinals won the 2006 World Series, their 10th championship in team history, further cementing the city as a baseball town.

Craig Custance, The Athletic

It wasn't even that that the 2007-08 Atlanta Thrashers overall record was so bad. In the history of the franchise, there were way worse point totals than the 76 they put up. It was the long-term repercussions that made that season so memorable.

The Thrashers had just won the Southeast Division the previous season. Sure, they got swept by the New York Rangers in the first round, but it was all part of the growing pains of a young franchise. This was the year

the fanbase was supposed to be solidified, the growth as a winning franchise apparent. There was star power in Ilya Kovalchuk and Marian Hossa. A Cup winner behind the bench in Bob Hartley. A high-end draft pick in goal with Kari Lehtonen.

It was a disaster.

They started the season 0-6. They were outscored 27-9. Hartley had just received a contract extension, and I was asking him about his job security five games into an 82-game season. He was fired after the sixth game. Hossa cut off contract extension talks and was traded after 60 games. Kovalchuk was gone a couple years later. Then the entire franchise moved to Winnipeg. It was like witnessing a train wreck, only one that happened so slowly you didn't realize the extent of the damage until the pile of wreckage was steaming in Manitoba. That was the year that did them in. RIP Mighty Thrash.

James Mirtle, The Athletic

I haven't been asked this question before. The hard part in answering it, when it comes to the Leafs beat, is there are a lot of options to choose from.

I ran the idea by a few other beat people and team staff, and their answers were all over the place. Many chose 2014-15, when the Leafs won just 11 of their final 51 games and new president Brendan Shanahan fired... almost everyone.

Me, I'll go earlier: the 2009-10 Leafs.

The Leafs have been awful a lot in my 11 years on the beat, but what made 2009-10 special was they were horrible and didn't have a first-round pick to make up for it. That September, new GM Brian Burke dealt Toronto's 2010 and 2011 first-rounders to division rival Boston for Phil Kessel.

Kessel proved a fine addition as a goal scorer, but Burke had dramatically overestimated how good his team was. His biggest free-agent signing, Mike Komisarek, became one of the highest paid defencemen in the league but struggled badly in Year 1. Another marquee addition, Jonas (The Monster) Gustavsson, was overwhelmed in his first North American season after starter Vesa Toskala flamed out with a .874 save percentage. A third newcomer? Enforcer Colton Orr.

With those additions joining the likes of Jason Blake and Jeff Finger, the Leafs won just one of their first 13 games and three of their first 20.

Let me tell you, the mood in that dressing room was grim. And I was there every day as a junior reporter for The Globe and Mail, Canada's national newspaper.

With the season already lost, Burke acquired Dion Phaneuf from Calgary in a blockbuster deal in late January, setting the stage for him to be named captain a few months later. (That, too, did not work out.)

The Leafs finished second to last in 2009-10, winning just 26 times in regulation or overtime. They couldn't score (26th in goals for in the NHL) and couldn't keep pucks out of their net (29th in goals against). They had the worst power play and the worst penalty kill in the league.

They gave the Bruins, an already strong team in their division, Tyler Seguin, and watched them win the Stanley Cup the following season. Then Boston drafted Dougie Hamilton, a top pair defenceman, with the Leafs' other first-round pick in June 2011.

What made the Leafs' 2009-10 season particularly hard to stomach was it robbed the fan base of hope. It guaranteed talent-poor Toronto wouldn't and couldn't rebuild — for years. From the moment that trade was made, they were locked into mediocrity, finishing in the bottom 10 in all six of the next full 82-game seasons.

Only in-the-tank-for-Connor McDavid Edmonton was worse than Toronto over that stretch. And this season was a huge reason why it was a dark decade for the Leafs.

Katie Strang, The Athletic



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The worst team I've ever covered was the 2010-11 New York Islanders. I was in my mid-20's and was the only traveling beat writer at the time; I was covering the team for Newsday on Long Island. There was goalie drama and an uncanny list of injuries and dysfunction at the very top. There was a six-week stretch where the team won just once. There was a streak in which the team dropped 19 of 21 games. After every game, I was usually the only one in the locker room, fumbling over and over to conceive of new ways to ask the same question, probably agitating and annoying everyone in my wake.

It was also one of the best years of my life, at least as a professional. You know why? You learn a lot about people when they're walking through the fire. It's the clearest and most convincing insight into someone's character. Some of my favorite people in the sport of hockey are from that team. I wrote plenty of stories that pissed off players and coaches and people in management — stories that were unseemly, but true — and yet the overwhelming majority treated me with a professionalism and decency I will never forget.

Players like John Tavares, Matt Moulson, Matt Martin, Kyle Okposo, Frans Nielsen, Mike Mottau, Josh Bailey, Blake Comeau, Robbie Schremp and Radek Martinek. P.R. man Kimber Auerbach (who heard more expletive-filled outbursts than he deserved). Coaches like Dean Chynoweth and Scott Allen and Ryan Ward and, above all else, head coach Scott Gordon. He had a tough job, and a shitty team and some bad luck, and he never once took it out on me. He was gracious and kind and never made me feel stupid, though I'm sure I gave him ample opportunity. It is hard to see someone you know and like lose their job, and when he was fired during that season, that was my first real exposure to that. He took my call 20 minutes after the worst day of his professional life. Years later, he called me on my wedding day. I'm looking forward to the day he returns to the NHL.

That's the best thing I learned from that miserable year covering a truly dreadful team. You figure out who you're dealing with pretty damn quickly.

Aaron Portzline, The Athletic

The early years of the Blue Jackets' franchise were mostly hopeless. The busted draft picks, the splashy trades that backfired, the wasted money spent in free agency ... they were the sporting world's example of how NOT to start and run a franchise, topped off by bombastic, volcanic general manager Doug MacLean.

But the one season that stands out — the year when the misery and mismanagement all came together — was long past the reign of MacLean and long after expansion could be used as an excuse. It was undoubtedly the 2011-12 Jackets season.

The team made a big trade in summer 2011, acquiring center Jeff Carter from the Flyers for Jake Voracek and a first-round draft pick that turned out to be Sean Couturier. (Gulp.)

Carter was so horrified at the thought of being a Blue Jacket that he went into hiding for days before even taking a phone call from Columbus management, much less speaking with the media. Blue Jackets' management group and star forward Rick Nash flew to visit Carter in Sea Isle, N.J. — his summer home — to talk him off the ledge.

The Blue Jackets lived up to all of Carter's fears, though. It started early. When the Blue Jackets, on their way to a 0-7-1 start, came off the ice at the end of an early season practice, Vinny Prospal stomped into the dressing room, hurling his gear at his locker. We made eye contact — I was covering the team for the Columbus Dispatch — and he lifted his head as if to say, "Get the hell over here."

Vinny spoke perfect English, but when he was passionate his Czech accent became stronger. "You have question for me?"

I didn't utter one syllable before Prospal went on a tirade aimed at coach Scott Arniel, saying the Blue Jackets didn't practice hard enough, that they didn't play hard enough, that they weren't mentally or physically prepared to play, and that they deserved to lose.

The season went downhill from there.

Carter was out of the lineup with an injury when the Blue Jackets traveled to play his old mates in Philadelphia on Nov. 5. He asked to travel with them, and the club obliged thinking an act of generosity might brighten his attitude. But as the Blue Jackets were getting beat 9-2, Carter was shown on the scoreboard — not with Jackets' management or teammates, as is customary — but in a private box with friends from Philadelphia.

The Blue Jackets were 5-13-3 by Thanksgiving, 9-22-5 just after Christmas and 11-25-5 when Arniel was fired, mercifully, on Jan. 9.

He got off easy.

At a midseason owner's meeting, it was decided that Carter would be traded to the highest bidder and Rick Nash, the captain, would be dangled about the league to gauge his value. When Nash learned of this, he took it a step further, requesting a trade. On Jan. 27, in the throes of a six-game losing streak, the NHL announced that Columbus and the Blue Jackets had been selected to host the 2013 NHL All-Star Game. The announcement was made as a small group of fans protested in front of Nationwide Arena, demanding change at the top of the organization.

The stain and stink of that year knew no bounds. The Blue Jackets finished with the worst record in the NHL (29-46-7) by nine points, then lost the draft lottery to Edmonton. Carter, who was traded to Los Angeles at the trade deadline, went on to win the Stanley Cup that year with the Kings. The 2013 All-Star Game was canceled due to the owner's lockout. To this day, longtime employees of the Blue Jackets just shudder at the memory of 2011-12.

Jason Botchford, The Athletic

Thirty years from now, god willing, I will still be telling stories to aspiring, wide-eyed sportswriters about the 2013-14 Vancouver Canucks.

They won't believe any of it.

How bad was it?

It was so bad the owners threatened legal action, actually alleging defamation, if people claimed they hired the head coach of their own team.

It was so bad the head coach chose to live in a different country for the season rather than live in, you know, Vancouver. It was so bad fans chanted in their home arena for the most successful general manager in team history to be fired. That chanting has been cited as a key reason they got their wish.

It's not so much this Canucks team was the least talented in franchise history. But they sure were the worst coached I've covered in 13 years working for The Province. They had one player get to 50 points. They had one player get to 20 goals. Their final 42 games, they got just 31 points. Think about this: Tom Sestito played 77 games for this team. In the rest of his nine-year NHL career, he averaged less than ten.

I will always understand the appeal of John Tortorella. His words and delivery are captivating. Often, I found myself internally pumping fists listening to him. It was only on my drives home when I'd think things like "Wait a minute, he just said the Sedins are going to kill penalties. This has no chance of working. What the heck is he thinking?" In their glorious 18-year careers, the Sedins averaged more than 20 minutes a game in just one season. This is the one. It was their least productive season in a decade. Despite the ice time, they combined for just 97 points. The next year, with a different coach, they combined for 149 and they played far fewer minutes.

Tortorella has since admitted he was never fully invested in the Canucks. It sure showed. There was even a Murphy bed built into his coach's office with the hope he'd spend more time at the rink and less time commuting home across the U.S. border.



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How bad was it? I've written hundreds of words already before mentioning the time Tortorella charged into an opponent's dressing room at intermission, intending to fight Calgary's head coach. The season was so bad I've written hundreds of words before mentioning the Tortorella decision which forever altered Canucks history. Roberto Luongo had waited for years to play in an outdoor game. The Canucks finally got one called the Heritage Classic. Luongo fussed over all details for months, making sure he had the right equipment to match the special uniforms. He regularly talked openly about how much this game meant to him. But when the day finally arrived, Tortorella tapped the backup, benching Luongo.

Luongo would never play another game for the Canucks because of it. Despite this being only the first year Tortorella's massive five-year contract, he was fired.

The Canucks had no other choice.

John Vogl, The Athletic

The thing about the 2014-15 Buffalo Sabres is they were supposed to be the worst. The players and coaches knew it. The fans knew it. Even the NHL was fully aware.

Sure enough, nothing could stop the Tank, though pride and goaltending came close.

The raw numbers were hideous:

Buffalo was 23-51-8, matching the franchise record for losses set just a year earlier. (It's been rough around here.)

The Sabres went 38 days without a victory, completely bypassing the month of January during a 14-game losing streak. All of the losses were in regulation, so it was easier to find a 50-degree day in the dead of winter than it was a single point.

Tyler Ennis was the lone player with more than 15 goals, leading the team with 20. The only other time the Sabres' scoring leader had a total that low was the lockout-shortened year of 2012-13, when Thomas Vanek potted 20 in just 38 games.

Buffalo's goal differential was minus-113 as it got outshot 4,483 to 2,694 at even strength. That Corsi of minus-1,789 had players seeing pucks in their sleep and is a whopping 704 away from anything else the NHL has ever seen.

But this team went beyond numbers. Players were shipped out if they performed too well. There was an all-out war within the fanbase as the Sabres' plan to stink divided the masses. The disagreement extended to media members, who sniped at each other relentlessly. A USA Hockey official visiting the city stopped his news conference to deliver a diatribe about tanking. Near the end of the season, when every loss mattered, the fight descended to players versus fans.

Nothing about this club was pretty.

Darcy Regier laid the groundwork in April 2013 when he said the Sabres would endure "suffering" in order to secure high draft picks. When Tim Murray replaced Regier as general manager in January 2014, he ran with the plan like he was Usain Bolt.

Murray knew what finishing last meant. The way the NHL Draft was set up, the team that resided in the cellar was guaranteed either the first or second pick. With "generational" centers Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel on the draft board, Buffalo was determined to get one of them.

The NHL, with competitive integrity in mind, quickly changed the draft rules. The league lowered the lottery odds of the last-place team. Starting in 2016, the first three picks would be determined via lottery, meaning last place could fall all the way to fourth.

But that would be for 2016. During the 2014-15 season, it was full speed to the bottom of the league and the top two of the draft.

Murray traded his No. 1 defenseman (Tyler Myers) and his first-line right winger (Drew Stafford) for forward Evander Kane, who'd already undergone season-ending shoulder surgery. The GM traded starting goalie Jhonas Enroth on Feb. 11. When the Sabres responded by going a relatively scorching 3-3-2, Murray shipped out goalie Michal Neuvirth (.924 save percentage) and brought in Chad Johnson (.889).

Still, with nine games left, last place was in doubt. Buffalo was only five points "ahead" of Arizona. As fate would ingloriously have it, the teams met in Buffalo on March 26, 2015. The home crowd cheered when the visitors scored. Sabres fans roared in appreciation when the Coyotes picked up a 4-3 overtime win, giving Arizona 54 points and Buffalo 48.

"I've always spoken extremely high of our fans," longtime defenseman Mike Weber said. "I don't even know if disappointed is the word. ... This is a whole new low right now."

Actually, the Sabres wouldn't secure the low until their penultimate game. A loss in Columbus cemented last place and, two months later, Eichel.

The Sabres still aren't winning, finishing at the bottom again last season. Animosity remains between the pro-and anti-tank forces. Looking back at the angst, anger and dreariness of the 2014-15 season isn't fun for players, fans or staff, as then-coach Ted Nolan told longtime Buffalo columnist Bucky Gleason last year.

"You could take Toe Blake, Al Arbour and Scotty Bowman, and I don't think all three of them together could have done much better – or better at all," Nolan said. "It was very, very difficult."

