



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 11, 2018



Hurricanes look different at start of 2018-19 season

An infusion of youth — and the patience of a former captain-turned-coach — has Carolina off to a fast start

Cory Lavalette

The Carolina Hurricanes — notoriously slow starters in recent seasons — started the 2018-19 campaign with a 3-0-1 record after Tuesday's night's 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks.

The new coaching staff — led by Rod Brind'Amour — and an overhauled roster that features five rookie forwards, new defensemen Dougie Hamilton and Calvin de Haan, and two additions to the goaltending mix have given the Hurricanes a new look. But what has been the difference in Carolina's start this year and years past?

Aho scored

Much has been made of Sebastian Aho's struggles at the start of his first two seasons — it took Aho 14 games to get his first NHL goal in 2016-17, and last season he didn't score until Game 16. Aho, who started the season at center, got his first goal in Columbus on Friday in Carolina's second game, scored again Tuesday, and has points in all four games so far.

The Hurricanes couldn't afford another slow start from Aho, especially with him playing center on the top line, and the 21-year-old responded with six points in the first four games.

Unsurprisingly, Aho is not yet satisfied.

"We want to be even better," he said after Tuesday's win. "We want to keep building something here."

Depth creates competition

Depth breeds competition for roster spots, and the team has already shuffled Valentin Zykov — who played the first two games — out of the lineup for Phil Di Giuseppe. Haydn Fleury, a healthy scratch in the first three games despite having a strong camp and preseason, played in his first game Tuesday in place of Trevor van Riemsdyk.

Even beyond the Hurricanes' NHL roster, Carolina boasts a wealth of talent in the American Hockey League. Checkers center Nicolas Roy made an early case for a look in Raleigh after he opened the season with back-to-back two-goal, one-assist efforts and was named AHL Player of the Week on Tuesday. Hurricanes rookie Lucas Wallmark, currently centering a line with Jordan Martinook and fellow rookie Andrei Svechnikov, had his best game in Sunday's 8-5 win over the Rangers — a performance that may have been needed to keep Roy in Charlotte for the time being.

Learn from your mistakes

Brind'Amour has preached patience, and the biggest part of that has been allowing his young player to make mistakes without fear of repercussions.

"We play with a confidence out there," Wallmark said. "Sometimes we're going to do a mistake, but they always support us, the coaches, and give us feedback and still allow us to try out there. It's really fun to play."

Brind'Amour has also made it a point to pair veterans forwards with the young players to help provide stability on each line.

"It's a huge part of our group that we have veteran leaders that get it, and they're quality people," Brind'Amour said. "So they reach out to the young guys and they help them along."

"I just go back to my experiences when I came in the league. It's the same thing," Brind'Amour added, recalling his start with the St. Louis Blues. "They stuck me with Adam Oates and Paul MacLean, and it was an easy transition for me."

It's paid off, with rookies Warren Foegele and Svechnikov combining for five goals through four games to lead the rookies.

Options in goal

Scott Darling's injury in the preseason finale threw a wrench in the team's plans: The presumed starter, who is starting to skate, is still week-to-week with a hamstring injury, Brind'Amour said. But waiver claim Curtis McElhinney performed exceptionally well in his first start, a 35-save effort in Carolina's 3-1 win in Columbus, and won again Tuesday, while Petr Mrazek is 1-0-1 despite being subjected to the 13-goal affair with the Rangers.

McElhinney could make Carolina's decision difficult once Darling is ready to return from injury if he continues to perform well, especially if Mrazek can't match his play.

Fans first

Brind'Amour lamented the opening night overtime loss to Islanders — not because of how his team played, but rather due to the fact the fans went home unhappy.

"At the end of the day, the unfortunate part is people came here and they wanted to see a win, the coach said after last Thursday's 2-1 loss, "and I hate it that they have to go home and go, 'We lost the game,' That's the frustrating part."

But the Hurricanes rewarded their fans Sunday with not only a thrilling 8-5 win — one that featured Carolina coming back



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from a deficit four times — but a post-victory celebration that made waves around the league.

After collectively saluting the fans at the blue line, the team, led by captain Justin Williams, sprinted to the far boards and leaped into the glass.

“It’s not hotdogging or anything,” Williams said. “We wanted something so we can get together with the fans a little bit

after the game with them cheering and us playing and just a nice little send-off.”

The fans got to see it again Tuesday. While it has proven to be a work in progress, the Hurricanes’ celebration is letting the fans in on the fun — and what could be more fun than seven of eight points to start the season.



By The Numbers: The New Guys and Hot Starts

New guys on the Hurricanes roster are dramatically exceeding expectations through the first four games.

By Andrew Ahr

Sitting at 3-0-1, the Carolina Hurricanes are at the top of the NHL standings in what has been the best regular season start in franchise history. With the departure of longtime leading goal scorer Jeff Skinner and top six forward Elias Lindholm, the narrative surrounding this team coming into the season was a lack of proven offensive producers in the lineup. Through the first four games, the club has dispelled this dramatically, sitting at second in the NHL in both total goals scored as well as goals scored per games played.

A lot of this offense has been fueled by new acquisitions, particularly ones that weren’t considered blockbuster. Micheal Ferland has been an invaluable third member on the Sebastian Aho/Teuvo Teravainen line, and Jordan Martinook has been a surprising offensive force on the “fourth line”.

Also rounding up that so called fourth line is Andrei Svechnikov, who has picked up two goals in as many games as he looks to be settling into the NHL. And perhaps the most surprising and exciting newcomer to this team, Warren Foegele, has put up three goals in just four games this October.

We’re just four games into an 82 game marathon, so it’s a bit early to take metrics very seriously, especially given that the Hurricanes have really only played one team thus far that was expected to be a playoff contender at the beginning of the season. But nonetheless, here’s what’s stuck out about some of the new guys thus far and maybe a little bit of what to expect from the long season ahead.

Micheal Ferland

After a big win last night, Sebastian Aho was asked about a goal that he scored off of an incredible pass from Michael Ferland.

Aho responded by praising his linemate, saying, “I think he’s way more skilled than people think he is.”

Honestly, Ferland’s five points (2g, 3a) here through the first four games shouldn’t come as much of a surprise given his career path thus far. Drafted in 2010, the 26-year-old

winger’s point production has been on a steady increase since his first full season in 2015-16. Pundits insist that Ferland’s play was carried by the likes of Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan in Calgary, but I’d argue that the Finns he’s playing alongside here in Raleigh are just as good — if not better.

Ferland’s hot start may indicate a continuation of that gradual increase in offensive production that Calgary enjoyed over the past few years. Or maybe he’s just enjoying some puck luck and the points will slow down soon. But one thing’s certain, he’s definitely more skilled than people think he is.

Jordan Martinook

The Jordan Martinook trade was a somewhat under-the-radar acquisition at the draft last year, but so far this October it’s looked like one of the best. Martinook has looked great playing alongside Lucas Wallmark and Andrei Svechnikov, banking three points (2g, 1a) so far this season. Looking back at his career to date with the Coyotes, Martinook looks to have established his “ceiling” at about 25 points, which he hit in the 2016-17 season before regressing a bit last year. The 2012 second round pick looks like he’s found his niche here in Raleigh as a physical player with deceptive speed who can put up secondary points. With a hot offensive start, Martinook could have the potential to enjoy a career year.

Andrei Svechnikov

Svechnikov’s season has been an exciting one thus far, as he’s gotten into the habit of scoring goals a lot quicker than most of us would have expected from an 18-year-old. Through the first few games something that’s stuck out to me the most about this exciting young player is his knack for being in the right place at the right time. Both of his tallies thus far were real goal scorer’s goals, indicative of the potential for a long and lucrative career in the league. We don’t have much to go off in terms of what to expect from him in the future, but if production from prior 2nd-overall picks is any indication, a 36-goal rookie season like Patrik Laine would be just fine with me.

Warren Foegele

I really can’t say enough good things about Foegele and his play thus far. Coming into camp last month, Foegele was far from a shoo-in to stay in Raleigh. An impressive camp and



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preseason afforded him a spot on the opening night roster, and if he continues his exceptional play in every area of the game, he's ensuring himself a spot on the club in the long term.

The young forward has earned high praise from Jordan Staal, who likened him to "a moose" in the locker room last night, as well as Rod Brind'Amour, who has twice referred to Foegele as, "everything we want in a Hurricane."

About Last Night: The Canes Keep Rolling

How can you not just love this team right now?

By Cody Hagan

In all honesty, who would have ever guessed the Carolina Hurricanes, with four rookie skaters, a rookie head coach, and a beyond questionable goaltending situation, would be atop the NHL standings after four games?

There is not a soul anywhere that saw this coming. That is not to say it couldn't have ever happened, but the odds were so slim that it makes what the Hurricanes are doing that much more impressive.

Last night was yet again not a 'pretty' win, but they got the job done in the end. While the Vancouver Canucks are not exactly Stanley Cup contenders, they put up a good fight and finding a way to come away with a victory showed us once again the perseverance and determination this team has.

Talking Points

Top Line

What defines a team's top line? Is it point production? Fear instilled into the other team? Work ethic? Maybe it is some combination of all of that. One thing is for certain with this Hurricanes team, and that is they do not have a defined top line. But that's actually perfect for this team and their makeup.