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The Athletic / Scouting the West: Giants' Bowen Byram leads the way among 2019 draft-eligible defencemen

By Ryan Biech Oct 5, 2018

Although it's still the start of the season for many of the NHL's feeder leagues, prospect evaluation at this time of year remains critically important. Doing a thorough review now gives us a base of information on each player. Then as you check in on them throughout the season, you can get an idea of what skills they have improved and possibly project improvement in other areas.

It also allows us an ongoing forum to discuss, dissect and analyze these prospects. It's easy to just do a quick draft ranking at the end of the year, with a blurb on each player, and then call it a day. There is much more to be gained from trying to emulate what NHL organizations will do in their scouting throughout the year and get a sense for the information they take with them to their draft table. It doesn't hurt that it's fun, too.

This draft class features a very strong crop from the WHL, and some interesting players from the BCHL, and so here at The Athletic Vancouver, we will be doing in-depth video and stat profiles on as many of them as possible. With the 2019 NHL draft being here in Vancouver, there will be considerably more interest in this year's crop.

Kicking off the series will be the defenceman that many have their eyes on, Bowen Byram of the Vancouver Giants.

A smart, smooth and effective defender, Byram is projected to be the first defenceman off the board and hasn't done anything so far this season to cast any doubt on that projection. In five WHL games this year, Byram has one goal and one assist but that isn't a complete indication of what kind of impact player he is.

Let's dive into his game, the things that make him attractive as a draft prospect, his underlying stats and what to keep an eye on as the season progresses.

Once you start to focus on Byram's game, one trait quickly becomes apparent, how smart and patient he is with the puck. He is very effective at drawing opponents toward him, then making a pass through the seam that is created. For the most part, he doesn't rush this process, either. One such example is from a power play in the first period of this Sept. 30 game against Spokane:

Byram appears to have space before receiving the puck, but the two Chiefs penalty killers close the gap quickly with the forward pressuring all the way to the boards. Byram puts his back to the forward, pulling him down and then finds the seam to Brayden Watts. The puck goes back to the point and the Giants were able to keep possession.

The simple play would've been to chip it down the boards and let Owen Hardy go after it, with support from Watts coming from the slot. It would've likely been a 2-on-1 in the corner against Hardy and the puck may have been sent down the ice before Watts could get in there.

Later in that same power play, Byram took that patient approach to another level.

Through his own read of the play or his coaches yelling for a full change, Byram comes all the way back after being pressured by the Chiefs forward looking to change. Byram allows his teammates to fully change and then carries the puck up the ice into the Spokane zone. He didn't lose possession, exited the zone and got the puck into the Chiefs zone with control.

The Giants remained in the offensive zone for the rest of the power play and ultimately scored moments after the penalty expired.

Another example of the patience to draw a player toward him and then thread the gap came later in that same game and it eventually led to a goal scored by Byram:

I wouldn't call that a high percentage play; in fact, it's a little riskier than some coaches would like to see. But it drew the two forwards to him and allowed the Giants to enter the zone in a 3-on-2 situation. The two Spokane forwards who Byram split with the pass just moments earlier, just float into the zone and then watch the puck carrier, leaving Byram all alone to walk in and then snap it through the screen.

Ignoring the rather suspect defending there, it's a good illustration of what Byram can do with the puck. For the most part, he makes the safe play but does show the confidence needed to make passes like the one above. He will try to do unconventional things when moving the puck, even if it doesn't always work out for him.

Byram was out on the ice a lot for the Giants in that third period and except for that turnover, had a pretty flawless showing. The Giants scored with 45 seconds left to tie the game and then won it in a shootout.

The play is a relatively safe bet — both of the Thunderbirds forwards are highly unlikely to knock down the puck and then create offence — but that possibility is still there. Byram looks so calm, flipping the puck a few feet off the ice to his teammate.

The Cranbrook-born defender isn't exactly the most fleet of foot but uses his legs to create powerful and effective strides. He is agile on his edges with and without the puck. He combines that with smart reads in the defensive and offensive zones.

An example of combining those two things happened in that same Sept. 28 game:

Byram sees the clear intention of the defender, cuts off the pass, corrals the puck, sees the gap and attacks it. He is able to get a shot on goal and force a faceoff in the opposition zone. Notice his stance when skating with the puck. Quick and wide movements with good balance over the puck and his head up the whole time.

He won't generate speed quickly with his acceleration but keeps up with everyone.

On the defensive side of the game, a play from the Sept. 21 game against Everett really stood out.

Byram clearly misjudged the speed of Wyatt Wylie but does a fantastic job of crossing over, disrupting Wylie's lane and then accelerating enough to keep his stick pressure on the Everett attacker. He is able to poke the puck away, gain control, slow the play down again and then outlet to his teammate along the boards.

Those plays are just illustrating the fact that his skating isn't an issue; he makes up for it with his heady play. Ideally, we'd like to see that two-step quickness to his game but it's not something to hold him back. Furthermore, there is another factor, which I will get to later, that may be limiting his ability to be explosive.

Another overriding theme to Byram's game is how efficient he is in the defensive zone. He doesn't engage in battles along the boards unless he has to nor is he overaggressive in trying to disrupt his opponent's lane. He waits for the right chance to take away the puck or opportunity.

Another illustration comes from that same game versus Everett:

Byram decisively cuts out Riley Sutter's lane, keeps him away from the goaltender until the other Everett player makes the pass behind Sutter.

All of the plays above show what Byram is as a player: a smart defender with intriguing two-way abilities that appears to be easily translatable to professional hockey. He generally makes the smart play that doesn't put his team in trouble. But like any player, he makes mistakes. With that said, having a defender that is so engaged, and makes the right play more often than not, his few mistakes are something you can live with. The most egregious error was that spin-o-rama turnover against



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Spokane, but he was really good the remainder of the game, picking up that highlighted goal and adding an assist.

The Giants will continue to rely on Byram a lot this season and while those mistakes will jump off the screen, they should be taken as part of the totality of his play.

The 6-foot-1, 192-pound defender is also regularly vocal on the ice. Pointing to his teammates with his stick, hollering for them to pass to him or a teammate or directing his teammates on the backcheck.

Stats

Unless otherwise stated, all of the stats in the graphs below are from the 2017-18 season, as players have only played a handful of games so far this season, limiting the sample size.

As the year and profiles go along, we will switch to the 2018-19 numbers.

The first is Byram's event tracker for the season.

His production increased in the second part of last year as the coaching staff leaned on him more and more. Usually, seeing that much red in terms of goals against is something to take note of, but when you combine it with his rolling 5-on-5 points per hour (pictured below), you can piece together that his role drastically increased and he was simply on the ice more often.

So far this season, Byram has been playing a lot for the Giants. It almost feels like he never leaves the ice. He's normally a left side defender but has seen regular shifts on the right side during games. He's cycled through multiple partners like Kaleb Bulych, Alex Kannok-Leipert and Matt Barberis.

Surprisingly, Byram wasn't on the first power-play unit to start the season but has quickly taken over that role. In the game against Spokane, the power play that was highlighted in the two clips above, Byram was out for the full two minutes of the man advantage and likely would've been out there for a bit more had the Giants not scored.

Back to last year, Byram was among the Giants' leaders in terms of points per 60 (based on estimated TOI)

There were only a handful of defenders in their draft-minus-one season (D-1) in the WHL during the 2017-18 season. Byram led that group in primary assists, secondary assists, primary points and total points. He trailed only Edmonton Oil Kings defender Matthews Robertson in goals and that was only by one (seven for Robertson and six for Byram), but Robertson played in seven more games.

All of the numbers from his last campaign suggest that Byram is going to get a lot of minutes again this year, play in a lot of situations and that he should thrive under those circumstances.

Another lens we can use to evaluate prospects is the Prospect Graduation Probabilities System (pGPS) that is developed by Jeremy Davis.

It compares junior players with their cohorts and then allows us to see how they might project at the NHL level based on success rates and NHL production within the cohort.

When using said tool for Byram, we get the following results:

Based on his D-1 season alone, 33.8 per cent of Byram's cohorts went on to become NHL regulars with an expected production of 28.5 points per 82 games. As always with looking at players at 16, 17 and 18 years old, there can be a wide range of matches. The closest comparables to Byram include Wade Redden, Michael Stone and Bryan McCabe.

Using last year's numbers and comparing to other players in their D-1 season, that percentage is highest among all of the draft-eligible CHL defencemen and second among all the defenders that are first time eligible for the 2019 NHL draft.

Things to watch

There aren't any major flaws in Byram's game. Although I've pointed to his skating, it's still good enough and shouldn't hold him back.

However, there is something to keep in mind about that skating concern. Byram plays a lot for the Giants and his role just seems to be increasing as the season has started. With injuries to Bailey Dhaliwal, Joel Sexsmith and Mark Barberis, the Giants defence is thin and the coaching staff is relying even more on Byram.

It means that you have to adjust the way you view his play on a night-in-and-night-out basis. Is his skating lacking explosiveness because he knows that he is going to be playing a ton and wants to conserve energy? Or does he not have enough gas in the tank to make that extra effort every time he's on the ice? Is he possibly making some of these mistakes due to fatigue?

This conversation was had about Evan Bouchard last season and it's something that already stands out about Byram. Some notes from Byram's first game were questioning if the overall offensive upside was there, as he was making the safer play more often than not. Then a few games later, particularly the game against Spokane, Byram was much more aggressive despite playing a considerable portion of the third period.

Byram was also quite aggressive in his play at the Ivan Hlinka tournament when he was playing fewer minutes for Team Canada. That reinforces the thought process that he is consciously being conservative to start the year with the Giants. He also showed a willingness to be more physical in that tournament. It all loops into that consideration about how much ice time he is seeing.

Byram also seems to lack a booming a slap shot, which isn't a bad thing. The role of a power-play quarterback is evolving as the hockey world puts more value in defencemen who can skate and move the puck efficiently. Byram possesses an accurate snapshot and is very good at creating space for his teammates and then hitting them right on the tape.

His ability to carry the puck out of his own zone, through the neutral zone and into the offensive zone is a skill that really sets him apart. There is no panic to his game when doing this and it generally results in getting a shot on net.

It will be interesting to see how much more time the left-hand shooting Byram spends on the right side. If he is comfortable with playing his off-side, it will only help his draft stock.

Conclusion

Byram is smart, decisive and generally makes the right play. His ability to hold onto the puck and wait for a seam is something that may go under the radar a bit but is really the hallmark of his game.

The questions about his offensive upside may persist until he starts to pile up the points. I think it's fair to suggest that he won't ever be an elite point producer but will still be able to man a power play with ease. He was extremely effective in that role at the Hlinka tournament and has displayed all the right attributes for that to continue this year. The questions about his ice time and possible overplaying will also play a part in the analysis, but over the course of the season, those concerns will likely be overlooked due to his consistent, intelligent and fluid play from the back end.

Unless a few defencemen have breakout seasons and Byram struggles for a significant portion of time, the Giants defencemen should remain as the top-rated defender for the year.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' two elite lines continue high-octane play vs. Stars

Chris Johnston | October 9, 2018, 11:19 PM

DALLAS – The goal light went on every third time John Klingberg stepped on the ice. Three went in the other net and six found his own while the Dallas Stars defenceman was involved in a game packed with action.

And yet Klingberg didn't come away from a 7-4 loss to the high-octane Toronto Maple Leafs believing there was too much risk to his team's approach.

What irked him most was how easily they surrendered the high-danger area around Ben Bishop's crease. Toronto may be the team of Matthews, Marner, Tavares and Rielly, but skill alone didn't carry the day here. The Leafs worked for scoring chances and wore the Stars down.

"Obviously there was a couple too many turnovers, but I think they scored from being more hungry in front of the net than we were and that's on our 'D,'" said Klingberg. "Myself, [partner] Esa [Lindell], we were on the ice for too many goals and obviously forwards coming back as well. That's where I think they scored their goals.

"Seven goals at home, that's never OK."

The Leafs basically burned a blue hole in the part of the ice where goals form at American Airlines Center. The heatmap paints a perfect picture of what went right for the visitors.

As if it wasn't already a scary proposition facing a team with two freakish forward lines powered by elite centres. But when you see Toronto hound the puck like this? Forget about it.

Zach Hyman won key board battles and beat out an icing to create goals for Mitch Marner and John Tavares. Kasperii Kapanen disrupted the defence with his speed and fought off the backchecking of Alex Radulov to give linemate Auston Matthews the only window he needed to score for a fourth straight game.

"We're a lot of skill [but] I think, at the same time, the thing that's made us successful is we're getting it in, we're grinding, we're getting down low and playing that heavy game," said Marner. "I think when we do that we're at our best."

Where once the Leafs of old seemed to thrive off the rush, this group is rolling up its sleeves and going to work. Matthews can basically score from anywhere on the ice – he already has seven goals thanks to a well-honed ability to fire the puck mid-stride – but the Hyman-Tavares-Marner line is controlling the play offensively from below the goal line.

They produced two goals at even strength in Chicago on Sunday and struck for two more here in Dallas – perfectly melding the relentless ethos of Hyman, slick playmaking of Marner and precision finish of Tavares.

"We had good intensity, good battle, everybody was focused, we had good detail in our game," said Leafs coach Mike Babcock. "I liked our game."

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They are also getting the job done on specialty teams with a 5-for-10 power play success rate early in this young season. The top unit went 2-for-3 against the Stars, needing just over three minutes at 5-on-4 to inflict that damage.

What stands out about the Marner/Rielly/Matthews/Tavares/Nazem Kadri super unit is how they've avoided the razzle-dazzle. They're moving the puck smartly and finding gaps in coverage. The puck is getting to the net and both goals against Bishop came with some chaos around the crease.

"I think when we move the puck well and kind of keep things, for the most part, simple, we have a lot of talent and skill out there and we can find each other," said Matthews.

"We're not trying to make any highlight-reel plays," added Tavares. "I think we're just kind of sticking with our structure and what we believe is going to work for us and then trying to take what's been given and not try to force anything. I think when you do that, time after time, I think the odds tend to be in your favour."

"Especially when we've got the type of guys we've got on the ice."

These are encouraging indicators for a group still working on its structure and still without William Nylander, the usual right-hand-man to Matthews who is waiting out a contract impasse with management.

They came up against a Stars team here that had allowed one goal in two games to start the season and is spilling over with firepower of its own. First liners Tyler Seguin, Jamie Benn and Radulov each scored against Frederik Andersen – as did Klingberg, the top defenceman.

Still, the Leafs felt like they had a firm grip on things throughout. They were in control.

Matthews and Tavares each scored two more goals to continue incredibly fast starts. Marner had a goal and three assists while Rielly added four helpers – bringing his season total to 10 points, tied with Matthews atop the NHL's scoring charts.

But it was the way they padded those impressive offensive totals that created the most enthusiasm inside the dressing room.

"I think this year we're different," said Marner. "We're making sure there's no easy games against us and we just want to make sure that we don't sit back. We keep pushing teams no matter the score."

They will be too much to handle on too many nights if it continues.

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Sportsnet.ca / Smith, Flames come up big in heavy test against Predators

Eric Francis | October 10, 2018, 12:24 AM

NASHVILLE – These are the types of efforts that make people believe the Calgary Flames are entering that window.

You know, the window in which it's believed a team has assembled enough talent and depth to not only make the playoffs, but potentially thrive in them.

Oh yeah, it's early.

Granted.

But marching into one of the toughest rinks in the league to bust up a Presidents' Trophy banner-raising party with an effort as stacked as a Broadway barmaid could do wonders for a retooled team's confidence.

A 3-0 win over the Nashville Predators included answers to two of the biggest questions facing the Flames this season – goaltending and special teams.

Mike Smith's 43-save performance for his 37th career shutout reeked of his brilliant start last season when he was a first-half all-star.

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"That was better," smiled Smith, peeling off the Calgary Police service hat as player of the game.

"They're a good team. When you come into this building we knew it would be a hard-fought battle. It was their opening night and we wanted to play spoiler. We got timely goals, the big penalty kill and a big two points to start the trip."

The Flames' plan to sit Smith Thursday to give David Rittich the start may be revisited now, given Smith's return to a form he hadn't found the first two games.

"The last two games were weird games – low shots and a lot of chances and weird flow," said Smith, whose workload will be closely monitored at age 36.

"I definitely felt a lot more like myself tonight."

If the Flames are in fact going to make a statement this year by returning to the playoffs, he'll have to feel like himself more often.

A good chunk of his highlight pack came midway through the game when the Flames faced a full two minutes down two men, calling on Smith to steal the show while Mikael Backlund, Mark Giordano and T.J. Brodie played strong supporting roles.

It came at a time when the Flames were clinging to a 2-0 lead courtesy of power-play goals by linemates Elias Lindholm and Sean Monahan who each scored their third goals of the year.

Monahan would later add his fourth on a night in which Johnny Gaudreau picked up three helpers.

The offensive depth this team worked so hard to add this summer has yet to surface, but none of it matters when the three aforementioned big guns are piling up points as they have.

All told the line has eight goals and eight assists in three outings.

"I think me and Lindy think the game the same way and Johnny's got the speedy legs – he likes to find you in open ice," said Monahan.

"It's nice to get a start like that and put some pucks to the net."

And get a win in a building few teams leave victorious.

It was huge for the confidence of a group playing with a third pair of defencemen who had combined for 13 NHL games heading in – Juuso Valimaki and Rasmus Andersson.

Valimaki's almost 18 minutes of play included a few crucial minutes killing penalties, demonstrating poise beyond his 20 years of age.

Ditto for Dillon Dube who spent almost two minutes killing penalties, blocking shots and continuing to impress with an all-around game no one expected him to bring to the NHL this early in his career.

Andersson didn't look at all out of place either on a night in which the Flames rearguards all played well.

Predators sniper Filip Forsberg said on the Sportsnet broadcast between periods he figured the 21 shots fired Mike Smith's way in the second period were, "so harmless (I) could have made those saves."

Filip may have spent too much time at Tootsie's or Bruno Mars the night before as Smith was called time and time again to come up with big saves including massive windups from P.K. Subban, Ryan Ellis and a Ryan Hartman shot he snagged with his glove in spectacular fashion.

Damned with the off-ice distractions Music City so famously offers, the Flames won their third game in a row here. Some nerve.

Perhaps they need to spend even more time in cities with motorized scooters like the ones plenty of the lads bombed around town on the last two days.

The win marks an amazing swing from where the team and its fan base was after an opening night loss in Vancouver that included a power play that went 0 for 7.

Since then the team that finished 28th last year with the man advantage has gone 5 for 10.

"A lot of special teams," said Gaudreau when asked what the key to the win on Tuesday was.

"We've gotten a lot better since that first game in Vancouver – we did a lot of work on that power play.

"Five on five we've been playing well too. It's a good start to the road trip."

The Flames play in St. Louis Thursday and Colorado Saturday before returning home.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks continue to struggle keeping the puck out of their net

Iain MacIntyre October 9, 2018, 9:55 PM

RALEIGH, N.C. – The hurricane the Vancouver Canucks face was not here in Carolina. It wasn't even Hurricane Michael, which the Canucks were to skirt on their post-game flight Tuesday over the Florida Panhandle.

The hurricane the Canucks face is still coming: Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning, then next week against two more Stanley Cup contenders in the Pittsburgh Penguins and Winnipeg Jets. There's also a difficult game Saturday against the Florida Panthers.

The Carolina Hurricanes, who beat the Canucks 5-3 here Tuesday, were the figurative calm before the storm for a Vancouver team struggling mightily to defend its net.

Two games into their six-game road trip, which started Saturday with a 7-4 loss to the Calgary Flames, the Canucks have scored seven goals. This is the National Hockey League; seven road goals in two games should translate to three or four points. Instead, the Canucks have none because either their defending (Saturday) or goaltending (Tuesday) has been so damaging that their surprising offence isn't enough to save them.

"If you score seven in three games, I'd like to get three wins," Canucks goalie Jacob Markstrom said. "So we've got to be better goalies, better D, better everything. We get our goals, but right now, today, I was not good."

"Losing sucks," Canucks leader Bo Horvat said. "No matter how many goals you score, if you lose at the end of the day, it's still a loss. For us, that's our main focus: we want to win hockey games."

Then they better get profoundly better in their half of the ice.

Given three days to rouse and prepare themselves after fading badly in the third period in Calgary, the Canucks fell behind 1-0 Tuesday after just 43 seconds when Markstrom was beaten by Jordan Staal's 60-foot floater from the blue line.

And after Canuck Sven Baertschi tied it with a breakaway finish even prettier than Alex Edler's stretch pass that set it up, Markstrom let Brett Pesce's point shot drift past him to make it 2-1 for the Hurricanes at 11:17 of the first period. Carolina led the rest of the way.

"I was frustrated, especially with the first goal," Markstrom said. "And the second goal, I kind of whiffed on. I was going to head it in the corner and it's a knuckle puck and goes to the side of my head. Those are frustrating goals to let in."

It was only when Markstrom's press scrum was transcribed that we realized he said he had planned to head the puck into the corner. Most goalies would use a blocker or something instead of channelling Cristiano Ronaldo or Harry Kane, but the Canucks are not conventional defenders.

They were a little cleaner with the puck in their zone than they were against the Flames, but still gave it away at critical points (like Brock Boeser on Warren Foegele's third-period goal for Carolina) and lost coverage at times (like when Canucks defencemen Derrick Pouliot and Erik Gudbranson both ended up behind the net as Sebastian Aho was scoring from the slot to make it 3-1).

In the third period, which began with the Canucks behind 4-3, Vancouver was outshot 10-5 and failed to generate sustained pressure around

Curtis McElhinney, the goalie plucked off waivers last week who is now 2-0 for the Hurricanes.

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Boeser, last season's Rookie of the Year runner-up who scored 29 goals in just 62 games, had a power-play second assist for his first point of the season but managed just one shot on net. This season's Calder Trophy candidate, Elias Pettersson, led Canucks forwards with 19:10 of ice time and extended his points streak to three games – the only ones he has played in the NHL – with a power-play assist.

"I think a lot of things we're doing to ourselves, whether it's turning the puck over or losing a battle or not being in position and protecting the front of the net," Edler said. "Just little details that are so important. Those are things that decide the games."

"You're not going to win that many games if you give up five goals. We talk about it, and that's something we've got to improve. We've got to play strong defensively."

Centre Brandon Sutter said: "After last game, we just kind of had a dull feeling (because) we thought we didn't play well. Tonight feels completely different. I thought we did a lot of good things. We have to stay positive and get a road win here. Sometimes for young guys, keeping your confidence and keeping your step is more important than a lot of the other stuff. We have to try to keep pushing."

Or risk getting blown away.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sam Gagner on Canucks cut: 'I didn't see it coming'

Luke Fox October 9, 2018, 5:49 PM

TORONTO – When you sign a three-year, \$9.45-million NHL contract one season, the last place you imagine starting the next is living at your parents' house, three time zones away, and skating for some other franchise's farm team.

Yet here Sam Gagner is.

Property of the Vancouver Canucks through 2019-20, Gagner is leading the Toronto Marlies in goals (three), points (five) and shots (11) after riding the buses for three games in three cities over a whirlwind four days and trying to wrap his brain around why Vancouver no longer wants him.

"I was shocked," Gagner told Sportsnet after Tuesday's practice.

"I didn't expect it. I didn't see it coming. I felt like I had a good enough camp and I'd shown enough in my 11 years that I was able to make the team."

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Waived last week when Jim Benning had to submit the Canucks' Opening Night roster, the 29-year-old forward was part of a six-pack of experienced free agents the GM brought to Vancouver in the summer of 2017 who've fallen out of the organization's good books.

In addition to Gagner, Patrick Wiercioch, Alex Burmistrov and Thomas Vanek are gone. Goaltender Anders Nilsson has yet to see action this season, and defenceman Michael Del Zotto is being healthy-scratched Tuesday.

"With these young kids coming, this could happen more and more," Benning told reporters upon waiving Gagner. "We're going to have to make tough decisions.

"We were hoping he would produce points."

Management's message to Gagner?

"Basically that I didn't make it. They have a lot of bodies, and they feel the forward group they have can get it done," Gagner said.

A deep exhale.

"So I was surprised by it based on the fact they signed me last summer. I came to camp prepared, I had a really good summer of work, I did well on the [fitness] tests, I thought I played pretty well in pre-season, but you just... you try not to worry about it. I'm still playing hockey."

And if that's not in Vancouver, the Ontario native is grateful it's in Toronto.

For one, the Utica Comets are pressed near the AHL's five-veteran limit, which might've spelled AHL scratches.

More important, Gagner's young family — wife Rachel and sons Cooper, 3, and Beckham, 1 — have remained back in Vancouver, and Gagner requested they keep within a direct flight away.

Cooper just celebrated his first day of school, but Sam expects he'll be flying east to cheer Dad on at Coca-Cola Coliseum and visit his grandparents' in Oakville, a short drive from the Marlies practice facility.

"We have a lot of afternoon games here. That helps," Gagner said. "He's not able to get to a lot in Van because they're nighttime games."

If Gagner outgrows life at Mom and Dad's, childhood friend and Maple Leafs centre John Tavares has extended an open billet invitation.

"I might. He's offered up a room," Gagner said. "I don't know what the future holds, so I'm taking it day by day."

Albeit curious — one team dressing an opponent's asset — the Gagner-Leafs relationship is a symbiotic one. There is an agreement that should the Canucks recall and return Gagner, his AHL landing spot will remain the Marlies, not the Comets.

In Toronto, the player can extend his private summer skating lessons with Leafs skating guru Barb Underhill into fall and take advantage of all the funding Toronto pumps into its development and sports-science programs.

"The way they treat the guys and the resources we have, it's pretty incredible for an American League team," Gagner said.

"That's obviously great of them to welcome me. It's not something they had to do. I'm very thankful to the Leafs organization for allowing me to come here and just play hockey and show that I'm capable of playing at a high level."

In turn, the Leafs expect Gagner's work habits, drive and professionalism to serve as the model for their forward prospects.

It's no accident that Gagner has been placed on a line with highly touted left wing Carl Grundstrom, or that he and Jeremy Bracco could be spotted in a Coliseum hallway chatting as they sprayed down their stick blades prior to Monday's home opener.

"We didn't think twice about it," Marlies GM Laurence Gilman says. "The veterans that comprise your roster are so critically important to the culture of your organization."

Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe says Gagner has been an easy fit. He credits Gagner's versatility to play wing or centre and is impressed by his positive response to abruptly being cut 770 games into his NHL career.

"Even today on the ice, he's very engaged. Wants to learn. He's listening. That's all we really can ask for," Keefe said. "All things considered, he's happy to be here."

Gagner jumps at the chance to play role model here, although he does note that he was embracing that same function with rebuilding Vancouver.

Being thrown directly into games has helped Gagner adjust to hockey purgatory. The goals don't hurt either.

"You feel good about yourself," said Gagner, who managed 10 goals and 21 assists for offence-deprived Vancouver last season. Not enough by Benning's standard.

"There's an opportunity for me here to show I can play at a high level. I played well on the weekend, but there's still another level I can get to in terms of growing my overall game."

Considering there's two full seasons on Gagner's contract, this experiment thrusts Keefe into an tricky spot. How do you give valuable ice time to an opponent's player when the Leafs' own prospects need game action to develop?

"I think the easy answer is, I'd just approach Sam like I would any of our other veteran people," Keefe says. "We're trying to win games and create a winning environment, but we're well aware of what our No. 1 priority is here, which is to produce big-league players."

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Sportsnet.ca / Stars' Carrick grateful for clean slate after trade from Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston | October 9, 2018, 4:32 PM

DALLAS – "That's a really difficult question," Connor Carrick says. And then he spends more than three minutes working through his answer.

With Carrick still getting adjusted to life in Dallas and about to face the Toronto Maple Leafs for the first time since being traded here last week, it's challenging for the 24-year-old defenceman to assess if he got a fair shake in his former home.

Eventually, he settles on something that sounds like "yes."

"There were chances in those two years. I was on the power play and didn't score. I was on the [penalty] kill and they scored. I was on in the last minute and I didn't do whatever we wanted," Carrick told Sportsnet on Tuesday. "The term players use is leash and different players have a different sort of leash. Hockey's not about equality. You've got 23 players who all have different things and have different roles and it's not about making sure everyone gets the same amount of treats. It's not the game.