At any given moment in these first four games the lines have all been dominate. For example last night we saw both the Justin Williams-Jordan Staal-Warren Foegele line and the Sebastian Aho-Teuvo Teravainen-Micheal Ferland line absolutely shred through the defense. For years the Hurricanes have never had a true top line, instead throwing together odd combos that saw their top goal scorer on the third line and guys who should arguably be in the AHL on the "first" line. It never worked. But now the team has balance and it is working.

While the Canes may have gotten a few lucky bounces last night, smart positioning and winning puck battles helped create those scenarios. Jordan Staal got the first goal and it came from his line mate Foegele making a timely shift change. Jordan Martinook comes speeding off the bench and creates net front traffic.

So one of your top lines gets the team on the board. The other guys can't settle with that right? Enter Sepe and Turbo who got the assists on Brett Pesce's long range goal.

Yet assists just aren't enough especially for a competitive guy like Aho. He had to go get his own goal. A beautiful

Three goals and an assist thus far makes him a point per game player this season. But his offense will most likely wane in the coming months given that he's outpacing his production in the AHL, where he put up 46 points (28g, 16a) in 73 games. As long as Foegele continues to work hard and utilize his high hockey IQ, he'll remain in the good graces of his head coach and teammates alike, and the offense will certainly come naturally.

setup from Ferland and the Canes other top line now has created two goals.

At this point the "fourth" line has seen enough and they want to get in on the scoring. Andrei Svechnikov sees his opportunity to join the fun and shoves his name on to the goal sheet.

But guys, the Williams-Staal-Foegele line can't be content with letting the other guys score more than them. That determination to never be happy with what you have has kicked in and Foegele has to get things even for his line.

It's simply amazing the balance that this lineup is showing right now. Each line is dangerous in it's own way which is perfect. You have pure offensive talent in Aho's line along with toughness. Grit and leadership plus a young star in the making on Staal's line. Elite speed on the Necas line. Then the second overall pick on the proverbial "fourth line".

Is it great to have a line featuring multiple guys who could be a league MVP? Sure it is. But having scoring balance and depth has haunted the Hurricanes for multiple seasons so seeing they do not need a "first" line in order to win games is extremely encouraging.

The Forgotten One

Going in to training camp all eyes were on prospects Martin Necas and Andrei Svechnikov. Pegged to be elite rookies, many expected them to come in and be the cream of the crop when it comes to prospects who make the team. While they wooed and wowed there was one guy in the back who kept his head down and outplayed them and outworked them day in and day out.

Warren Foegele has been the biggest surprise, not only on the Hurricanes but in the entire NHL so far. But we really shouldn't be so surprised considering how well he played in Charlotte last year and then his superior play during his brief call up. Foegele may not have the raw talent that other guys have but his work ethic alone will keep him in this league for a long time. There's a reason Rod Brind'Amour and others have said he's everything they want in a Hurricane.

Paired with Williams and Staal, he is surrounded with two guys who know what it takes to play in the NHL for a long time. Very much like Erik Cole took Jeff Skinner under his wing during his rookie season, it is easy to see Williams and Staal looking after Foegele. Meanwhile he is energizing those two to play at an extremely high level that this team needs from them.



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The best thing about Foegele is his ability to jump in and help a NHL penalty kill yet still have the determination to create plays.

He never gives up and competes to the highest level on every shift. This kid gets it. Is he a perfect player? Not even close. He's taken a few penalties he'd like to have back but you can see he will learn from those and be better because of that.

Having Fun

Playing hockey for every person in the NHL is a job. They get paid a lot of money to go out there and play a game. Nowhere does it say they have to have fun or enjoy what they do. There surely are plenty of players who don't have fun playing this game.

You can easily look back at numerous moments over the past nine seasons and see Hurricanes players not having fun out there. They go through the motions and collect a paycheck. That was an atmosphere Tom Dundon and Brind'Amour set out to change—and, boy, have they changed it.

It helps that the team has a true leadership core this season, captained by a guy who also 'gets it' when it comes to being a NHL pro. Justin Williams has a family and has won the Stanley Cup three times. Yet every game he's out there enjoying himself. It's extremely contagious as the entire team has bought in to this. They all are having fun.

Look no further than this game winning celebration they are doing. Micheal Ferland took point after last night's win and guys like Foegele jumped nearly a third of the way up the glass.

#MHFA

In all seriousness, the culture has changed and for now, it appears to be working. Who knows if it will hold up for the entire season, but for now the Carolina Hurricanes are having fun and because of that they are producing points at a pace we've never seen before.

Moral of the Story

These first four games have been very fun to watch. The energy on the ice is clearly different and the results are showing it. Last night was not pretty; in fact, at some times it was quite ugly. Bad bounces and players out of position cost made it a closer game than it should've been. But the Canes found a way and got the win.

Will this intensity and determination hold up in the long run? We will soon find out. Up next is a true test of what this team can be. With dates against Minnesota, Winnipeg, and Tampa, all on the road. If they can manage to hold their own in those games, then we may have to really start talking about this team.

Until then, let's just enjoy what we currently have.

THE ATHLETIC

State of the Canes: Are you not entertained?

By Sara Civian

Sebastian Aho seemed utterly relieved.

The goal he had just scored in the Hurricanes' first win of the season, a 3-1 decision at Columbus, was nothing out of the ordinary for the under-the-radar talent. He'd found the back of the net 53 times before in his two NHL seasons.

But Aho has struggled to get things going early on in seasons past. This goal was a relief simply because it was the first one he'd ever scored in October.

Did it feel good to get that out of the way?

"Ohhhh yeah," he offered. "For sure."

Like so much else about this Hurricanes team, the 21-year-old winger-turned-center is different this year. He's started out on a tear, with six points (two goals, four assists) in four games. His immediate impact isn't limited to the scoresheet; a few of his opponents have specifically mentioned he's harder to play against than he had been.

Folks involved with the Hurricanes in various aspects aren't surprised Aho has taken this next step. Since before Game 1, some have been thinking out loud that he has a new swagger about him. Maybe he's just another year older,

maybe it's a positive reaction to the off-season changes, maybe he kicked his summertime training up a notch.

Probably all of that and then some.

Pick your reason, he and his new school squad with old school values are off to the hottest start in the NHL at seven points and a 3-0-1 record. One more win and they tie their franchise record 4-0-1 start.

For all the national buzz the Hurricanes and their victory celly are garnering, it seems the Eeyores of the hockey world have chosen them as their latest doomsday crusade.

"iT's OnLy fOuR gAmEs!"

"bAd oPpOnEnTs!"

"sOmEonE iS gOINg To gEt HuRt wHeN tHeY GeNtLy bUmP tHeIr sHoUIDeRs aGaiNst tHe gLaSs"

To the Eeyores, I ask: Are you not entertained?

Newsflash, haters: If anyone's aware of how long the NHL regular season is, it's the Carolina Hurricanes faithful. They haven't escaped it in nine years.

They can be excited about an encouraging start without prematurely equating it to Justin Williams hoisting his fourth Cup. You don't sound smart reminding them there are 82



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games a season every time they so much as smile about the last three. You just sound miserable. Go pet a dog, or take a nap, or clap your hands a few times, storm the length of a hockey rink, and jump into the glass.

You'll be OK.

No one's saying the Hurricanes are Undisputed Stanley Cup Champions Of The World, just that they're paving their way back to relevancy, playing hard, having fun. And it's different this time around, as different as a winger who couldn't score before Nov. 11 turned center who potted two for good measure by Oct. 9.

General manager Don Waddell had a good perspective when we talked the day before the season started:

"We can't not have a good start. In years past we've been playing catch-up, we've talked about that and we're focusing on building momentum. Points in October count as much as points in March."

What the Eeyores of the world don't understand is it's not necessarily that the Hurricanes are in the race, it's that they keep gaining momentum.

Sometimes sticking to the plan is worth a celebration — especially for a team with a totally new complexion and a laundry list of firsts to go around.

What's working

The Trade

With almost every passing shift I sit there more dumbfounded than the last. What was the point of Calgary GM Brad Treliving trading Dougie Hamilton, Micheal Ferland and Adam Fox to Carolina for Noah Hanifin and Elias Lindholm?

The Hamilton situation has been covered ad nauseam, but Ferland has had an underrated impact in his first few games as a Cane. It shouldn't have come as a complete shock, as he notched 21 goals and 41 points in 77 games last season. But with Dougie Hamilton's evidently problematic fondness of museums, any analysis on Ferland's expected impact in the trade kind of faded into the background.

So far he's been key in Aho's success at center, pretty versatile in terms of play creation and scoring his own goals, and he bounced right back for two points in Game 2 after that untimely penalty in Game 1. He has two goals, three assists, nine hits, two rebounds created and a plus-five rating through four games. Maybe most importantly, he boasts a team-leading seven high danger scoring chances.

There's so much going on here and, like, 90 percent of it is Ferland. That's why the danger zone is important.

The Kids and Vets Jibing

Andrei Svechnikov is off to an expectedly hot start, with two goals and two assists in four games. What might be coming as a pleasant surprise to some is his clutch factor — his two goals have both been game-winners. Toss that in with the fact that he's averaging only 11:56 TOI while the rest of the team that's scored at least four points is averaging 14:42+ TOI and the possibilities are fun.

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour has been gradually giving him more minutes, but I do like the hesitancy to toss him to the wolves. It appears he'd have no problem handling a bigger role, but don't fix what clearly isn't broke and let Svechnikov feel like he can make some mistakes until there's need for change.

"You gotta remember how young he is, and that's something I have to keep reminding myself," Brind'Amour told me. "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."

22-year-old winger Warren Foegele plays the exact brand of hockey that fits into Brind'Amour's system, and it's won him five goals and two assists in six career games. He, Williams and Jordan Staal have all seemed to really benefit from playing with each other in different ways.

"He's kind of what we want in a Hurricane," Brind'Amour said. "A young guy who does it right. Every shift. He's getting rewarded now for it."

This was easily Brind'Amour's favorite play of the game. You have Williams' unselfishness in passing it to Foegele, and you have the whole line and Jaccob Slavin relentless on the puck despite a one-goal lead.

"We're playing hard and we're playing fast — it's fun when you play that kind of hockey," Foegele said. "I just come in here and try to work hard. I'm fortunate enough to have two great linemates to make my job easier."

What Needs Work

It's nothing to have a heart attack over for a team that's put up 17 goals in four games, but not much is popping off on the third line right now. They aren't really expected to produce to begin with, but through 34:01, Martin Necas has tallied an assist, two shots and a 38.1 (8-13) face-off percentage. Phil Di Giuseppe and Valentin Zykov have been splitting time on his right wing. Brock McGinn has four shots and a minus-three through :59 TOI, BUT he is No. 2 on the team with 15 hits so it hasn't been all bad.

What gives? Brind'Amour says nothing, really. He did bump Svechnikov up to play with Necas and McGinn briefly in Game 1, but it doesn't seem like he's going to shake things up in the near future. He played the third line significantly less as time went on in the win against Vancouver.

"I think it's just the way the game was going, I had to get my veteran guys and the lines I'm counting on to score out there," Brind'Amour said. "I think Marty (Necas) is coming along fine and that's just what you do to try to win games sometimes. You shorten the bench sometimes."

Shall we have a bit of patience? It's tough finding chemistry early on, even if some of these guys are making it look stupid easy right now.

Three Goalies? In This Economy?

It's not that Carolina's goaltending needs work, per se, it's just a situation that'll eventually need solving. Where most teams would have to make a tough decision between Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney when Scott Darling returns from injury, the Canes have some wiggle room to see how things play out. To put it simply, defense is usually just really



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weird the first week or so of the NHL season. Especially with new key players on Carolina's blue line and a small sample size, it's tough to evaluate the goaltending.

Still, McElhinney is sitting on a 2.00 GAA and .930 save percentage while Mrazek's at 3.53 GA and .841 save percentage.

Though Carolina picked McElhinney up off waivers after Darling's injury, the Canes are higher on McElhinney than some might think according to our Pierre LeBrun.

"You get the feeling the Hurricanes are going to be patient and play this out carefully," LeBrun reported Wednesday. "They really like McElhinney, and I think it's not out of the question they carry three goalies on their NHL roster once Darling returns, at least for a while. It's a luxury they can afford right now ...

"If he continues to play well in Carolina, it'll be interesting to see if there are teams willing to give up an asset for him once/if the 'Canes decide three's a crowd in net. Or maybe

LeBrun Notebook: Revisiting the draft if Ryan O'Reilly trade with the Habs had come to fruition

By Pierre LeBrun

Half of the fun in this business is to look back at what could have been.

And certainly, last June's top five in the NHL draft might have played out a little differently had the Buffalo Sabres been able to entice the Montreal Canadiens in a Ryan O'Reilly trade.

That's because the price set forth by the Sabres, or at least part of the package, included Montreal's third overall pick.

As the Sabres continued to talk to the St. Louis Blues about an O'Reilly deal — a trade that would eventually happen on July 1 — they certainly hoped the Canadiens would bite.

And so the question is, which player would the Sabres have taken with the No. 3 overall pick, had it played out that way with Montreal?

Brady Tkachuk, that's who, according to a source.

If that was the case, we can revisit the draft to see how it may have unfolded.

Buffalo takes Rasmus Dahlin first overall, Carolina follows with Andrei Svechnikov, then the Sabres take Tkachuk. Where does that leave Ottawa next at No. 4, remembering that the Senators coveted Tkachuk. Would the Sens have taken centre Jesperi Kotkaniemi next? Or would they have gone with winger Filip Zadina?

"I think they take Zadina, they wanted an elite scoring winger who was ready to play, which obviously they got in Tkachuk," TSN's scouting director Craig Button told me Wednesday morning.

Having said that, I'm also told the Senators' staff had it fairly close to 50-50 between Zadina and Kotkaniemi but both behind Tkachuk, so I really feel that one would have gone either way. The Sens had been aware of the Sabres-Habs

McElhinney becomes part of things there for the season. At this point you get the sense the 'Canes are willing to see this play out week to week before they decide on that."

Special Teams

The Canes are 1-for-10 on the power play and 10-for-14 on the penalty kill. They'd clearly like to do more on the power play, but I wouldn't read into it that much for the first few weeks as a young team is trying to figure out the best precise combinations. They've started playing Hamilton more, which is obviously a step in the right direction and an indication that they're starting to fit the rest of the units together around him. He's now averaging 1:28 power play TOI, still not as much as more than half the team but the number will gradually increase.

My opinion on their power play struggles remains the same as I tweeted during Game 2: They're winning games, half the team isn't old enough to buy a beer, ask me again in November.

trade rumors and were planning ahead in case Tkachuk went No. 3.

But let's pretend Ottawa takes Zadina, which would have dropped Kotkaniemi to fifth overall where perhaps Arizona would have taken him over centre Barrett Hayton, although I think the Coyotes liked both centres very much.

We'll never know, but it sure would have changed the dynamic had Montreal bit on the O'Reilly carrot. As it turns out, much to Buffalo's chagrin, Habs GM Marc Bergevin never contemplated giving up on the No. 3 overall pick as part of an O'Reilly deal, and seeing Kotkaniemi play now, it appears that he made the right decision.

About the only thing Bergevin did look at in the hours leading up to the first round on that Friday in Dallas was whether there was any offer that made sense for him to move down a few spots and still have a shot at Kotkaniemi. Arizona most likely talked to Montreal about just that, but I don't think anything ever heated up there.

Laine contract

I wonder when Maple Leafs president Brendan Shanahan made his comments on opening night regarding his young, core players and the salary cap crunch Toronto will soon face, whether members of the Winnipeg Jets front office were nodding accordingly.

I'll put some money on yes, yes, they were.

Because if you're Jets chairman Mark Chipman or GM Kevin Cheveldayoff, you too are espousing the idea of your core wanting to make it work under the cap to keep a stacked Jets team contending for years to come.

Talented winger Kyle Connor will need a new deal after this season — the 21-year-old playing out his entry-level contract — that will cost to be sure. But of course what we're really



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getting at here is phenom Patrik Laine, who scored 80 goals in his first two NHL seasons, before turning 20 last April.

As Leafs fan ponder whether Mitch Marner will end up costing \$8-million or \$9-million a year (or more?), not to mention the face of the franchise, Auston Matthews, who will command at the very least \$12-million but perhaps more, where does that leave Laine in Winnipeg?

Hard not to look at Jack Eichel's \$10-million a year deal as the first benchmark and work from there, I would think.

Although the Jets could certainly point to star centre Mark Scheifele and his \$6.125-million a year salary (what a steal!) and try to navigate around the Eichel deal. But I find it hard to believe Laine's salary would not be in double digits.

What we do know, as I reported on TSN's Insider Trading on Tuesday, is that the Laine camp is no hurry. My sense is that veteran agent Mike Liut, who represents Laine, wants his client to focus on what could be a special year for the Cup-contending Jets and worry about the contract later.

Now, that's not to suggest the Laine camp has shut the door on talks. Not at all. I think there's a terrific relationship there between the front office and the Laine camp and hey, if Winnipeg came charging in with a big offer during the season, no doubt the Laine camp would look at it. But all things being equal, I get the sense the Laine camp is fine waiting until after the season.

Which, actually, would be par for the course for Liut in recent negotiations with high-profile, young stars coming out of entry-level deals. He negotiated Leon Draisaitl's eight-year deal in August 2017 and Vladimir Tarasenko's eight-year deal in July 2015. In both cases those players playing out their entry-level contracts completely before their next contracts got done.

So again, while you can't count out the Jets stepping up and getting something done during this season, Liut's recent

track record suggests a deal won't get done until after the season.

McElhinney's future

And so Curtis McElhinney is 2-0 with a .930 save percentage to open his account with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Count me among those that figured when the 'Canes plucked him off waivers from Toronto last week that they would simply put him back on waivers once injured No. 1 Scott Darling returned to health. But now I'm not so sure.

You get the feeling the Hurricanes are going to be patient and play this out carefully. They really like McElhinney, and I think it's not out of the question they carry three goalies (along with Petr Mrazek) on their NHL roster once Darling returns, at least for a while. It's a luxury they can afford right now.

When reached on Wednesday, Hurricanes GM Don Waddell would only say that they've been impressed with the 35-year-old netminder.

"Curtis is a true pro and a player that players like to play in front of," Waddell told The Athletic. "He carries himself very well. His approach and preparation is first-rate."

McElhinney seems to be playing the best hockey of his career in his mid-30s, which is interesting. He put up a .934 save percentage in 18 games with the Leafs last season.

And I can tell you this: I'd be shocked if Carolina was the only team that put him a claim for him last week: I'm guessing there was at least one addition claim.