"So the way I view it is we wanted it to go a certain way, it didn't, and I accept as much responsibility as I can bear. And whatever trace there is left over, there's things that happened."

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Carrick started losing his grip on a job with the Leafs during the 2017 playoffs, when he played 15 shifts or less in the final four games against the Washington Capitals. Then he was a healthy scratch in the seventh regular-season game last season – and more than 30 times after it – and by the time training camp rolled around last month he figured he was as good as gone.

That was hammered home when he was placed in the AHL group midway through camp. He'd spent the summer working out like a fiend and produced the top fitness results of any Leaf but wasn't going to be able to convince the coaching staff he had more to give.

You can appreciate then why a wave of optimism washed over Carrick once he started processing the Oct. 1 trade that brought him to the Stars. Here he has a clean slate with coach Jim Montgomery, who paired him with former Toronto teammate Roman Polak for the first two games and gave him a regular even-strength shift.

There is a chance to grab a role in Dallas that eluded him with the Maple Leafs and he understands better just how precious those opportunities can be.

"I can tell you right now, walking in, my demeanour around this room, around this coach, is different than when I first walked into Toronto," said Carrick. "It's aged. You just have more confidence things are going to work out and you understand the importance of other things. You take those lessons and you build [your game]."

"Until you can really get your head above the trees, a lot of the guys in the league are managing what they want to be and what the coach needs out of them. It's that give and take. It's the player's responsibility to achieve freedom of mind; you've got to create your own peace out there and make plays."

Carrick has already caught the eye of Montgomery by producing three assists in his first two games. Talk about a dream start. The new Stars head coach says that kind of production speaks for itself when assessing his play so far.

Carrick believes he has another level to reach and made an investment in himself over the summer, travelling to Darryl Belfry's exclusive camp in late August and taking the ice with Auston Matthews, Patrick Kane, Claude Giroux, Charlie McAvoy and others.

The right-shot defenceman draws inspiration from players who have travelled the long road before eventually establishing themselves as reliable NHLers.

"There's so many stories of it," said Carrick. "That's what you rely on when you're in the fight: 'Whose done more with less than I have right now?' Sometimes you don't fit in a plan. The coach sees it one way and wants the team to play a certain way."

"It's all about assets. It's 'what do you bring as a player' – every player has strengths and weaknesses. You try and build a role and that's something I wasn't able to do in Toronto."

What he is proud of is how he handled himself during a trying 2017-18 season with the Leafs. Carrick said there "were a lot of days where you've got a couple attitudes in the drawer to pick from" when he was riding a long stretch of healthy scratches, and is satisfied that he managed to put his best face on more often than not.

It was telling that a few Leafs stopped by his apartment while he was packing up in the wake of the trade last week. Several others sent text messages of support.

There's bound to be some conflicting emotions for Carrick when he lines up opposite them on the ice at American Airlines Center. The memories, both good and bad, are still fresh. This won't feel like your typical Tuesday night game early in the season for No. 5 in black and green.

"It's not the same when I play against Chicago – that's where I'm from and you've got 50 people in the stands versus two in any other town," said Carrick. "It's not the same against Toronto, it's not the same against Colorado, which is my favourite childhood team."

"You've always got your baggage, man. That's what it is."

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Sportsnet.ca / Sam Gagner on Canucks cut: 'I didn't see it coming'

Luke Fox October 9, 2018, 5:49 PM

TORONTO – When you sign a three-year, \$9.45-million NHL contract one season, the last place you imagine starting the next is living at your parents' house, three time zones away, and skating for some other franchise's farm team.

Yet here Sam Gagner is.

Property of the Vancouver Canucks through 2019-20, Gagner is leading the Toronto Marlies in goals (three), points (five) and shots (11) after riding the buses for three games in three cities over a whirlwind four days and trying to wrap his brain around why Vancouver no longer wants him.

"I was shocked," Gagner told Sportsnet after Tuesday's practice.

"I didn't expect it. I didn't see it coming. I felt like I had a good enough camp and I'd shown enough in my 11 years that I was able to make the team."

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Waived last week when Jim Benning had to submit the Canucks' Opening Night roster, the 29-year-old forward was part of a six-pack of experienced free agents the GM brought to Vancouver in the summer of 2017 who've fallen out of the organization's good books.

In addition to Gagner, Patrick Wiercioch, Alex Burmistrov and Thomas Vanek are gone. Goaltender Anders Nilsson has yet to see action this season, and defenceman Michael Del Zotto is being healthy-scratched Tuesday.

"With these young kids coming, this could happen more and more," Benning told reporters upon waiving Gagner. "We're going to have to make tough decisions.

"We were hoping he would produce points."

Management's message to Gagner?

"Basically that I didn't make it. They have a lot of bodies, and they feel the forward group they have can get it done," Gagner said.

A deep exhale.

"So I was surprised by it based on the fact they signed me last summer. I came to camp prepared, I had a really good summer of work, I did well on the [fitness] tests, I thought I played pretty well in pre-season, but you just... you try not to worry about it. I'm still playing hockey."

And if that's not in Vancouver, the Ontario native is grateful it's in Toronto.

For one, the Utica Comets are pressed near the AHL's five-veteran limit, which might've spelled AHL scratches.

More important, Gagner's young family — wife Rachel and sons Cooper, 3, and Beckham, 1 — have remained back in Vancouver, and Gagner requested they keep within a direct flight away.

Cooper just celebrated his first day of school, but Sam expects he'll be flying east to cheer Dad on at Coca-Cola Coliseum and visit his grandparents' in Oakville, a short drive from the Marlies practice facility.

"We have a lot of afternoon games here. That helps," Gagner said. "He's not able to get to a lot in Van because they're nighttime games."

If Gagner outgrows life at Mom and Dad's, childhood friend and Maple Leafs centre John Tavares has extended an open billet invitation.

"I might. He's offered up a room," Gagner said. "I don't know what the future holds, so I'm taking it day by day."

Albeit curious — one team dressing an opponent's asset — the Gagner-Leafs relationship is a symbiotic one. There is an agreement that should the Canucks recall and return Gagner, his AHL landing spot will remain the Marlies, not the Comets.

In Toronto, the player can extend his private summer skating lessons with Leafs skating guru Barb Underhill into fall and take advantage of all the funding Toronto pumps into its development and sports-science programs.

"The way they treat the guys and the resources we have, it's pretty incredible for an American League team," Gagner said.

"That's obviously great of them to welcome me. It's not something they had to do. I'm very thankful to the Leafs organization for allowing me to come here and just play hockey and show that I'm capable of playing at a high level."

In turn, the Leafs expect Gagner's work habits, drive and professionalism to serve as the model for their forward prospects.

It's no accident that Gagner has been placed on a line with highly touted left wing Carl Grundstrom, or that he and Jeremy Bracco could be spotted in a Coliseum hallway chatting as they sprayed down their stick blades prior to Monday's home opener.

"We didn't think twice about it," Marlies GM Laurence Gilman says. "The veterans that comprise your roster are so critically important to the culture of your organization."

Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe says Gagner has been an easy fit. He credits Gagner's versatility to play wing or centre and is impressed by his positive response to abruptly being cut 770 games into his NHL career.

"Even today on the ice, he's very engaged. Wants to learn. He's listening. That's all we really can ask for," Keefe said. "All things considered, he's happy to be here."

Gagner jumps at the chance to play role model here, although he does note that he was embracing that same function with rebuilding Vancouver.

Being thrown directly into games has helped Gagner adjust to hockey purgatory. The goals don't hurt either.

"You feel good about yourself," said Gagner, who managed 10 goals and 21 assists for offence-deprived Vancouver last season. Not enough by Benning's standard.

"There's an opportunity for me here to show I can play at a high level. I played well on the weekend, but there's still another level I can get to in terms of growing my overall game."

Considering there's two full seasons on Gagner's contract, this experiment thrusts Keefe into an tricky spot. How do you give valuable ice time to an opponent's player when the Leafs' own prospects need game action to develop?

"I think the easy answer is, I'd just approach Sam like I would any of our other veteran people," Keefe says. "We're trying to win games and create a winning environment, but we're well aware of what our No. 1 priority is here, which is to produce big-league players."

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets challenged to focus on present, not playoff aspirations

Damien Cox | October 10, 2018, 1:25 AM

WINNIPEG—Paul Maurice knows how this works. He knows the way this city feels about its Jets, or more important, what this city is expecting from its Jets this season.

"10-1, right?," he said drily. "Every night."

Twenty-two years after Winnipeg lost its franchise, and seven years after it got one back, the city is primed for a Stanley Cup, clearly one of the NHL's best teams with arguably the most impressive collection of quality big men in the sport.

Maurice is the coach and low-key Kevin Cheveldayoff is the general manager who get to manage all that, get this team from October to April in shape to begin the long, hard slog that the Jets and their fans got a taste of last spring with a run to the Final Four.

"You could see the excitement level generated with this city, how it grew over three rounds," said Cheveldayoff. "It's not hard to understand how important this is, and how excited this Jets Nation could become."

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The challenge is not thinking too far ahead.

"You can fall into a trap with this league. It's a very humbling league," said Cheveldayoff. "The moment you take a breath, someone passes you by."

If the Jets looked on the weekend in a loss to Dallas like a team that was taking a breath, they looking far more focussed on the task at hand in their home opener Tuesday against the Los Angeles Kings. The Jets weren't perfect, but they were very, very good, winning a 2-1 game they dominated but couldn't turn into a one-sided contest because of the combination of good work from Jonathan Quick's goaltending understudy, Jack Campbell, and some inefficient shooting of their own.

Still, the Jets held the Kings to only 19 shots after giving up 77 shots in their first two games. Only in the third did L.A. press, and it wasn't in convincing style.

"I thought in our own zone we were very detailed," said Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck. "That made it very easy on me."

Opening night in Manitoba was thus a successful one, and a feel good one. Fans yelled "TRUE NORTH" during O Canada as loud as ever, the Dirty Catfish Brass Band provided a nice respite from the non-stop audio assault you get in most rinks these days, they honoured the Jets' first captain from the WHA days, the late Ab McDonald, and there were plenty of those snappy alternate "Aviator" jerseys in the crowd, with the team set to officially unveil them on Rogers Hometown Hockey this weekend when they host Carolina.

The Jets made few changes over the off-season, but they are asking more of talented youngsters like Nik Ehlers and Kyle Connor, and integrating players like Jack Roslovic and Kristian Vesalainen into the lineup.

"We're going to find ourselves, develop our team," said Maurice. "The expectations got considerably higher and our team got considerably younger, so there's a balancing act that's going to have to go on there. I'm sure it'll go on for about 82 games this year."

The Jets dominated the first period on Tuesday night, outshooting the visitors 14-4, but came out tied 1-1. Ilya Kovalchuk, back in the NHL after

five years in the KHL, scored at 6:26 after a Kings rush caught Jets in the middle of a line change. Drew Doughty worked his way down the right boards in the Winnipeg zone and found Kovalchuk unmarked slicing between Tyler Myers and Joe Morrow.

The 35-year-old, who ended up playing 23 minutes and was L.A.'s best forward on the night, redirected the pass past Hellebuyck's glove for his first NHL goal since April 25, 2013.

The Jets answered back just over four minutes after some excellent forechecking kept the Kings bottled up in their own zone. Brandon Tanev, another youngster destined to inherit a bigger role with the Jets this season, worked his way out of the corner up the boards, then quickly threw it into reverse to create some space between himself and L.A. defenceman Jake Muzzin.

That move caught Muzzin by surprise, and apparently had the same effect on rookie Kings forward Austin Wagner. Wagner was on Jets centre Mark Scheifele, but then lost him, and Scheifele tipped the centring pass by Campbell, tying the game 1-1.

The Jets were completely dominant in the second, outshooting the Kings 19-5, but only came up with one goal, and that was a little lucky. Blake Wheeler's goalmouth feed for Connor was intercepted by Alec Martinez, but he inadvertently directed it into Campbell. The puck popped loose, and Connor pushed it across the line for his third of the season.

Earlier in the day, Maurice had raved about Connor's progress as an NHL player playing alongside Wheeler and Scheifele, the team's biggest stars.

"I don't think I've seen a player go from where he was in training camp last fall to where he got to in the playoffs last spring," said Maurice. "Now, he's not the kid on the line any more. He's making his own decisions, making the plays he feels are right. He's made incredible progress."

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If Connor, who scored 31 times last year, can continue to progress, and Ehlers can start finding his game, the Jets should have more than enough firepower spread over two lines. The question is whether they can be disciplined enough to play the kind of grinding game that suits them, keeps the pressure off Hellebuyck and still creates loads of offensive opportunities.

"We did such a good job last year of getting to a certain way we have to play to win hockey games. We're going to try and do the same this year," said defenceman Tyler Myers. "There's no question teams are going to look at us differently. We expect to get every team's best given the success we had last year. We're going to have to make sure we play within our system, within our game plan, very consistently."

At 2-1 on the season, the Jets now head for the first big NHL tussle of the season, a rematch with 2-1 Nashville on Thursday after the two clubs met in the playoffs last year in what many hyped as the "real" Stanley Cup final.

"I know it's going to be intense," said Hellebuyck. "So we've just got to go in there with the right mindset."

Like the high-scoring Toronto Maple Leafs out east, the Jets are putting their best foot forward this season knowing they're going to have solve vexing salary cap problems over the coming months. Winnipeg has to sign Patrik Laine, Connor and defenceman Jacob Trouba. Myers is also a free agent, and it seems likely he'll be the one who has to go to pay the others.

Cheveldayoff, like Kyle Dubas with the Leafs, will have to figure this all out.

"It's something you think about every day," he said. "People ask me about Laine and how we're going to sign him. I said I started thinking about that a couple of seconds after winning the lottery and drafting him. As a manager, you have to keep abreast of what's going on. There are



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so many uncertainties. You try to manage it with the best information you have."

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

Beyond that, Cheveldayoff doesn't talk about whether he's talking contract with any of the players, or hopes to sign any of them like he signed Ehlers to an extension last fall.

"We're just not a team that ever talks about what we're doing," he said.

Last winter, the Jets were able to do something many believed they would not be able to do, and that was bring in an established NHL veteran, in this case Paul Stastny, at the trade deadline. It was complicated. Stastny had to waive his no-trade clause, St. Louis had to retain part of his contract and the Jets had to have the combination of assets the Blues were looking for.

Stastny ended up walking in the off-season as a free agent, but it was a meaningful move. With all the youth the Jets have, you could see them trying to do something like that again this coming winter.

"We have to earn the right to even be able to consider doing something like that," said Cheveldayoff. "What we've tried to assemble here is a group of players who can think the game, play the game with passion and energy, play multiple different styles."

He and Maurice, not to mention owners Mark Chipman and David Thomson, have a keen sense of responsibility of what this team means to Winnipeg, and what winning a Cup could mean.

"We know it's a great task," said the Jets GM.

They won't have to win 10-1 every night to make it happen.

But 10-1 once in a while would sure make it easier on one and all.

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Sportsnet.ca / Definitive ranking of NHL's top 20 goalies over three seasons

Andrew Berkshire October 9, 2018, 12:02 PM

After ranking the top centres, left winger, right wingers and defencemen relative to their peers over the past three seasons, it's time to move on to the goalies – the toughest position to quantify.

Before we get into it, you can check out 2016's top-20 here, and 2017's list here.

Along with the usual suspects of hockey analytics contributors I've mentioned in each piece of this series, I'd like to also give a shoutout to Chris Boyle and Paul Campbell when it comes to the goalies. They have helped me a bunch over the past few years drilling down what's important when evaluating the so-called voodoo magic of NHL goaltending.

Statistics for the goaltender position were gathered from SPORTLOGiQ, Hockey Reference, and the NHL's official website.

As we did with the skaters, the qualifying bar has been lowered for goalies this season to include more of them. In previous years I used 75 starts over three seasons as the cutoff, whereas this season it's simply 75 games played. This gave a sample size of 48 goalies.

The weighting of categories for goalies is the same as last season, with 70 available points for performance-based statistics mostly built around various components of save percentages, and 30 points available for consistency — how often is a goaltender relied on and how well does he perform? The difficulty adjustment is done in much the same way it was for skaters.

Each season was weighted so that recent performances account for more of a player's total score, with 22.2 per cent for 2015-16, 33.3 per cent for 2016-17, and 44.5 per cent for 2017-18. If a player only played in two of those years they would see a weighting of 42.8 per cent for 2016-17, and 57.8 per cent for 2017-18.

Here are the statistics used in each category:

Performance: 5-on-5, power play, and penalty kill inner slot/high danger save percentage, high slot save percentage, corner point save percentage, centre point save percentage, low perimeter save percentage, percentage of shots from the perimeter with no rebound, percentage of shots from the slot with no rebound, and percentage of rebounds that go into the slot.

Consistency: Quality start percentage, percentage of available games started, and really bad start percentage.

Degree of Difficulty: 5-on-5, power play, and penalty kill high danger chances against, scoring chances on net against, scoring chances against, rush chances against, slot passes against, east-west passes against, passes off the rush against, shots with pass preceding against, slot rebound recovery rate, perimeter rebound recovery rate, perimeter shots against, and goal support.

Let's get into it.

20. Marc-Andre Fleury

Difficulty adjustment: -2.30%

Performance: 42.15/70 | Consistency: 18.37/30

Total: 60.51/100

Fleury didn't make the top-23 last year after a terrible final year in Pittsburgh where he posted below league average numbers and was relegated to a backup role. He followed that up with arguably the best season of his career in Vegas.

Fleury is an acrobatic goaltender who can put up show-stopping performances, but throughout his career he has been prone to being very erratic positionally when he's off his game. Fleury can play great and still somehow look foolish on each of the few goals he allows. It makes him one of the most fun goalies to watch.

19. Connor Hellebuyck

Difficulty adjustment: -2.57%

Performance: 43.23/70 | Consistency: 17.61/30

Total: 60.84/100

Last season was a breakout one for Connor Hellebuyck, who nearly doubled his scores for both performance and consistency to get into this year's top 20. Hellebuyck is a strong technical goaltender who keeps rebounds low and rarely allows weak goals.

One of the most important keys to Hellebuyck's game last year was he very rarely lost games for the Jets. Every goalie has an awful outing now and then, but Hellebuyck consistently put up decent to strong performances. He struggles a bit on shots from in tight, but the Jets' spectacular team defence helps keep those kinds of shots to a minimum.

18. Jimmy Howard

Difficulty adjustment: -0.14%

Performance: 42.59/70 | Consistency: 19.30/30

Total: 61.90/100

Howard's career has been all over the place, and at times he's looked done due to injuries and struggling to perform. But over the past two seasons he's actually played some good hockey despite facing more difficult shots as the Red Wings spin their wheels as a team.

Howard struggles to string together quality starts at times, but he also rarely has blow-up games that ruin Detroit's chances to win. At 34 years old his best seasons are behind him, but he's still a decent goalie.

17. Matt Murray

Difficulty adjustment: -1.72%

Performance: 43.01/70 | Consistency: 19.54/30

Total: 62.55/100

Murray is the first in a large group of previously good goaltenders who had disastrous seasons in 2017-18. Murray saw tougher shots than his first two seasons in the NHL as the Penguins were a bit more suspect defensively last season, but it wasn't the tough shots he struggled on.

Murray posted a respectable high danger save percentage last year, but was picked apart from the high slot and was fairly porous from the perimeter as well. He didn't just allow goals at a high rate from these areas, but also allowed big rebounds on simple shots. Those kinds of struggles seem mental more than physical, so he was a decent candidate for a bounce back season, though a concussion diagnosis makes that questionable.

Penguins goaltender Matt Murray has been diagnosed with a concussion and will not practice today. Coach Sullivan will address the injury after practice.

— Pittsburgh Penguins (@penguins) October 9, 2018

16. Cam Talbot

Difficulty adjustment: +2.26%



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Performance: 42.61/70 | Consistency: 20.11/30

Total: 62.71/100

Talbot is another of the goalies who took a big step down last year. But while his performance cratered, he remained the single most relied upon goaltender in the NHL. No healthy goaltender was started more often as the Oilers turned to Talbot more than 90 per cent of the time he was healthy enough to play.

He faced far more difficult shots last season than the previous two years, specifically while the Oilers were shorthanded. His rebound control remains strong, and technically I think Talbot is still a very good goaltender. But he at least needs more rest and a bit better defence in front of him.

15. Brian Elliott

Difficulty adjustment: -0.14%

Performance: 44.56/70 | Consistency: 18.49/30

Total: 63.05/100

A few years ago Elliott was quite consistent in that he had an extremely high rate of quality starts, though he had a propensity to get blown out the rest of the time instead of just being slightly below average. As he's gotten older those blow up games have happened more often.

The result is that every game seems to be a coin flip — Elliott can be brilliant and win games on his own, or he can be a team's Achilles heel. He is a strong even strength goaltender who can stop high danger chances at a high rate, but weak goals always seem to trickle in as back breakers. He's a strange one.

14. Jonathan Quick

Difficulty adjustment: -8.09%

Performance: 42.67/70 | Consistency: 20.40/30

Total: 63.07/100

No starting goaltender in the NHL has more consistently faced easier shots than Quick, as the Kings play a choking style that clogs the passing lanes better than any other team. That advantage is lessening, but the shots he's facing are still more simple than anyone else is seeing.

That doesn't mean Quick is bad. He is an athletic goaltender who can get on runs of excellent play — last year's playoffs are a decent example because he was the only reason the Kings weren't run out of the building by the Golden Knights. But Quick's average performance would likely look a lot different on the surface if he played for a team that couldn't cover for his overly aggressive positioning and poor setups for secondary chances.

13. Braden Holtby

Difficulty adjustment: -2.02%

Performance: 43.27/70 | Consistency: 20.10/30

Total: 63.36/100

Another goaltender who saw years of great performances interrupted by a terrible year. Holtby followed the worst regular season of his career by winning the starting job back in the playoffs and then winning the Stanley Cup, so somehow I don't think he cares about the bad season anymore.

Holtby has been one of the NHL's best goalies essentially his whole career, but if there's one knock on him it's bouts of inconsistency. Holtby can be great for long stretches, but can also yo-yo from tremendous to terrible. His first two starts of this season are an example of this: a shutout followed by a loss in which he allowed seven goals.

12. Frederik Andersen

Difficulty adjustment: -1.75%

Performance: 42.22/70 | Consistency: 21.22/30

Total: 63.44/100

Leafs fans might be shocked to see a lower than average quality of shots faced for Andersen, but the Ducks were excellent defensively two years ago and the Leafs were very successful last season at cutting down dangerous passes in their own zone. This is a heavy component of shot quality.

Andersen posts decent save percentage numbers each year, but his strength lies in game-to-game consistency. Outside of the month of October, he is remarkable at giving quality starts and rarely gets blown out. Knowing their goaltender is extremely likely to give them a league average or better performance every night lets the Leafs take more risks on offence.

11. Mike Smith

Difficulty adjustment: +3.89%

Performance: 46.48/70 | Consistency: 18.20/30

Total: 64.68/100

There are a lot of games where Mike Smith is a dominating force. He's one of the strongest first-shot goaltenders in the NHL who makes saves from dangerous areas at an absurd rate. But his recovery to make a second save is poor and that's a big deal because his rebound control isn't good.

With that said, he has consistently faced among the toughest shots in the league for the past few years, and despite a tendency to have a few too many blow up games, he's been strong for his teams.

10. Henrik Lundqvist

Difficulty adjustment: +2.29%

Performance: 43.88/70 | Consistency: 21.08/30

Total: 64.96/100

One of the best goaltenders in the history of the game, Lundqvist is starting to wear down a little bit at 36 years old. He has finished with a save percentage below .920 the past two seasons in a row, the first time he's done that since 2007-08 and 2008-09 when the league average save percentage was much lower.

Lundqvist actually improved last year over the season before, but age and years of lackluster defending in front of him seems to have taken a toll. He remains a consistent, far above average goaltender when you factor in the quality of shots he faces, so don't be surprised if a new system in New York leads to a bit of a save percentage revival for the King.

9. Devan Dubnyk

Difficulty adjustment: -7.04%

Performance: 45.97/70 | Consistency: 19.28/30

Total: 65.25/100

Devan Dubnyk's career renaissance in Minnesota continues. On the surface Dubnyk's play last season was just okay, but he was one of the top even strength goaltenders in the NHL with a high rate of quality starts and very few blow up games.

Dubnyk faces among the easiest shots of any starting NHL goaltender, which certainly goes a long way towards helping him be a consistently high performing goaltender. But there's also a certain kind of mental fortitude needed to perform at that level for such a long time at this position.

8. Ryan Miller

Difficulty adjustment: +4.01%



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Performance: 49.41/70 | Consistency: 16.12/30

Total: 65.53/100

Once in a while you get a weird one that pops out when you're going just by the data. Considering the rest of Miller's career, though, maybe it shouldn't be that weird to see him ranked highly on this list.

At 38 years old, age has robbed Miller of some of his quickness, but after two seasons of absolutely brutal shots faced in Vancouver he went to Anaheim and faced tougher shots than Gibson and put up comparable numbers.

Miller actually posted the highest 5-on-5 save percentage in the NHL last year, and his high danger save percentage was right up there at fourth overall. It's much easier to accomplish that level of performance in fewer games, though, and the Ducks didn't rely on Miller too much. He is capable of phenomenal performances, but in a limited role.

7. Roberto Luongo

Difficulty adjustment: -1.04%

Performance: 44.25/70 | Consistency: 21.36/30

Total: 65.61/100

While injuries have been a problem for Luongo in his late-30s (and it hit him again already in 2018-19), his play hasn't. With the Panthers being a much better defensive team now than the first time he played there, Luongo has enjoyed a long stretch of time where people thought he was going to fall off, but he continued as one of the league's top netminders.

Usually, great goaltenders at the end of their careers still put forth strong performances, but the consistency falls off. But Luongo has been more consistent in each of the past three seasons than the one that came before it. He remains a master of rebound control and is excellent in the low slot, but he can be victimized a bit in the high slot.

6. Pekka Rinne

Difficulty adjustment: -4.47%

Performance: 48.05/70 | Consistency: 20.89/30

Total: 68.94/100

Rinne's entire career has come on a team that has mastered controlling defensive shot quality, but last year Nashville slipped a bit and Rinne had to face tougher shots than usual. He responded by leading the league in almost every goaltending category, including finishing with the best rebound control in the league, which cut down his own quality of shots faced.

Just a few years ago Rinne looked like he was done, posting far below league average save percentages while facing some of the easiest shots of anyone. But in 2016-17 there was movement back towards being among the top half of the league and last year he deservedly won the Vezina Trophy. While some goalies have game-to-game consistency where you don't know what you'll get from them, Rinne can be inconsistent season-to-season. Doubt him at your peril, but can you trust him?

5. Carey Price

Difficulty adjustment: +6.42%

Performance: 48.62/70 | Consistency: 20.81/30

Total: 69.43/100

The reigning champ of the goaltending position the first two years I did this project was dealt a double whammy this time — his Hart Trophy season dropped out of the three-year sample and the worst season of his career was added in. Price was awful in 2017-18, but I was a little surprised at how difficult his job was after deeper research.

No one faced more dangerous passes immediately preceding shots than Price last season, and that trend extends back over the entire three years of the sample. The Canadiens are uniquely terrible at clogging up passing lanes and preventing backdoor chances, which gives some context to Price's struggles. But remember Antti Niemi faced the same shots Price did and he was fine.

Something was up with Price last year, though so far this season it appears to no longer be a problem. It's going to be interesting to see if Price can re-establish the enormous gap he had between himself and the next best goaltender.

Observation from today's practice: Haven't seen Carey Price enjoying himself this much in a year. He's also stopping just about everything.

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) October 8, 2018

4. John Gibson

Difficulty adjustment: -2.17%

Performance: 47.30/70 | Consistency: 23.25/30

Total: 70.55/100

Gibson has seen serious improvement in each of the past four seasons and is now a top-five player at his position. His numbers are extremely strong and he is nearly unbeatable while the Ducks are shorthanded. But his consistency is what's most impressive to me.