If he continues to play well in Carolina, it'll be interesting to see if there are teams willing to give up an asset for him once/if the 'Canes decide three's a crowd in net. Or maybe McElhinney becomes part of things there for the season. At this point you get the sense the 'Canes are willing to see this play out week to week before they decide on that.



A 'Storm Surge:' Canes celebrate wins by leaping into glass

By JOEDY McCREARY

The Carolina Hurricanes are bringing the Lambeau Leap to their hockey rink.

Their post-victory parties have gone viral : After each win on home ice, they've skated en masse down the ice and jumped into the glass.

Consider it the latest sign that this isn't the same team that has missed the playoffs an NHL-worst nine straight years.

"Instead of the standard, everybody goes to center ice and holds their stick up, we're trying something new," veteran winger Jordan Martinook said. "I think we had fun with it, and I think the fans liked it, so just keep an eye out on those. We might change it up, stick with that one, who knows?"

They call it the "Storm Surge," and they've already done it twice to rave reviews from the fans who stuck around after the final horn.

It debuted following Carolina's 8-5 victory over the New York Rangers on Sunday night. After the buzzer sounded, the team lined up along one blue line and clapped their hands over their heads while DJ Khaled's "All I Do is Win" played over the arena's sound system.

Then they skated the length of the ice, with each player taking a playful leap into the boards as the fans cheered. Video of the celebration caught fire on social media seemingly as quickly as the players bounced off the Plexiglas.



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The encore came Tuesday night after beating Vancouver 5-3, but this time, as his teammates lined up, Micheal Ferland skated to center ice and led the claps before everyone skated down the ice and jumped into the glass.

"We looked at it, and they're fine-tuning it," first-year coach Rod Brind'Amour said, adding that Ferland "had a little issue with the beat. But again, that's something that they've created, and hopefully they enjoy it and the fans enjoy it."

New captain Justin Williams was the one who came up with the idea, Martinook said.

"Once he mentioned it, everyone was pretty excited and ready to run with it," Martinook said.

They know the celebration needs some fine tuning, and the best way to get it right it is by continuing to win — and to have a good reason to do it again.

"I think we've got to get our tempo better and in sync," rookie forward Warren Foegele deadpanned.

So far during the young season, they certainly have been in sync on the ice.

They're only a week in, but they entered Wednesday night's games with an Eastern Conference-best seven points.

Their 3-0-1 record is the franchise's best since it relocated from Hartford to North Carolina in 1997, and the last time they opened a season by earning points in four straight games was in 1994 — when they started 4-0-1 and were still known as the Whalers.

During their current three-game winning streak, they've outscored their opponents by a combined 16-9.

For a team with a young core — key players Sebastian Aho, Martin Necas and Andrei Svechnikov were all born after the Whalers skated for the final time in Hartford — they're determined to keep the focus on having fun and not on the pressure of trying to snap the NHL's longest postseason drought.

"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."



31 Thoughts: NHL embracing new era of fun, personality

Elliotte Friedman

Canadiens among teams interested in Sam Bennett Melnyk tells NHL Board he's not selling Sens Six-year deal the answer for Leafs, Nylander?

Well before the Carolina Hurricanes publicly unveiled their new victory celebration — featuring a team-wide leap into the glass — they discussed it with new head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

"The captains brought it up early and we talked about it as a group," Brind'Amour said Tuesday, driving home from a 5-3 victory over Vancouver. "They were tired of the salute at centre ice."

What did you think?

"I thought it was great," he replied. "Guys play hard and they should enjoy themselves. It should be fun when you win. It used to be that when you won you'd go out and have a good time, but guys don't do that anymore — they're serious about things all the time. You have to find other ways to blow off steam.

"I'm not sure coaches (back when I played) would have allowed it, but we're living in a different time."

In a wild first week, we've seen a magnificent showdown between Patrick Kane and Auston Matthews, where Matthews put his hand to his ear when scoring late against the Blackhawks, only to see Kane mimic the move after his own goal minutes later. (Matthews smiled on the bench in reply. I'm convinced we're about to discover a whole new side of him.)

Nashville's Roman Josi was on GQ's "best-dressed of the week" list, joining Orlando Bloom, Ryan Gosling, Gucci Mane and Tom Hardy.

Even Gary Bettman got into the act. As the Ducks celebrated their 25th anniversary with a shootout win over Detroit, Anaheim colour analyst Brian Hayward got Bettman to blow a duck call during an intermission interview. There was precedent for this, as the commissioner did the same thing in March 1993, when the team was first introduced. But I never thought we'd see him do it again.

Ever since last year's NHL Awards, where Winnipeg GM Kevin Cheveldayoff, Florida's Roberto Luongo, Vegas GM George McPhee and Nashville's P.K. Subban were trusted to lead more serious segments, I've been wondering if we're heading into a new era. That was bold, and they shined.

Reigning Super Bowl championship coach Doug Pederson came out with a book called *Fearless: How an Underdog Becomes a Champion*. In it, he writes: "One of the things I've told players repeatedly is I want them to show their personalities. Be who you are.... I am not coaching robots.... Your career is going to last two years or ten years, or somewhere in between. Then it is over. So while you are playing, enjoy it, man. Don't hide. Don't mask anything. Doing that helps cultivate our culture, and if dancing around on the field helps you win games, do it."

Not sure if Brind'Amour's read this book, but his philosophy is the exact same.

There's always a clash in hockey of team vs. individual. I get that. It is very, very hard for an individual to win in the NHL.



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You just don't get the same opportunity to impact the game as an NBA star or a top NFL quarterback would. But what that often suppresses is the fact that you can be both a great individual and a great teammate. And if it is not what you want, no one's forcing you.

We're off to a fun start. Hope it stays that way.

31 THOUGHTS

1. A quick whistle erased Sam Bennett's first goal of the season Tuesday night in Nashville, but he did play 13:27 — his highest of the year. He saw 8:47 and 7:01 in the opening two games against Vancouver. The list of teams who've inquired about him through the years includes Anaheim, Montreal, Philadelphia and Tampa Bay. I'm not convinced the Flames want to trade him, knowing he's 22 and could blossom elsewhere. Just something to watch, as he searches for a fit with a new coach and changed roster.

2. Alexander Edler is playing 25:19 a game, 12th in the NHL. This is someone who does not want to leave Vancouver. He's made that very clear. His contract is up after the season, and Tampa was interested a year ago. Someone's going to want him as a rental, even if he returns to British Columbia next year.

3. We've seen stronger-than-expected openings for Montreal and Ottawa, who are both under different offensive setups than what we were used to. The Canadiens, realizing they would not be able to overpower teams, especially along the boards, placed emphasis on offence through the middle.

"Own the area between the dots," one player said.

"Beat the swarm," said another.

"The fourth player up the rush is much more active," says an opposing coach.

The organization was encouraged by a home pre-season game against Toronto, where the Maple Leafs dressed both Matthews and John Tavares for the first time. The Canadiens lost 5-3 thanks to one ugly stretch of two shorthanded goals allowed in 20 seconds, but battled to a draw at even strength and were competitive.

4. Kelly Hradek showed during last week's pre-game show how Carey Price has moved his legs closer together, providing video evidence of a six-inch difference between his skates from 2017-18 to 2018-19. In the short-term the adjustment looks good, as he stopped 44 of the 48 shots he faced in nearly ruining the Maple Leafs' home opener and blowing out the Penguins. The Canadiens wanted to see him regain his swagger, and felt the first week was a great opportunity for that.

Two things stood out: Price celebrating when the Canadiens got to overtime in the Ontario capital, knowing that would be good for confidence. Second was a lengthy solo practice with goalie coach Stephane Waite Tuesday in Montreal. Years ago, then-Canadiens coach Jacques Martin complained about Price's work habits, wanting to see him work as hard on the ice as Patrick Roy would after a bad performance. Price is putting in the time after good work.

5. The Senators are completely different, almost unrecognizable in the offensive zone. They aren't afraid to

play three below the face-off dots, and it's noticeable how players are covering for each other when a fourth comes down to make a play.

"We knew in the past our left defenceman was coming up — now everyone reads the third forward or both 'D,'" one player said.

Added another: "It reminds me of what New Jersey did last season. As long as we're willing to get back, this can work."

Coach Guy Boucher said it wasn't quite correct to call it a copy of the Devils.

"You design a system to fit your players. Our guys are fast enough to play this way."

They definitely caught people by surprise.

6. Not long after being put through waivers, Zack Smith has four points in his first three games. Smith had some interesting things to say about how he handled it, from the number of surprisingly supportive texts he received to the fact he's a new father (daughter Rae was born in August).

"When you go home to see her," he said, "things don't bother you as much."

Best text?

"There was one from Nick Foligno that was pretty good."

But what Smith said helped the most was that he realized 2017-18 simply wasn't acceptable.

"This year was always going to be a fresh start for me. I was in the mindset that I was going to be better. That didn't change with what happened."

7. Ottawa owner Eugene Melnyk took the floor at the Board of Governors meeting to let the rest of the NHL know that he's not selling the club. We've heard that before, but it's interesting that he was given the opportunity to do it in that setting. Clearly, he wanted the other owners to hear it from him — directly.

One governor said what he took from it is the downtown building process is going to take a long, long time.