Only three goaltenders last year put up a higher percentage of quality starts than Gibson, and nobody lost fewer games for their team. Sure, Gibson has bad games from time to time, but he was almost never bad enough in any start to take the Ducks out of games. For a team that struggled with injuries through most of last season and still made the playoffs, Gibson was the MVP.

3. Sergei Bobrovsky

Difficulty adjustment: -0.49%

Performance: 51.40/70 | Consistency: 22.63/30

Total: 74.03/100

For whatever reason, public data and private data vehemently disagree about the shot quality Bobrovsky faces in Columbus, with my numbers ending up very close to league average shots faced. Regardless, Bob is one of the most consistently excellent goaltenders in the NHL.

Bobrovsky struggled a bit on special teams last year, but he was so excellent at even strength that his performance was still among the best in the league. He continued to give the Blue Jackets a chance to win almost every single night.

2. Corey Crawford

Difficulty adjustment: +1.79%

Performance: 50.89/70 | Consistency: 23.46/30

Total: 74.35/100

It appears Crawford is getting closer to game action, but the question now becomes whether the Blackhawks will get the goaltender back that they lost, or if post-concussion syndrome and vertigo will have negative long-term impacts.

As Chicago's defensive play declined, Crawford got better and he's been the NHL's most consistent goaltender the past four seasons — he almost never plays a poor game. The one weakness in Crawford's game is his rebound control, but he's so good at stopping pucks that it doesn't hurt him much.

1. Antti Raanta

Difficulty adjustment: +1.34%



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Performance: 53.03/70 | Consistency: 22.32/30

Total: 75.35/100

As a big fan of Antti Raanta's game, this one was still a bit of a shocker for me, but that's the way the numbers work out. Going from Corey Crawford's backup to Henrik Lundqvist's backup, it took a long time for Raanta to be given a true shot as a No. 1 NHL goalie. But even though his first season in Arizona was marred by injury he posted a ridiculous .930 save percentage for a bad team.

Like Crawford, Raanta's big weakness is his rebound control, which can lead to him facing more quality chances against despite his team's efforts, but he still stops pucks at an absurdly high rate. Last season was also a huge step forward for Raanta's consistency, as he led the league in quality start percentage and had among the fewest blow up games in the league.

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Sportsnet.ca / Stars' Carrick grateful for clean slate after trade from Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston | October 9, 2018, 4:32 PM

DALLAS – "That's a really difficult question," Connor Carrick says. And then he spends more than three minutes working through his answer.

With Carrick still getting adjusted to life in Dallas and about to face the Toronto Maple Leafs for the first time since being traded here last week, it's challenging for the 24-year-old defenceman to assess if he got a fair shake in his former home.

Eventually, he settles on something that sounds like "yes."

"There were chances in those two years. I was on the power play and didn't score. I was on the [penalty] kill and they scored. I was on in the last minute and I didn't do whatever we wanted," Carrick told Sportsnet on Tuesday. "The term players use is leash and different players have a different sort of leash. Hockey's not about equality. You've got 23 players who all have different things and have different roles and it's not about making sure everyone gets the same amount of treats. It's not the game.

"So the way I view it is we wanted it to go a certain way, it didn't, and I accept as much responsibility as I can bear. And whatever trace there is left over, there's things that happened."

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Carrick started losing his grip on a job with the Leafs during the 2017 playoffs, when he played 15 shifts or less in the final four games against the Washington Capitals. Then he was a healthy scratch in the seventh regular-season game last season – and more than 30 times after it – and by the time training camp rolled around last month he figured he was as good as gone.

That was hammered home when he was placed in the AHL group midway through camp. He'd spent the summer working out like a fiend and produced the top fitness results of any Leaf but wasn't going to be able to convince the coaching staff he had more to give.

You can appreciate then why a wave of optimism washed over Carrick once he started processing the Oct. 1 trade that brought him to the Stars. Here he has a clean slate with coach Jim Montgomery, who paired him with former Toronto teammate Roman Polak for the first two games and gave him a regular even-strength shift.

There is a chance to grab a role in Dallas that eluded him with the Maple Leafs and he understands better just how precious those opportunities can be.

"I can tell you right now, walking in, my demeanour around this room, around this coach, is different than when I first walked into Toronto," said Carrick. "It's aged. You just have more confidence things are going to work out and you understand the importance of other things. You take those lessons and you build [your game]."

"Until you can really get your head above the trees, a lot of the guys in the league are managing what they want to be and what the coach needs out of them. It's that give and take. It's the player's responsibility to achieve freedom of mind; you've got to create your own peace out there and make plays."

Carrick has already caught the eye of Montgomery by producing three assists in his first two games. Talk about a dream start. The new Stars head coach says that kind of production speaks for itself when assessing his play so far.

Carrick believes he has another level to reach and made an investment in himself over the summer, travelling to Darryl Belfry's exclusive camp in late August and taking the ice with Auston Matthews, Patrick Kane, Claude Giroux, Charlie McAvoy and others.

The right-shot defenceman draws inspiration from players who have travelled the long road before eventually establishing themselves as reliable NHLers.

"There's so many stories of it," said Carrick. "That's what you rely on when you're in the fight: 'Whose done more with less than I have right now?' Sometimes you don't fit in a plan. The coach sees it one way and wants the team to play a certain way."

"It's all about assets. It's 'what do you bring as a player' – every player has strengths and weaknesses. You try and build a role and that's something I wasn't able to do in Toronto."

What he is proud of is how he handled himself during a trying 2017-18 season with the Leafs. Carrick said there "were a lot of days where you've got a couple attitudes in the drawer to pick from" when he was riding a long stretch of healthy scratches, and is satisfied that he managed to put his best face on more often than not.

It was telling that a few Leafs stopped by his apartment while he was packing up in the wake of the trade last week. Several others sent text messages of support.

There's bound to be some conflicting emotions for Carrick when he lines up opposite them on the ice at American Airlines Center. The memories, both good and bad, are still fresh. This won't feel like your typical Tuesday night game early in the season for No. 5 in black and green.

"It's not the same when I play against Chicago – that's where I'm from and you've got 50 people in the stands versus two in any other town," said Carrick. "It's not the same against Toronto, it's not the same against Colorado, which is my favourite childhood team."

"You've always got your baggage, man. That's what it is."

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators' Thomas Chabot already thriving in expanded role

Wayne Scanlan October 9, 2018, 4:41 PM

Through the first weekend of the NHL season, Ottawa Senators defenceman Thomas Chabot was a two-time social media sensation.

His first blush with fame came Saturday on the Hockey Night in Canada broadcast between the Senators and home Toronto Maple Leafs. On the game-winning goal, Chabot undressed rookie Toronto defenceman Igor Ozhiganov, slipping the puck through his skates before scoring on Frederik Andersen.

It was Chabot's second goal of the game and was captured brilliantly on the Senators web site, as they inserted a recent facial expression from Ottawa rookie Brady Tkachuk to punctuate the highlight. According to the Senators content producer Craig Medaglia, the highlight has had 450,000 views, making it the most-watched in franchise history.

A day later, Chabot, 21, was the unintended star of a "Road Trippin'" video that also went viral. Speaking in his second language, the native of Sainte-Marie, Que., was perfectly deadpan in his delivery as a tour guide of a trip to Boston (The Senators faced the Bruins on Monday).

Among the highlights: "Bostonians have been known to consume seafood, while at other times they just eat regular land food."

And, "In Boston they're just called cream donuts."

Again, it's all in the delivery.

"I had no clue what we were talking about to be honest, I didn't know some of the words, but it was pretty funny," says Chabot, trusting Medaglia with the script (though Chabot's English is quite good). "I'm glad people enjoyed it."

Needless to say, over his first three games of the season, off-days included, Chabot has it going on.

How quickly he has stepped up, necessarily, in the absence of superstar defenceman Erik Karlsson, traded away on the first day of training camp.

Physically stronger, the sophomore Chabot has contributed two goals and three assists, second only to the Leafs' Morgan Rielly among NHL defencemen.

With an average ice time of 21:51 (26th overall for defencemen), Chabot is playing four minutes-plus per game more than he did last season, when he chipped in with nine goals and 16 assists in 63 games. On the Senators, only Cody Ceci has more ice time (22:37), as Karlsson's former minutes are distributed.

Perhaps knowing more about Karlsson's situation than Chabot did, Senators head coach Guy Boucher and associate coach Marc Crawford met with Chabot long before training camp.

"I had a few chats over the summer with Guy and Marc and they were telling me to get ready and expect a bigger role, which kind of helped me," Chabot says.

Chabot finished his rookie season carrying 188 pounds on a six-foot-two frame designed for a larger load. He showed up at camp weighing 196, the extra girth all muscle, and hopes to maintain 192 to 193 pounds through the season.

"My goal was to get a little bigger and a little stronger, but to be honest with you I did the same things I do every summer – work a lot on my skills, skating and details in my own zone," Chabot says.

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As a team, the Senators also carried extra weight into the season, most of it unwanted baggage from the off-season from hell. So, to be 1-1-1 off a 4-3 overtime loss in the home opener to Chicago, a thrilling 5-3 victory in Toronto over John Tavares and the Leafs, and then a 6-3 road loss in Boston is not the worst start.

As expected, Ottawa's revamped defence has been under pressure, especially the so-called shutdown committee of Ceci, Mark Borowicki and Dylan DeMelo. Minus a true shutdown pair, Boucher is rotating the defensive load.

Paired mostly with Chabot, DeMelo, 25, acquired from the San Jose Sharks in the Karlsson trade, is plus-7 and has three points.

Boucher likes the chemistry of DeMelo and Chabot, the former more apt to stay home while Chabot can roam with those fluid strides. If he isn't already, it won't be long before Chabot becomes the Senators' best all-around defenceman.

Known for his offence as a point-per-game defenceman in the QMJHL with the Saint John Seadogs, Chabot was drafted 18th overall by the Senators in 2015. He led Canada to a silver medal at the 2017 world junior championships, winning the tournament MVP award as well as being named the best player in the final game, despite a shootout loss to the U.S.

Typical of offensive-minded defencemen, Chabot has had to go to school on the defensive aspect, including 13 games with the AHL Belleville Senators last season. Unlike many with such skill, he has the size and the will to play a stout defensive game.

"They're called defencemen for a reason, right?" says veteran Senators forward Matt Duchene. "The first objective is to defend well and get the forwards the puck. For me, that's what he does. He doesn't try to do too much. He doesn't lead the rush, he joins the rush."

"That's key for a guy with that skill set, who could lead the rush if he wanted to, to know what is best for our team, our forwards."

Chabot is far removed from that famous Boucher quote when the kid first arrived in Ottawa: "Do we give steak to a baby?" Boucher said by way of reducing the hype.

Today, Boucher sees the potential for Chabot to become a top all-around D-man in the league.

"People look at his offence and go 'Wow,' but we're also looking at the other side," Boucher says. "There's a lot more maturity in his game."

For his part, Chabot, the chill tour guide, is enjoying the extra ice time, the first unit power-play duty, the added responsibility.

"I think I've come a long way," he says. "When I look back on last year or even two years ago, I was kind of trying to go out there and not make any mistakes, which I'm still thinking in my head."

"But I'm just trying to get some plays going, trying to create some scoring chances and get some goals."

He already has one goal that will be on highlight videos for years to come.

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TSN.CA / Leafs becoming offensive juggernaut in second straight win

Kristen Shilton

Auston Matthews and John Tavares led the way again for the Maple Leafs in a pair of two-goal nights as Toronto downed the Dallas Stars 7-4 on Tuesday night. Mitch Marner and Morgan Rielly were also big contributors with four points each in the win (a new career high for Rielly), as Toronto earned back-to-back victories for the first time this season.

TAKEAWAYS

Matthews keeps motoring

Auston Matthews said during the summer he was hoping to register more assists than goals this season. And maybe he will, by the end of the campaign. But four games into this season, Matthews has more than double the number of goals (seven) as helpers (three) to lead not only the Leafs in goals, but the entire NHL field. He scored his sixth and seventh of the season against Dallas, marking his fourth straight game with a goal and his fourth straight multi-point game. On the first, Matthews once again took advantage of new linemate Kasper Kapanen's skill, as he did in Sunday's two-goal performance in Chicago.

With the Leafs and Stars tied in the first period, Kapanen spied Matthews in the right circle and teed him up with a back-hand pass assist. With the score, Matthews became the sixth Leafs' player to score at least one goal in each of the franchise's first four games (the last player to do it was Clarke MacArthur in 2010-11). The 21-year-old didn't stop there. He took advantage of a bad roughing penalty against Jamie Benn to send home another goal from his new office in the left circle on the Leafs' top power play. With that, Matthews joined Harry Cameron (1917-18) and Sweeney Schriner (1944-45) as the only Leafs to tally multiple points in each of the team's first four games of the season.

Being able to anticipate what's coming and get his shot off so quickly has always been a staple of Matthews' game, but he's evolved that even further to require seemingly no time at all to pick his spot on net and surprise goaltenders with an even faster release than before. Matthews was never a player that lacked in confidence. But with his skating also further improved from last season he moves around the ice with such ease and determination that he's difficult to stop. And with Tavares acting as the perfect one-two offensive punch with Matthews, the Leafs are slowly starting to look like the juggernaut they were expected to be. Matthews finished the night minus-1 with four shots on goal, while Tavares had an even rating with three shots.

Hustle and hard work

In the first week of this regular season, Toronto has made a bad habit out of chasing the puck in their end, especially early in games. That happened again in the first against Dallas, where the Leafs went from solid to lacklustre defensively in a matter of minutes. But unlike in previous games, that stretch was only an aberration for Toronto, a blip they smoothly recovered from to take control of the period from there. The Leafs established a forecheck and were winning battles they'd been prone to losing in the first three games.

Dallas entered Tuesday's game boasting a 2-0-0 record and with goaltender Ben Bishop having given up only one goal against in two starts, fewest in the NHL. Bishop ended up ceding two goals to the Leafs before the first period was over, thanks to strong play by the Leafs offence and special teams. Coach Mike Babcock had chided his team last week for putting their talent ahead of their work, and Tuesday's game was the first time those two elements felt more balanced. As the game wore on, the Leafs got key contributions from Kapanen and Zach Hyman

winning races to the puck to negate icings, both of which resulted in goals (for Ron Hainsey and Tavares respectively). Hyman had his best game of the season by far, doing the lion's share of the work in front of the net to not only screen Bishop but feed the pass Marner would score on. The overall physicality was lacking on both sides, but the Leafs forwards weren't jumping out of their zone too quickly looking for stretch passes and overall supported their back end better, which led to more positive plays through the neutral zone and winning the possession battle at 52 per cent.

Andersen wins big in Big D

Frederik Andersen played career game No. 260 on Tuesday, and on that night recorded the 150th victory of his NHL tenure. To get there, Andersen had to survive an early push by the Stars in the first period, particularly on a terrific chance for Tyler Seguin, to keep Toronto from getting behind early. What also helped was a little luck on Andersen's part after his miscue overskating a puck behind the net very nearly turned into a goal, but Mattias Janmark sent the puck through Andersen's legs across the crease to keep the Leafs ahead 1-0.

It wasn't until the Leafs committed a bad line change and confusion ensued at Toronto's blueline that Dallas solved Andersen, courtesy of an Alex Radulov wrister. Then Seguin out-raced Hainsey to a loose puck in the neutral zone and took off on a breakaway to beat Andersen five-hole and tie the game again midway through the second period. On John Klingberg's goal, Dallas' fourth, Andersen looked to have his stick tied up by Benn in front of the net, but the Leafs' challenge on the play was unsuccessful and briefly made it a one-goal game in the third before Toronto took over.

Solid, if not spectacular, Andersen made the saves Toronto needed and was helped by the outpouring of offence generated in front of him, as well as a more cohesive defensive showing. Andersen finished with 30 saves and an .882 save percentage.

All-powerful power plays

The Leafs entered Tuesday's second period clinging to a one-goal lead. By late in the frame, they were leading 5-2 after scoring three goals in 5:01, two of which came on the power play. First it was Matthews beating Bishop, then Tavares finished off a superb individual play by Marner to pot his sixth goal of the year. That top power play unit for Toronto has scored five goals in Toronto's first four games, with at least a goal in each. Going into the night, Dallas and Toronto were tied with the second-best power plays in the NHL (42.9 per cent), and both sides proved potent with the extra attacker. When Patrick Marleau went to the box for hooking, Benn needed little time to light the lamp against Toronto's penalty kill in the Stars' only power play opportunity. The Leafs finished 2-for-3 with the man advantage. But not relying on special teams will continue to be a focus for the Leafs, who saw an example on Tuesday of how much they can help, and hurt, in a hurry.

Cause for concern?

While the Leafs have scored 20 goals to start this season, they've also given up 17 goals against. It leaves a tiny margin of error Toronto, and as the NHL continues tightening up in the coming weeks, the Leafs have to be cautious defensively before those close games start slipping through their fingers.

Blue & White Trending

Tracking Leafs' trends all season long

Tavares and Matthews have scored 13 goals between them to start the season, while the rest of the Leafs combined have scored seven. Tavares has multiple goals in each of his last two games.

Match game

How the Leafs matched up against the Stars

Benn-Seguín-Radulov vs. Hyman-Tavares-Marner



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Shore-Faksa-Pitlick vs. Marleau-Matthews-Kapanen

Janmark-Spezza-Comeau vs. Lindholm-Kadri-Brown

Nichushkin-Hintz-Ritchie vs. Leivo-Gauthier-Ennis

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TSN.CA / Matthews more comfortable showing his personality

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Leafs and Stars skated on Tuesday morning at American Airlines Center in Dallas.

It feels like more and more we're getting to see the real Auston Matthews. There was the GQ spread in the preseason and this week a similar photoshoot and article was published in Sharp, a Canadian men's lifestyle magazine.

The 21-year-old from Arizona now seems more willing to show off his personality.

"You just grow more comfortable with yourself and with your teammates and everything as the years go by," Matthews acknowledged. "Obviously, we're still kids so we want to have fun out there and I think that's really important."

Matthews is also showing more emotion on the ice with his goal celebrations, including a Hulk Hogan-esque ear cup on Sunday in Chicago. Patrick Kane wasn't a huge fan of the move, but Tyler Seguin enjoyed it.

Kane on this: "That's like entertainment right there. I wasn't really happy when he did it, so it was nice to get a chance to score and do it back to him. <https://t.co/lAzBjRjLbn>

— Scott Powers (@ByScottPowers) October 8, 2018

"I think it's great," the Stars centre said. "Anything that's going to bring that kind of buzz to the sport is great. I also don't even mind Matthews' photoshoots. I think they're alright too. A couple of the pictures, I don't know about the outfits, but good for him just getting outside the comfort zone and doing things that a lot of hockey players don't."

Asked if he's received any negative feedback from the photoshoots, Matthews said he didn't really focus on the reaction to the pieces.

"Everybody's into different things and if you're not, I mean, there's nothing against you, right. Everybody can be their own person. Traditionally, it's more of a conservative sport, but I think you see more and more younger guys kind of come into the game and they got that flash and I think it can only help the game."

Does Matthews want to push the boundaries even more as time goes by?

"I don't know," he said. "We'll see. I'm not thinking about that too much right now."

Auston Matthews' personality has been on display through the early part of this season. From goal celebrations to a couple of magazine profiles, Matthews is growing more comfortable showing his personality. Mark Masters has more on the real Matthews coming out.

It's a lot easier to show off your personality when you're playing well and right now Matthews is leading the league in scoring with eight points in three games. He's doing it despite the absence of his usual running mate William Nylander, who remains without a contract.

The Leafs are still looking for a reliable right winger to skate with Matthews and Patrick Marleau. Kasperii Kapanen got a chance on Sunday taking over from Tyler Ennis and produced a goal and an assist. Kapanen will be back in that spot tonight.

"Kappy was great," said head coach Mike Babcock. "He was physical, he was fast, and he played heavy. Those are the things you need to play with good players because they want the puck back. You've got to be able to play without it and get to the net. I thought he did all that. Now the challenge for him, and he knows that, is he's got to do it again and then you've got to do it again the next day and then I said we're in game four so that's about 80 more of them and then the playoffs."

Matthews made a nice lob/stretch pass to spring Kapanen on a breakaway against the Blackhawks. That sort of play could become a big weapon for this line considering Kapanen's blazing speed.

"I knew he got it before the goal line," Kapanen recalled, "and I thought if I started skating I might have a chance on the breakaway and he made a great pass. That was a great pass by Auston."

"He opens up a lot of space with his speed," noted Matthews, "so not a lot of guys can fly like him. If you put the puck out there for him then nine times out of 10 he'll probably be the first guy on it. I just saw him going and tried to lay it out for him."

Kapanen, who has been a fourth liner for most of his early NHL career, realizes how big a chance this is.

"Auston has taken himself to the next level and it's scary to see," said Kapanen. "Obviously, he's 21 years old and still developing. He makes all the plays and makes guys around him look good."

Leafs Ice Chips: Kapanen gets big chance as Babcock shakes things up

Kasperii Kapanen produced alongside Auston Matthews and Patrick Marleau in Sunday's wild win in Chicago and he will get another chance with Matthews tonight in Dallas. Mark Masters has more on Kapanen's big chance and the other lineup changes.

New Stars head coach Jim Montgomery is well aware of what that line can do. He was actually teammates with Marleau in San Jose in 2000-01.

"It doesn't look like he's lost a step yet," Montgomery said.

Montgomery also studied Matthews quite a bit and attempted to recruit him to the University of Denver where he was coaching the Pioneers. Matthews ultimately decided to play in Switzerland.

"I had never seen someone have that dynamic to him at that size and then also have the power game," Montgomery gushed. "I mean, he's a rare player. And you knew it. You could see it coming. I remember when we were recruiting him we were like, 'Please let him fall into our lap somehow for one year.' But I think he made the right choice."

"I don't know if it's true or not, but he did say that if he didn't get the opportunity to go play pro in Switzerland he was going to come to Denver. Maybe he said that to 10 schools, I don't know."

Montgomery has, like much of the hockey world, kept tabs on Matthews and been impressed with his development.

"He's an incredible talent and what I've really noticed about his game is how good he's become defensively," the Stars bench boss said. "In his first year in the league he got exposed with that, but you don't see him getting exposed now. I watched the game against [Jonathan] Toews and that was a great battle between two great centres."

With Matthews raising his level, matching up against the Leafs will be even more of a headache for opposing teams this season.

"Up front at the centre position they're very deep," said Seguin before cracking a smile. "Everyone knows that. You guys make sure everyone knows that."

Matthews managed to produce two goals despite facing Toews and Duncan Keith on Sunday. Meanwhile, John Tavares, Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman got an easier matchup, leading to Tavares' first hat trick with his hometown team.



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So, what message will Montgomery send his defence?

"Hope and pray," he said with a chuckle. "Their transition to offence is incredible. We got to catch them going east/west before they get a head of steam."

What's the biggest thing Montgomery has brought to the Stars so far?

"Our speed, our tempo has gone up higher than it was last year," said Seguin. "We focused so much on defending that we kind of lost our speed, which had been a big strength of our team the last few years and he's brought that back."

The Stars have allowed just one goal in two wins over Arizona and Winnipeg.

How do you slow down Matthews?

"It's a tough question," said ex-Leaf Roman Polak. "Everybody's trying to figure that out. It looks like he's unstoppable so far ... We need to be all over him."

Polak is one of two former Toronto blueliners now taking up residence in Dallas. The other is Connor Carrick, who was traded on the eve of the season. Both seem pretty fired up to face their old friends.

"It's going to be lots of fun," Polak said. "It's going to be an exciting time. I can't wait to be out there today against them. I think there'll be lots of chirping out there too."

Anyone he's looking forward to chirping in particular?

"Probably just everybody."

Anyone he wants to hit?

"I'm going to try everyone, but they're tough to hit. They're so fast. So, it'll be interesting."

"Not a guy you want to run into, for sure," said Matthews, who sat beside Polak for two years in Toronto's practice facility dressing room. "He's a competitor out there. He's built like a mountain."

Polak met up with some Leafs yesterday, but refused to say who.

"It's a secret," he said with a laugh.

Carrick met up with Connor Brown and Marner last night. One of his favourite memories from his time in Toronto was helping run a weekly Catan board game.

"I had very close friends in Toronto – guys that were at my wedding and all that," he said. "Super grateful for my time there. The whole organization always treated me really well. Had some goals there that had to die with the trade and that's just the matter of the fact. [I'm] really looking forward to playing a good hockey team tonight."

Ex-Leafs Polak, Carrick eager to chirp, hit old friends

Roman Polak and Connor Carrick will take on the Maple Leafs for the first time since joining the Stars and Polak says he can't wait to hit and chirp everyone.

Babcock is shuffling his bottom-six forwards. Par Lindholm, the fourth-line centre so far, will shift to left wing alongside Nazem Kadri and Brown. The third line has played inconsistently so far this season. Kadri and Brown (-5) have the worst plus-minus ratings on the team.

"Obviously, I'm still searching," Babcock said. "I've got the one line that kind of looks like it's going and Tavares' group. The other one is still a work in progress. But it's game four, right? Same questions every year."

Frederik Gauthier will make his regular-season debut as the fourth-line centre skating between Josh Leivo and Ennis.

Andreas Johnsson, the MVP of the AHL playoffs last spring, will be a healthy scratch.

"The biggest thing for him is: How do you respond from it?" said Babcock. "It hasn't gone as good as you'd like so there's no sense worrying about that now. You can't fix that. What you can fix is what you do tomorrow and your next opportunity. Get to work and get it going. He's an important part for us. We think he's a big piece, we think he's an important player, but you've got to do it at the NHL level."

After sitting out Sunday's game, Russian rookie Igor Ozhiganov is back in on defence paired with Travis Dermott. Martin Marincin will be the odd man out.

Sidelined by a lower-body injury in the pre-season, Valeri Nichushkin will be in the Stars lineup tonight.

"He had a real good preseason," Montgomery said. "He was really dominant in the exhibition games that he played. Unfortunately, he tweaked a muscle, so now we need to get him going."

Nichushkin will start on the fourth line alongside Roope Hintz and Brett Ritchie, but the coach won't hesitate to bump him up.

"If he's on he's getting moved up, because he's a heavy horse and I think he's a good matchup against their defencemen."

Lines at Leafs morning skate:

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Marleau-Matthews-Kapanen

Lindholm-Kadri-Brown

Leivo-Gauthier-Ennis

Johnsson

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Marincin-Holl

Andersen starts

Sparks

* Power play units at Leafs morning skate:

Rielly

Matthews-Kadri-Marner

Tavares

Gardiner

Ennis-Brown-Leivo

Marleau

* Lines at Stars morning skate:

Benn-Seguin-Radulov

Janmark-Spezza-Comeau

Shore-Faksa-Pitlick

Nichushkin-Hintz-Ritchie

Lindell-Klingberg

Methot-Heiskanen

Carrick-Polak

Bishop starts

Khudobin



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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Bergeron is a two-way superstar

Scott Cullen

Patrice Bergeron leads Boston's powerhouse line; Lehner, Eichel and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

In Boston's 6-3 victory against Ottawa, Boston's two-way superstar centre Patrice Bergeron led the way with three goals and an assist. He has six points (4 G, 2 A) in three games this season, but has also been the standard-bearer for all-around play for a long time.

Since 2013-2014, for example, the Bruins have controlled 58.8% of the shot attempts with Bergeron on the ice at 5-on-5. His relative Corsi in that time is +8.3%, which is comfortably ahead of the second-best relative Corsi in the league over that time, belonging to linemate Brad Marchand (+7.0 CFRel%).

So, we know that Bergeron dominates shot counts. Always has, seems like he always will. But it's not like he's lofting flip shots from centre ice to pad the shot totals. When it comes to relative expected goals percentage over that time frame, only Connor McDavid (+8.1 xGF%) ranks higher than Bergeron (+7.6 xGF%).

I might refer to him as the Corsi God, but Patrice Bergeron is a superstar and the Senators were on the receiving end of one of his standout performances.