8. At the Board of Governors meeting last week, the NHL provided 2019-20 cap estimates ranging from \$81.4 million (no NHLPA inflator) to \$85.4 million (the full five per cent). (The players committed to 1.25 for 2018-19.) Looking at the last six Stanley Cup champions and their four highest-paid players, the percentage of the cap spent on them ranges from 35.5 (Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, Corey Crawford and Patrick Sharp on the 2015 Blackhawks) to 45.2 (Evgeni Malkin, Sidney Crosby, Kris Letang and Phil Kessel on the 2017 Penguins).

The advantage Pittsburgh had that Toronto doesn't is Crosby and Malkin are on back-diving contracts no longer allowed under CBA rules. The defending-champion Capitals were at 40.2 for Alex Ovechkin, Evgeni Kuznetsov, Nicklas Backstrom and Braden Holtby. Those deals all have acceptable structure. We already know John Tavares is at \$11 million, so if the Maple Leafs want to stay at 45 per cent, they have between \$36.6 million (low end) and \$38.4 million (high end) for Matthews, Mitchell Marner and William



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Nylander. Matthews is going to come in above Tavares, and Marnier will wait to see what he signs for. It's a tight, tight squeeze.

9. Chicago and Pittsburgh alleviated cap stress with five-year second contracts for Crosby, Kane, Malkin and Toews. It's unlikely Toronto would want that term for Nylander, since it takes him right to free agency. Maybe six is the answer. I do believe they've looked at something in the three- or four-year range, but the gap remains. The other issue is that I don't see many easy trades, if Toronto ever decides to go that route. Monetary differences aside, they like the player. A lot.

10. Early-season prediction: The number "34" shows up somewhere in whatever extension Auston Matthews signs.

11. "Here's one for you," an amateur scout said. "Can you find the NHL team that had [Elias] Pettersson No. 1 on its draft board?"

12. The Canucks produced a draft video after Pettersson's fifth-overall selection in 2017, revealing they felt safe trading down one spot with Vegas, but were worried about the Rangers — picking seventh. One executive indicated that if Pettersson had followed top pick Nico Hischier to North America the season beforehand, the current Canuck would have been No. 1. Another disagreed, if only because it is so hard to be dominant with his body structure.

"You need to be special if you're built the way he is," a third said of Pettersson, who's currently listed at 6'2" and 176 pounds on the Canucks' website. "I had no doubt that he was the most talented player in his draft class. Him not playing in North America and being so physically raw prevented him [from going] first overall in my opinion."

The Canucks were handed a tough, tough schedule to start this season, but that's probably good for Pettersson, who will learn what it's like to be the focus of a game plan when you don't have last change.

13. If you're wondering who might be next to follow John Tavares's free-agent setup, the betting money is on Artemi Panarin.

14. It's been reported that the NHL and potential plaintiffs in concussion lawsuits were ordered into mediation. About two weeks ago, there were rumours about "movement" towards some kind of resolution. Multiple sources warned not to call it a settlement, that the language of any reporting would be very important. Obviously, it is complex. We'll see where it goes.

15. Sportsnet producer Jeremy McElhanney went to Russia for Ovechkin's time with the Cup. The piece will air this weekend on Hockey Night in Canada. We were in Washington for extra interviews during the pre-season, and asked Ovechkin about not having to answer any more questions about winning his first Cup or getting past the Penguins or whatever. He wasn't buying it.

"Well, you have to figure out what's the next question. What's the next question for me?" he asked.

It was a great response.

Added Braden Holtby, "They're all over Tom Brady right now. You're always going to have to answer questions."

16. Two weeks ago, we interviewed Dallas Green (City and Colour) for 31 Thoughts: The Podcast. He talked about his friendship with Holtby, laughing at how he went to see the goalie play in Nashville, only to see him get yanked after six goals in 25 minutes. He did add that there was a better story about their friendship, but we'd need Holtby's permission to tell it.

Holtby told it himself.

"I don't know if my wife (Brandi) is going to be mad at me for telling everyone this," he smiled. "My wife and I, when we first met had that common ground of City and Colour. We were big fans. I kind of took a shot in the dark and asked [Dallas] if he'd play 'The Girl' for me and record it [so] I could play it at our Cup party for Brandi. I think that's one thing that gets forgotten in all this is the support we get from our families and especially our wives and our kids.... They took on a lot to go through that playoff run. We weren't being the best fathers or husbands because we were busy, and when we were home we were sleeping. I just wanted to find a way to say thank you."

17. Best story heard from the Capitals' Stanley Cup celebration: The morning after they won, the travelling party could not find Alex Chiasson for the bus ride to the airport.

"We were like, 'Where is this guy?'" said Mike Vogel, well-known to fans for writing the "Dump 'N Chase" blog at washingtoncaps.com. "We went knocking on the door and there was no answer.... So security opens the door, and there's no one in this room."

They packed his stuff, stepped out of the elevator into the hotel lobby and walked right into Chiasson. He had been in Starbucks.

"He said, 'That's not my luggage; mine is on the bus.' I said, 'No, we went to your room and packed it.' He said, 'No, it's on the bus.'"

It turned out Chiasson was unhappy with his original room and changed it.

"I can't imagine this guy going back to his room and... 'Why is all my stuff packed?'"

18. Philadelphia's had a couple of rough losses after an impressive start in Vegas, but one player who looks much better is Wayne Simmonds.

"I'm close to fully healthy," he said this week.

How close?

"I'd put it at 95 per cent."

It was an intense, gruelling summer of rehab after pelvic and abdominal surgery in May. Asked if he considered changes to his skating style to ease the workload, Simmonds responded that when he missed seven games last winter with torn ligaments on his left thumb, he worked with the team's skating coach on making his stride less choppy.

At the Bio Steel camp in 2017, other players said Simmonds has tried just about everything to add weight — not easy for someone with such a lean physique. He is a bit heavier to start this season.



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"I didn't do as much cardio because of the rehab, so I'm close to 190 (pounds)."

What's normal for you?

"Between 180 and 185," he answered.

One fact I never knew about him: Simmonds went to the Ontario high school track and field championships in the 1500-metre run, qualifying by finishing 10th in the city of Toronto. His parents were distance runners, too.

19. Prior to their home opener Tuesday night, the Flyers announced Simmonds would be a permanent alternate captain to Claude Giroux. He's a pending free agent, with the Flyers saying they'd like to keep him, and the player responding that he'd like to stay.

"I'm going to let my agent (Eustace King) handle that," Simmonds says.

He's kept his spot in front of the net on the Flyers' first power-play unit, which was uncertain after Philadelphia signed James van Riemsdyk. The two were linemates between Mikhail Vorobyev before van Riemsdyk was injured in the team's second game, at Colorado.

"He's very smart," Simmonds says of the Russian rookie.

Vorobyev looked hilariously stone-faced with his first goal puck, scored in the 5-2 defeat to the Avalanche.

"I don't think he was mad (at taking the photo after a loss)," Simmonds laughed. "I think that's just him. He'll sit quietly on the bench during the game, then say something out of nowhere."

20. Another guy who can't put on weight? Tyler Seguin.

"I have struggled with keeping my weight up throughout a season. Most years I'll lose 10 to 13 pounds."

During playoff runs in Boston, Seguin said it wasn't unusual to lose 15 to 17. Now he's hired a chef to cook for him, and this summer he's up 15 pounds.

"The boys joke about my body fat, just because it is so low. This is the first year I got it over four per cent."

Four per cent!

"I'm happy about that. Hopefully I can keep it up."

Jeff Marek wondered if this means Seguin has to change his stick during the year, and he replied it does happen, for both kick point and flex.

21. Winnipeg's players joke that captain Blake Wheeler has two distinct personalities — an easygoing one, and "grumpy Blake" for when things aren't being done properly.

"I think there are times that I can boil a little bit," he admitted. "I think as I've gotten older, I've gotten better about controlling when and where, time and place, and who's involved in that. All in all, it all comes from a good place. I have a high level that I expect from myself every single day. I have a high level I expect from my teammates every single day. More than anything I try to dish out positive reinforcement, but there's going to be days where we don't

have it, or I don't have it. So the intensity gets revved up a little bit. That's a healthy thing."

Wheeler said he picked up that attitude by hearing how people talked about Nicklas Lidstrom.

"He was doing the same thing every day. An 82-game season is a marathon. There's days where it's no fun doing things in the gym or doing things to warm up. Seeing a guy like that who found a way to love doing that stuff and make himself great every single day, that stuck with me. So, I've tried to trick myself on those days to making it fun and enjoying it and putting a smile on my face even though inside you're burning up. Carrying a positive attitude goes a long way."

22. Brind'Amour's Hurricanes have 17 goals in four games. Did he think they could score like this?

"I don't think we expected it. We're a bit fortunate that we are scoring on chances that would not go in last year or the year before. We're not going to do this all year, but it's good to see them coming together, playing hard."

How does one of his era's best two-way players handle this?

"You can handle it as long as we win them," he laughed.

Brind'Amour is off to a 3-1-0 start in his coaching debut. He didn't really celebrate his first victory, but the players did.

"I walked in, told them 'Good job' and walked out. They grabbed me back, presented me with the team puck. I still don't view myself as coach.... It's very strange. I feel like a player in a lot of ways. The first win wasn't as overwhelming as my first goal."

What has he learned so far?

"How important your staff is."

23. Brind'Amour, with enormous praise for Jordan Staal: "He's as good a player as there is in this league, our MVP. Shift after shift, he dominates. He may not score, but he always does it right. He can do everything, penalty kill, power play, our glue for sure. He's a horse out there."

24. Finally, the coach on Warren Foegele, with three goals in four games: "He keeps his mouth shut, works his butt off. We told him to earn his spot. He did it."

25. Asked to remember a favourite play, Josh Gorges didn't mention a goal, a blocked shot or a big hit. He remembered his fourth game in the NHL, Dec. 23, 2005. His San Jose Sharks hosting the St. Louis Blues.

"Evgeni Nabokov went out to play the puck, and he clipped skates with a forechecker."

Gorges went in to defend his goalie, engaging in his first fight.

"That opened the door. Our coaches saw how competitive I was and looked at me differently."

Do you remember the player?

"Yes, it was Mark Rycroft."

(Rycroft is now part of Colorado's broadcast team.)



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26. After 783 NHL games, Gorges is back in Kelowna with his wife and two young children, helping out the WHL Rockets. Is coaching in his future?

"I've thought about it. There's a lot that's appealing, a lot that is not. But as I transition, I know the owner and the GM (of the Rockets). It's nothing official, just hanging out with the young guys to see if I want to pursue it or not."

At 34, Gorges wanted to continue his career, but things did not materialize.

"I wanted that chance to win a Stanley Cup. It is the thing that was driving me, another shot at it. But, as the summer went along, I saw the writing on the wall. It's different. Since the age of four, I've never not played hockey come September. But there's nothing to hang my head or be embarrassed or upset about."

That's for sure. His older boy is four, and starting to try hockey.

"I get to take him skating. Those are things you miss when playing, so that makes it easier on me."

His greatest moments? Easy.

"Twice for the Canadiens, we got to play in the conference final. In Montreal, the first round is so spectacular. I always told guys, 'You've got to experience what it's like, the playoffs in Montreal.'"

27. Also returning to British Columbia was Derek Dorsett, who needed to take his physical with one year remaining under contract. You'll remember that after the final game of Daniel and Henrik Sedin's careers, they presented the puck to Dorsett in Edmonton's visitors dressing room.

"It just shows what kind of guys they are," Dorsett told Sportsnet's Joey Kenward last month. "They knew I was going through a tough time.... That puck means a lot to me. It actually sits on the nightstand beside my bed. I'll remember that for the rest of my life."

Even more impressive than being on receiving end of that gift is that his wife, Allison, gave birth to the first Dorsett girl in three generations — Emmie Rose.

"She's going to be spoiled," he told Kenward.

28. I think the pressure on the Department of Player Safety to give Tom Wilson a large suspension was as great as any decision the department's faced since its inception. Bettman will hear the appeal. Wilson has the right to go to an independent arbitrator if he doesn't like Bettman's decision.

29. During this year's trip to China, Bettman said he wanted to bring regular-season hockey to the country, not just exhibition games. That's going to be interesting, simply because teams might not want that. One governor suggested taking four clubs instead of two, so they don't have to move between cities while overseas, adding that you can make a little more impact when you stay put longer. There is no question clubs will be afraid of the toll the travel and time change could take on their regular seasons.

30. We are seeing earlier goalie pulls than normal at the start of this season. It's not unusual to see nets empty with three minutes to go. This is something analytically inclined minds have been pushing for years. But the bigger storyline might be if it means front offices are taking more control of coaching strategy. We've seen that in baseball, where the manager is now an extension of the GM as opposed to an independent mind. There's always been a separation of church and state in hockey. Is that line blurring?

31. Coming soon to a liquor store near you: NHL Alumni Whisky. Several retired players went to the JP Wiser's factory to create their own concoctions and be part of the process. The first three are to be launched this month, from Wendel Clark, Lanny McDonald and Larry Robinson. As a Scotch/whisky person, I'm looking forward to trying it. If I were Ron MacLean, I'd probably say Clark's will pack a mighty punch.



Hurricanes are young, fun, worth watching

By Adam Gretz

Every year we go through the same cycle with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Throughout the summer, in to training camp, and right up to the start of the regular season they are a hot analytically-driven pick to be the surprise team in the league.

Look at the possession numbers, we say. Look at how good the defense is, we scream. If only they could find a goalie, we plead. Then once the season actually begins they

typically stumble out of the gate and put themselves in a deep hole, never recover from it because the goaltending never works out and they never have enough pure finishers to take advantage of the possession numbers, and then process repeats itself over the following summer.

It was the same story this summer, especially after the addition of Dougie Hamilton from the Calgary Flames to further bolster their defense, the drafting of Andrei Svechnikov with the No. 2 overall pick, and some of the other promising young forwards that are starting to hit the NHL.



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But now that the games have started and the season is underway, things are for once looking a little different on the ice.

Is this the year things finally change? Maybe!

Thanks to Tuesday's 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks, the Hurricanes are off to a 3-0-1 start, which is their best start to a season in years. Over the past six or seven years it's typically taken them anywhere from ten to 12 games to record seven points in the standings. They have done it this year in four. Even more important than the early wins, is the way they are playing and the way the roster is constructed.

Bottom line: This team looks fun, and there are a lot of reasons for you to pay attention to them.

At the start of the season they are the fourth-youngest team in the NHL, and they finally seem to be working in the type of players up front that they had been lacking in recent years. Specifically, potential impact players.

They have one of the league's most anticipated rookies in Svechnikov, who has already made a massive impact in what has been a very limited role. Through four games he has averaged less than 12 minutes of ice-time per game and has already averaged a point per game. His potential is massive and if he reaches it could be the franchise-changing player they have been lacking up front.

The rookie that is probably making the most surprising impact has been 22-year-old Warren Foegele, who has already scored three goals this season and , and we haven't really seen anything from Martin Necas, the team's 2017 first-round pick, quite yet.

Along with the core of young talent, there just seems to be a different energy around this team. The way they play, and the fact they are trying to just make things ... fun.

Stuff like that won't make a difference in the standings, but it can help build excitement. It can help get eye balls on the team. It can maybe help get more people in the building and give people a reason to take notice of them. And that, too, is important.

If you take advantage of those extra eyes and that extra attention by winning, it's even bigger.

I argued last season that even after years of preseason anticipation that never manifested itself in victories that this could still be a team on the verge of a Winnipeg Jets-like breakthrough. For years the Jets were another team that had strong talent on paper, would at times be a strong team analytically, but would always fall short because they lacked a couple of key ingredients, whether it be finishers up front or quality goaltending.

The drafting of Patrik Laine at No. 2 helped change that. The development of Mark Scheifele helped changed that. The emergence of players like Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor also helped change that.

While the Hurricanes do not have quite the level of talent that the Jets did up front (to be fair, who does?), the Hurricanes are further ahead of where the Jets were at the start of last season on the blue line.

They may not have quite the offensive depth up front, but they do have talent. Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen are legitimate top-six forwards, Jordan Staal and Justin Williams are solid veteran two-way presences, and we already talked about the rookies. They still need some things to go right. They need Svechnikov to become their version of Laine. They need Necas and Foegele to work out, and they need somebody to emerge as a reliable starter in goal (though, to be fair, it would be nearly impossible for Scott Darling and Petr Mrazek to play worse than they did a year ago for their respective teams).

I don't know if the Hurricanes are going to keep winning this year, and I don't know if they are a playoff team just quite yet. But I do know based on what we have seen so far they are definitely a team worth paying attention and might be able to bring a level of excitement and intrigue that few others can. They also might be able to finally become the team we have been waiting for them to become for years.



Checkers Assign Nick Schilkey To Florida

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Ahead of another weekend on the road, the Checkers have assigned Nick Schilkey to the ECHL's Florida Everblades.

The 24-year-old forward was a healthy scratch for Charlotte's first two games this season. Schilkey spent the entirety of his

rookie campaign with the Checkers, logging 12 points (5g, 7a) in 48 games.

The Checkers are now carrying 13 healthy skaters up front heading into the weekend.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Super 16: Ducks, Hurricanes crack top 10

Blackhawks, Avalanche join rankings; Jets on rise
by Dan Rosen

One shootout win was enough to convince the voters to keep the Tampa Bay Lightning as the top team in the NHL.com Super 16.

The Lightning, who defeated the Florida Panthers 2-1 in a shootout in their season opener Saturday and haven't played since, retained their spot as the No. 1 team with all 13 voting staff members including them somewhere in the top five of their rankings.

Tampa Bay was No. 1 in the preseason Super 16 that came out Oct. 3.

In addition, one week was enough to convince the voters that the Anaheim Ducks and Carolina Hurricanes belong in the Super 16. They each made it into the top 10 this week after being unranked last week. The Colorado Avalanche and Chicago Blackhawks are also in this week after falling short last week.

To create the power rankings, each participating staff member put together his or her version of what they think the Super 16 should look like. Those are submitted and a point total is assigned to each.

The team picked first is given 16 points, second gets 15, third gets 14, and so on down to No. 16, which gets one point.

Here is the latest Super 16, with some news and notes to follow for each team:

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (1-0-0)

Total points: 185
Preseason: No. 1

Hit: The Lightning got a shorthanded goal from center Anthony Cirelli and went 5-for-5 on the penalty kill, including 3-for-3 in the third period, in their win against the Panthers. That's significant considering their PK was a major issue last season, when it was 28th in the NHL at 76.1 percent.

Miss: They were 0-for-3 on the power play and outshot 43-29 by the Panthers, including 16-4 in the first period, which was played entirely at 5-on-5.