With Bergeron going off, it's no surprise that his linemates got in on the act, too. Right winger David Pastrnak had two goals and two assists; he has five points (3 G, 2 A) and 15 shots on goal in three games. Left winger Brad Marchand chipped in three assists, giving him seven helps in the past two games.

They form one of the most dominant lines in hockey. Last season, they controlled 58.9% of the shot attempts while outscoring opponents 27-17 (61.4 GF%) during 5-on-5 play, and Bergeron is the one at the centre of all that excellence.

HEROES

Robin Lehner – The Islanders netminder posted a 35-save shutout in a 4-0 win over San Jose, his first start for the team. Given what he has been through, that's quite a start to the new season.

Jack Eichel – Buffalo's young star centre scored a pair of goals in a 4-2 win against Vegas, giving him four points (3 G, 1 A) in three games.

ZEROES

Casey Mittelstadt – Buffalo's rookie centre had a tough game in a 4-2 win against Vegas, failing to register a shot attempt and finishing with team-worst possession numbers (1 for, 13 against, 7.1 CF%, 0-7 scoring chances) against the Golden Knights.

Marc-Andre Fleury – Vegas' veteran goaltender allowed four goals on 17 shots in a 4-2 loss at Buffalo. It's very early, obviously, but he has a .841 save percentage through his first three starts of the season.

VITAL SIGNS

Matt Murray – Pittsburgh's starting goaltender has suffered a concussion. Casey DeSmith is next in line, though if Murray is going to miss significant time, Tristan Jarry could see some action, too.

SHORT SHIFTS

Senators LW Ryan Dzingel scored a pair of goals in a 6-3 loss at Boston, giving him four points (2 G, 2 A) in three games...Senators D Dylan DeMelo chipped in a couple of assists and has three points (1 G, 2 A) in

three games; he has also been on the ice for seven goals for and none against at 5-on-5 play...Bruins D Charlie McAvoy contributed three assists against Ottawa; he has four assists in three games...Islanders C Casey Cizikas recorded a goal and an assist in a 4-0 win over San Jose, his first points of the season...Sabres RW Kyle Okposo picked up a pair of assists in a 4-2 win against Vegas, his first points of the season...Golden Knights LW Jonathan Marchessault produced a goal and an assist in a 4-2 loss at Buffalo, and has four points (2 G, 2 A) in three games...Golden Knights C William Karlsson added a couple of assists at the Sabres, his first points of the year.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Toews starts season with a bang

Scott Cullen

Chicago's captain is off to a great start; Dallas' big line, Matthews, Tavares, Pettersson, Chabot, Gibson and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

Blackhawks centre Jonathan Toews recorded a hat trick in Saturday's 5-4 overtime win at St. Louis and added a goal in Sunday's 7-6 overtime loss to Toronto, giving him five goals in three games to start the season.

Toews scored a career-low 20 goals in 74 games last season, so a return to 25-plus goals, a threshold he's hit seven times in his career, would be a welcome development for the Blackhawks.

In this small sample, he's started the season skating on a line with sophomore winger Alex DeBrincat and rookie winger Dominik Kahun and is scoring on an unsustainable 38.5% of his shots, but there is a positive side too - Toews has generated 13 shots on goal in three games, 4.3 per game. He's averaged more than three shots on goal per game just twice in his career, most recently in 2012-2013.

If the Blackhawks are going to contend for a playoff spot this season, a big year from Toews, their 30-year-old first-line centre, would presumably be a big part of that effort.

HEROES

Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov - Dallas' big line destroyed the Jets on Saturday, scoring all five goals in the Stars' 5-1 victory over Winnipeg. Benn had two power play goals and an assist, Seguin had two goals and two helpers, and Radulov contributed a goal and two assists.

Thomas Chabot - Ottawa's sophomore blueliner led the way in Saturday's 5-3 win at Toronto, scoring two goals and adding an assist. He's in for a much bigger role with the Senators this season, playing more than 21 minutes per game in the first two games of the year after averaging 17:31 per game as a rookie.

Auston Matthews - The Maple Leafs centre recorded a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-3 loss to Ottawa then added two goals and two assists in Sunday's 7-6 overtime win at Chicago. He has a league-leading eight points (5 G, 3 A) in three games to start the season.

John Tavares - Almost an afterthought in Sunday's 7-6 overtime win at Chicago, Tavares posted a hat trick, giving him four goals in three games. He also has 15 shots on goal.

Morgan Rielly rescues Leafs in OT

Morgan Rielly - The Maple Leafs blueliner scored the winning goal in overtime and added two assists in Sunday's 7-6 overtime win at Chicago, following a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-3 loss to Ottawa. He has six points (2 G, 4 A) in three games to start the season.

Paul Byron - The Habs speedster scored a pair of goals and added an assist in Saturday's 5-1 win at Pittsburgh. Over the previous three seasons, Byron had scored on a remarkable 20.3% of his shots.

Elias Pettersson - Vancouver's highly-touted rookie tallied a pair of goals and added an assist in Saturday's 7-4 loss at Calgary. He has five points (3 G, 2 A) in his first two NHL games.

Elias Lindholm - After a tough Flames debut, Lindholm scored two goals and added an assist in Saturday's 7-4 win over Vancouver.

Henri Jokiharju - Chicago's 19-year-old rookie blueliner recorded five assists, and team-best possession stats (50 for, 20 against, 71.4 CF%) in two games over the weekend.

John Gibson - Anaheim's netminder recorded a 41-save shutout in Saturday's 1-0 win at Arizona. He has stopped 72 of 74 shots in his first two games.

ZEROES

Josh Leivo, Nazem Kadri, and Connor Brown - The Maple Leafs trio was on the ice for four goals against, and none for, during 5-on-5 play in Toronto's two weekend contests.

David Perron - The veteran Blues winger had a tough night (1 for, 14 against, 6.7 CF%) and was on the ice for a couple of goals against in Saturday's 5-4 OT loss to Chicago.

Garret Sparks - It wasn't an ideal start for Toronto's backup goaltender, who allowed six goals on 31 shots, on his way to a 7-6 overtime win at Chicago Sunday.

Alexander Georgiev - Surely not all of his fault, behind a leaky Rangers defence, but Georgiev gave up seven goals on 39 shots in his first start of the season, Sunday's 8-5 loss at Carolina.

VITAL SIGNS

Joe Thornton - San Jose's veteran centre has landed on IR with swelling in his surgically-repaired knee. The Sharks have options down the middle of the ice, and experience with Thornton missing time in recent seasons, but they could still use his setup skills, especially on the power play.

Ryan Getzlaf - Anaheim's playmaking pivot suffered a lower-body injury against Arizona Saturday. With Ryan Kesler already out, the Ducks can ill-afford to lose their No. 1 centre.

Flyers await word on JvR

James van Riemsdyk - In just his second game back in Philadelphia, JvR suffered a knee injury while blocking a clearing attempt. If he misses some time, Jordan Weal would seem like a decent bet to get into the Flyers lineup.

Jonathan Quick - The Kings netminder suffered a lower-body injury and will miss some time. Jack Campbell takes over between the pipes for Los Angeles in Quick's absence, and he stopped 36 of 38 shots in Sunday's 4-2 win vs. Detroit.

Roberto Luongo - Florida's veteran netminder suffered a knee injury against Tampa Bay Saturday, leaving James Reimer as the main man in the Panthers net.

Trevor Daley - Detroit's veteran blueliner had an awkward fall against Los Angeles Sunday and was forced to leave the game in the first period.

Kevin Shattenkirk - With the Rangers dressing seven defencemen at Carolina on Sunday, Shattenkirk played just 7:29 (4:07 at even strength)..

SHORT SHIFTS

Maple Leafs RW Kasperii Kapanen moved up to the Matthews line and had the most productive game of his career, coming up with a goal and an assist, with seven shots on goal, in Sunday's 7-6 overtime win at Chicago...Blackhawks D Duncan Keith produced three assists in Sunday's 7-6 overtime loss to Toronto. He's been effective alongside Jokiharju to start the season...Hurricanes rookie LW Warren Foegele put up two goals and an assist in Sunday's 8-5 win over the Rangers. His linemates, Jordan Staal and Justin Williams both contributed three points. Staal had a goal and two assists while Williams recorded three assists. Foegele has six points (4 G, 2 A) in five career games...Hurricanes LW Micheal Ferland had a goal and an assist in both Carolina games over the weekend. He has four points, and 11 shots on goal, in three games.



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Rangers LW Chris Kreider and LW Jimmy Vesey both scored a pair of goals in Sunday's 8-5 loss at Carolina, their first points of the season...Kings LW Alex Lafallo scored a pair of goals in Sunday's 4-2 win against Detroit, the second multi-goal game of his career...Kings RW Ilya Kovalchuk added a couple of assists against Detroit, but is off to a rough start in terms of shot differentials, with a 32.8 CF% in his first two games after five years in the KHL.

Flames LW Matthew Tkachuk earned four assists in Saturday's 7-4 victory over Vancouver; it was the first four-point game of his career...Flames LW Johnny Gaudreau and D Mark Giordano both had a goal and two assists while Flames C Sean Monahan contributed a goal and an assist. Flames D T.J. Brodie chipped in a couple of assists...Devils RW Kyle Palmieri and C Travis Zajac both tallied a pair of goals in Saturday's 5-2 win over Edmonton. Over the previous three seasons, Palmieri has tallied 80 goals and Zajac has scored 40...Predators RW Viktor Arvidsson scored two goals in Saturday's 4-3 victory at the Islanders, his only shots on goal in the first two games of the season...Predators D P.K. Subban added a couple of assists, giving him three points (1 G, 2 A) and six shots on goal through two games...Islanders C Mathew Barzal recorded a goal and an assist in Saturday's loss to Nashville. Islanders RW Josh Bailey added a pair of assists. They both have three points (1 G, 2 A) in two games.

Blackhawks RW Patrick Kane produced a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-4 OT win at St. Louis and scored two more goals in Sunday's 7-6 overtime loss to Toronto. He has six points (4 G, 2 A), and a league-leading 20 shots on goal, in three games...Blackhawks C Nick Schmaltz added a couple of assists in both Blackhawks games over the weekend. Blackhawks rookie LW Dominik Kahun added a couple of assists in Sunday's loss to Toronto, his first NHL points...Blues RW Vladimir Tarasenko potted a pair of goals in Saturday's loss to Chicago. He has 13 shots on goal in two games...Blues C Ryan O'Reilly had three assists and LW Patrick Maroon had two assists against Chicago. O'Reilly has four assists and a ridiculous face-off record (20 wins, three losses, 87.0%) in his first two games with St. Louis.

Sabres LW Conor Sheary scored two power play goals in Saturday's 3-1 win against the Rangers. He had four power play goals in 184 games with Pittsburgh prior to this season...Canadiens RW Arturi Lehkonen and D Jeff Petry both had a pair of assists in Saturday's 5-1 win at Pittsburgh. Lehkonen has three points (1 G, 2 A) in two games...Oilers LW Milan Lucic and C Leon Draisaitl both produced a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-2 loss to New Jersey. Oilers C Connor McDavid added a pair of assists...Sabres C Jack Eichel contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 3-1 win against the Rangers.

Stars C Jason Spezza picked up a pair of assists in Saturday's 5-1 victory against Winnipeg. He had one multi-assist game last season...Senators LW Zack Smith, who was waived before the start of the season, chipped in a couple of assists in Saturday's 5-3 victory at Toronto...Maple Leafs RW Mitch Marner contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's loss to Ottawa. Marner added two assists in Sunday's win at Chicago, giving him four points (1 G, 3 A) in three games...Avalanche LW Colin Wilson scored a couple of goals in Saturday's 5-2 win against Philadelphia. He had six goals in 56 games last season...Avalanche D Erik Johnson had three helpers, his first three-assist game since March, 2014, and C Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and an assist. He has three points (1 G, 2 A), and 15 shots on goal, in two games...Canucks C Bo Horvat contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 7-4 loss at Calgary, while Canucks D Alex Edler added a couple of assists.

Sabres G Carter Hutton stopped 43 of 44 shots in Saturday's 3-1 win vs. the Rangers. He has had more saves in a game just once in his career, last season against Winnipeg...Lightning G Andrei Vasilevski turned away 42 of 43 shots in Saturday's 2-1 shootout win against Florida. He had six games with at least 40 saves last season...Wild G Devan Dubnyk had 41 saves on 42 shots in Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss against Vegas, and has stopped 77 of 80 shots to start the season...Hurricanes G Curtis McElhinney turned away 31 of 32 shots in Friday's 3-1 win at Columbus, a strong debut for his new team. McElhinney had a .925 save percentage in 32 appearances for the Maple Leafs in the past two seasons.

FIRSTS

Andrei Svechnikov - The second pick in the 2018 Draft by Carolina scored his first career goal and added an assist, in his third career game, Sunday's 8-5 win against the Rangers.

Andrei Svechnikov pots the redirect for his #FirstNHLGoal as well as being the first skater born in the 2000s to score an NHL goal! #TakeWarning pic.twitter.com/dOBWwj3K61

— NHL Daily 365 (@NHLDaily365) October 7, 2018

Brett Howden - The Rangers' rookie centre notched his first career goal, in his second career game, Saturday's 3-1 loss at Buffalo.

Brett Howden - New York Rangers pic.twitter.com/1D80NTO9qr

— First NHL Goals (@FirstNHLGoal) October 7, 2018

Jacob MacDonald - Florida's 25-year-old rookie blueliner scored a goal in his NHL debut, Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss at Tampa Bay.

First NHL game. First NHL shift. First NHL shot. First NHL goal. That is a lot of firsts for @FlaPanthers defenseman Jacob MacDonald! Watch the action live on FOX Sports Florida! #FlaPanthers #OneTerritory pic.twitter.com/r6wyjC89sy

— FOX Sports Florida (@FOXSportsFL) October 6, 2018

Mikhail Vorobyev - Philadelphia's rookie centre recorded his first NHL goal, in his second NHL game, Saturday's 5-2 loss at Colorado.

Mikhail Vorobyev with one of the strangest first career NHL goals pic.twitter.com/aAoTJ8L0in

— Brady Tretteno (@BradyTrett) October 7, 2018

Many of the advanced stats used here come from Natural Stat Trick, Corsica and Hockey Reference.

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