2. Winnipeg Jets (2-1-0)

Total points: 173
Preseason: No. 3

Hit: Kyle Connor has scored in each of the three games. The forward had 31 goals in 76 games last season. The Jets have allowed one goal in two of their first three games.

Miss: Nikolaj Ehlers has no points and four shots on goal in three games. The forward is averaging 12:07 of ice time per game. He had 60 points (29 goals, 31 assists) and averaged 16:05 in 82 games last season.

3. Toronto Maple Leafs (3-1-0)

Total points: 167
Preseason: No. 6

Hit: Auston Matthews and John Tavares, their top two centers, have combined to score 13 of Toronto's 20 goals through four games. Matthews has seven; Tavares has six.

Miss: Toronto has allowed 17 goals in four games.

4. Nashville Predators (2-1-0)

Total points: 163
Preseason: No. 4

Hit: The Predators have gotten nine points (two goals, seven assists) from their defensemen after leading the NHL in points from defensemen with 206 last season.

Miss: They're 0-for-6 on the power play in three games, including 0-for-4 in a 3-0 loss to the Calgary Flames on Tuesday.

5. Washington Capitals (2-1-0)

Total points: 159
Preseason: No. 5

Hit: Michal Kempny returned to the lineup against the Vegas Golden Knights on Wednesday. The defenseman missed the first three games with an upper-body injury sustained in a preseason game Sept. 25.

Miss: Forward Andre Burakovsky had no points and two shots on goal in Washington's first two games.

6. San Jose Sharks (2-2-0)

Total points: 139
Preseason: No. 2

Hit: Evander Kane has four goals in four games. The forward, who signed a seven-year contract with the Sharks in May after being acquired in a trade with the Buffalo Sabres in February, has scored 12 goals in 21 regular-season games with San Jose.



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Miss: The top power-play unit, which includes defensemen Erik Karlsson and Brent Burns, and forwards Logan Couture, Joe Pavelski and Tomas Hertl, has scored one goal on its first 15 chances. It came in an 8-2 win against the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday, when San Jose went 2-for-5 on the power play after starting the season 0-for-10.

7. Boston Bruins (2-1-0)

Total points: 117
Preseason: No. 9

Hit: The top line of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak has 18 points (seven goals, 11 assists) in three games. The line combined for 11 points (five goals, six assists) in a 6-3 win against the Ottawa Senators on Monday.

Miss: Boston has four points (two goals, two assists) from forwards on its bottom three lines, including zero from Danton Heinen, David Backes and Anders Bjork, who made up the third line against the Senators.

8. Anaheim Ducks (3-0-1)

Total points: 93
Preseason rank: NR

Hit: Rookie forward Max Comtois had three points (two goals, one assist) in his first three NHL games before being held without a point in a 3-2 shootout loss against the Arizona Coyotes on Wednesday. Goalie John Gibson has allowed six goals on 130 shots (.954 save percentage) in his first four starts.

Miss: The Ducks are missing five of their top nine forwards: Ryan Getzlaf (lower body), Corey Perry (knee), Ryan Kesler (hip), Ondrej Kase (concussion) and Nick Ritchie (unsigned, restricted free agent).

9. Pittsburgh Penguins (1-1-0)

Total points: 92
Preseason: No. 8

Hit: Kris Letang is off to a strong start with four points (two goals, two assists) in two games, including the overtime goal in a 7-6 win against the Capitals on Oct. 4. He broke Paul Coffey's Penguins record for points by a defenseman (441) with an assist in a 5-1 loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday.

Miss: Matt Murray, the Penguins' No. 1 goalie, is out indefinitely with a concussion. It's his third concussion since the 2016 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

10. Carolina Hurricanes (3-0-1)

Total points: 72
Preseason rank: NR

Hit: The Hurricanes have outscored the opposition 16-7 at 5-on-5 through four games with goals from nine players.

Miss: They've been outscored 4-1 on special teams.

11. Vegas Golden Knights (1-2-0)

Total points: 67
Preseason: No. 7

Hit: Cody Eakin made his season debut against the Washington Capitals on Wednesday. The forward missed the first three games with a lower-body injury.

Miss: Paul Stastny is out with a lower-body injury. The center missed the game against the Capitals and will be out at least two more games, coach Gerard Gallant said. He didn't have a point in the first three games.

12. Columbus Blue Jackets (2-1-0)

Total points: 61
Preseason: No. 11

Hit: In the absence of defenseman Seth Jones, who is on injured reserve with a knee injury, defenseman Markus Nutivaara is playing well in 19:24 per game. Nutivaara has two assists and had a Columbus-high seven shots on goal in a 5-2 win against the Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday. He had 23 points (seven goals, 16 assists) and averaged 16:02 per game in 61 games last season.

Miss: Brandon Dubinsky will be out 4-6 weeks because of a strained oblique muscle. The forward had a point in each of the first two games (one goal, one assist) and won 68.8 percent of his face-offs.

13. Dallas Stars (2-1-0)

Total points: 59
Preseason: No. 12

Hit: The top line of Tyler Seguin, Jamie Benn and Alexander Radulov has scored 21 points (nine goals, 12 assists) in three games. Seguin has eight points (three goals, five assists); Benn has seven points (three goals, four assists); Radulov has six points (three goals, three assists).

Miss: Dallas has one goal from the other 10 forwards. Devin Shore scored in the season opener against the Arizona Coyotes on Oct. 4.

14. Calgary Flames (2-1-0)

Total points: 51
Preseason: No. 15

Hit: Sean Monahan, Johnny Gaudreau and Elias Lindholm, who make up the No. 1 line, have 14 points (seven goals, seven assists) in the past two games, each a win. Gaudreau has six points (one goal, five assists); Monahan and Lindholm each has three goals.

Miss: Travis Hamonic remains out of the lineup with a facial fracture. The defenseman is on injured reserve and is out week to week.

15. Colorado Avalanche (2-1-0)

Total points: 37
Preseason rank: NR

Hit: The Avalanche have scored at least one goal in seven of the nine periods they've played. Center Nathan MacKinnon has scored in each of the first three games for the first time in his career.

Miss: Philipp Grubauer struggled in his first start with the Avalanche, allowing four goals on 34 shots in a 5-2 loss to



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the Columbus Blue Jackets on Tuesday. Colorado acquired Grubauer in a trade with Washington on June 22.

16. Chicago Blackhawks (2-0-1)

Total points: 36

Preseason rank: NR

Hit: Jonathan Toews has five goals through three games. The center scored an NHL career-low 20 goals in 74 games last season.

Miss: Forward Brandon Saad has struggled with one point, an assist, and five shots on goal in three games.

Others receiving points: Los Angeles Kings 25, St. Louis Blues 23, New Jersey Devils 20, New York Islanders 11, Florida Panthers 9, Buffalo Sabres 5, Montreal Canadiens 4

Dropped out: St. Louis Blues (No. 10), Florida Panthers (No. 13), Philadelphia Flyers (No. 14), Los Angeles Kings (No. 16)

HERE'S HOW WE RANKED 'EM

AMALIE BENJAMIN

1. Winnipeg Jets; 2. Tampa Bay Lightning; 3. Toronto Maple Leafs; 4. San Jose Sharks; 5. Nashville Predators; 6. Washington Capitals; 7. Boston Bruins; 8. Los Angeles Kings; 9. Vegas Golden Knights; 10. Pittsburgh Penguins; 11. Dallas Stars; 12. St. Louis Blues; 13. Calgary Flames; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. Carolina Hurricanes; 16. Columbus Blue Jackets

TIM CAMPBELL

1. San Jose Sharks; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. Nashville Predators; 4. Tampa Bay Lightning; 5. Vegas Golden Knights; 6. Winnipeg Jets; 7. Boston Bruins; 8. Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Dallas Stars; 11. Calgary Flames; 12. Carolina Hurricanes; 13. Anaheim Ducks; 14. Colorado Avalanche; 15. Los Angeles Kings; 16. Chicago Blackhawks

BRIAN COMPTON

1. Anaheim Ducks; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Toronto Maple Leafs; 4. Washington Capitals; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Chicago Blackhawks; 7. Calgary Flames; 8. Nashville Predators; 9. New York Islanders; 10. San Jose Sharks; 11. Colorado Avalanche; 12. Boston Bruins; 13. Winnipeg Jets; 14. Buffalo Sabres; 15. New Jersey Devils; 16. Vegas Golden Knights

NICK COTSONIKA

1. Washington Capitals; 2. Vegas Golden Knights; 3. Winnipeg Jets; 4. Nashville Predators; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Toronto Maple Leafs; 7. Boston Bruins; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. San Jose Sharks; 10. Calgary Flames; 11. Dallas Stars; 12. St. Louis Blues; 13. Florida Panthers; 14. Los Angeles Kings; 15. Anaheim Ducks; 16. Carolina Hurricanes

TOM GULITTI

1. Nashville Predators; 2. Tampa Bay Lightning; 3. Washington Capitals; 4. Winnipeg Jets; 5. Toronto Maple Leafs; 6. Boston Bruins; 7. San Jose Sharks; 8. Anaheim Ducks; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Vegas Golden Knights; 12. St. Louis Blues; 13. New Jersey Devils; 14. Dallas Stars; 15. Chicago Blackhawks; 16. Carolina Hurricanes

ADAM KIMELMAN

1. Toronto Maple Leafs; 2. Winnipeg Jets; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. San Jose Sharks; 5. Carolina Hurricanes; 6. Nashville Predators; 7. Washington Capitals; 8. Boston Bruins; 9. Dallas Stars; 10. Colorado Avalanche; 11. Anaheim Ducks; 12. Columbus Blue Jackets; 13. Calgary Flames; 14. Pittsburgh Penguins; 15. Buffalo Sabres; 16. Chicago Blackhawks

ROBERT LAFLAMME

1. Toronto Maple Leafs; 2. Anaheim Ducks; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Winnipeg Jets; 5. Carolina Hurricanes; 6. Chicago Blackhawks; 7. Nashville Predators; 8. San Jose Sharks; 9. Washington Capitals; 10. Columbus Blue Jackets; 11. Pittsburgh Penguins; 12. Vegas Golden Knights; 13. Dallas Stars; 14. New York Islanders; 15. Calgary Flames; 16. Colorado Avalanche

MIKE G. MORREALE

1. Washington Capitals; 2. Winnipeg Jets; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Toronto Maple Leafs; 5. Nashville Predators; 6. Columbus Blue Jackets; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8. San Jose Sharks; 9. Anaheim Ducks; 10. New Jersey Devils; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. St. Louis Blues; 13. Carolina Hurricanes; 14. Vegas Golden Knights; 15. Colorado Avalanche; 16. Chicago Blackhawks

TRACEY MYERS

1. Winnipeg Jets; 2. Nashville Predators; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Boston Bruins; 5. San Jose Sharks; 6. Toronto Maple Leafs; 7. Dallas Stars; 8. Columbus Blue Jackets; 9. Colorado Avalanche; 10. Washington Capitals; 11. Pittsburgh Penguins; 12. Carolina Hurricanes; 13. Vegas Golden Knights; 14. Anaheim Ducks; 15. St. Louis Blues; 16. Calgary Flames

BILL PRICE

1. Toronto Maple Leafs; 2. San Jose Sharks; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Winnipeg Jets; 5. Nashville Predators; 6. Boston Bruins; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8. Washington Capitals; 9. Calgary Flames; 10. Colorado Avalanche; 11. Columbus Blue Jackets; 12. Anaheim Ducks; 13. New Jersey Devils; 14. Florida Panthers; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. Carolina Hurricanes

SHAWN ROARKE

1. Tampa Bay Lightning; 2. Winnipeg Jets; 3. Nashville Predators; 4. Washington Capitals; 5. San Jose Sharks; 6. Boston Bruins; 7. Toronto Maple Leafs; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. Anaheim Ducks; 10. Dallas Stars; 11. Los Angeles Kings; 12. Columbus Blue Jackets; 13. Vegas Golden Knights; 14. Calgary Flames; 15. Florida Panthers; 16. Carolina Hurricanes

DAN ROSEN

1. Tampa Bay Lightning; 2. Winnipeg Jets; 3. San Jose Sharks; 4. Nashville Predators; 5. Washington Capitals; 6. Toronto Maple Leafs; 7. Boston Bruins; 8. Vegas Golden Knights; 9. Carolina Hurricanes; 10. Anaheim Ducks; 11. Pittsburgh Penguins; 12. Los Angeles Kings; 13. Dallas Stars; 14. New Jersey Devils; 15. Columbus Blue Jackets; 16. St. Louis Blues

MIKE ZEISBERGER

1. Tampa Bay Lightning; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. Toronto Maple Leafs; 4. Winnipeg Jets; 5. Nashville Predators; 6.



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Boston Bruins; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8. Chicago Blackhawks; 9. Columbus Blue Jackets; 10. Anaheim Ducks; 11. Calgary Flames; 12. Carolina Hurricanes; 13. Montreal

Canadiens; 14. Colorado Avalanche; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. San Jose Sharks

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1109291 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes are young, fun, worth watching

By Adam Gretz Oct 10, 2018, 4:45 PM EDT

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Every year we go through the same cycle with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Throughout the summer, in to training camp, and right up to the start of the regular season they are a hot analytically-driven pick to be the surprise team in the league.

Look at the possession numbers, we say. Look at how good the defense is, we scream. If only they could find a goalie, we plead. Then once the season actually begins they typically stumble out of the gate and put themselves in a deep hole, never recover from it because the goaltending never works out and they never have enough pure finishers to take advantage of the possession numbers, and then process repeats itself over the following summer.

It was the same story this summer, especially after the addition of Dougie Hamilton from the Calgary Flames to further bolster their defense, the drafting of Andrei Svechnikov with the No. 2 overall pick, and some of the other promising young forwards that are starting to hit the NHL.

But now that the games have started and the season is underway, things are for once looking a little different on the ice.

Is this the year things finally change? Maybe!

Thanks to Tuesday's 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks, the Hurricanes are off to a 3-0-1 start, which is their best start to a season in years. Over the past six or seven years it's typically taken them anywhere from ten to 12 games to record seven points in the standings. They have done it this year in four. Even more important than the early wins, is the way they are playing and the way the roster is constructed.

Bottom line: This team looks fun, and there are a lot of reasons for you to pay attention to them.

At the start of the season they are the fourth-youngest team in the NHL, and they finally seem to be working in the type of players up front that they had been lacking in recent years. Specifically, potential impact players.

They have one of the league's most anticipated rookies in Svechnikov, who has already made a massive impact in what has been a very limited role. Through four games he has averaged less than 12 minutes of ice-time per game and has already averaged a point per game. His potential is massive and if he reaches it could be the franchise-changing player they have been lacking up front.

The rookie that is probably making the most surprising impact has been 22-year-old Warren Foegele, who has already scored three goals this season and , and we haven't really seen anything from Martin Necas, the team's 2017 first-round pick, quite yet.

Along with the core of young talent, there just seems to be a different energy around this team. The way they play, and the fact they are trying to just make things ... fun.

Stuff like that won't make a difference in the standings, but it can help build excitement. It can help get eye balls on the team. It can maybe help get more people in the building and give people a reason to take notice of them. And that, too, is important.



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If you take advantage of those extra eyes and that extra attention by winning, it's even bigger.

I argued last season that even after years of preseason anticipation that never manifested itself in victories that this could still be a team on the verge of a Winnipeg Jets-like breakthrough. For years the Jets were another team that had strong talent on paper, would at times be a strong team analytically, but would always fall short because they lacked a couple of key ingredients, whether it be finishers up front or quality goaltending.

The drafting of Patrik Laine at No. 2 helped change that. The development of Mark Scheifele helped change that. The emergence of players like Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor also helped change that.

While the Hurricanes do not have quite the level of talent that the Jets did up front (to be fair, who does?), the Hurricanes are further ahead of where the Jets were at the start of last season on the blue line.

They may not have quite the offensive depth up front, but they do have talent. Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen are legitimate top-six forwards, Jordan Staal and Justin Williams are solid veteran two-way presences, and we already talked about the rookies. They still need some things to go right. They need Svechnikov to become their version of Laine. They need Necas and Foegele to work out, and they need somebody to emerge as a reliable starter in goal (though, to be fair, it would be nearly impossible for Scott Darling and Petr Mrazek to play worse than they did a year ago for their respective teams).

I don't know if the Hurricanes are going to keep winning this year, and I don't know if they are a playoff team just quite yet. But I do know based on what we have seen so far they are definitely a team worth paying attention and might be able to bring a level of excitement and intrigue that few others can. They also might be able to finally become the team we have been waiting for them to become for years.

LOADED: 10.11.2018

1109331 Minnesota Wild

Wild-Chicago game preview

Sarah McLellan

7 p.m. vs. Chicago Blackhawks - Xcel Energy Center • FSN, 100.3-FM

Wild can't win; Chicago can't lose

Preview: The Wild still is seeking its first win after opening the season 0-1-1. This is the team's first game since Saturday. As for the Blackhawks, they've started 2-0-1. All three of their games have gone to overtime.

Players to WATCH: Captain Jonathan Toews has a team-high five goals. Winger Patrick Kane is tied with Toews for the most points (six). Rookie defenseman Henri Jokiharju has five assists.

Numbers: The Wild has scored two goals off 51 shots. Its power play has gone 0-for-5. Chicago is averaging 34.7 shots through its first three games. Kane has 39 points in 45 career games against the Wild.

Injuries: Blackhawks G Corey Crawford (concussion), Ds Gustav Forsling (wrist) and Connor Murphy (back) and F Andreas Martinsen (back) are out.

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.11.2018

1109332 Minnesota Wild

Wild center Mikko Koivu: a closer look

Staff

MIKKO KOIVU FILE

Age: 35 Size: 6-3, 219 pounds Pos.: Center
Captain: Since 2009

Drafted: First round, sixth overall in 2001

Wild team records: Games (927), assists (465), points (660), plus-minus (70), shots (2,108).

Chasing another: His 193 goals are second, 26 behind Marian Gaborik.

Contract: Koivu is in the first season of a two-year, \$11M deal.

Did you know? 322 NHL players have skated in 1,000 games, including Koivu's teammate Eric Staal (1,095).

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.11.2018

1109333 Minnesota Wild

Mikko Koivu's value to Wild is measured in the win column

Known for defense, the Wild's captain owns diverse skills

By Sarah McLellan Star Tribune OCTOBER 11, 2018

He doesn't always score a goal.

His screen time in the highlight reel is often minor.

And when it's time to parade out the game's three star performers, he usually isn't invited.

But subtract the effect captain Mikko Koivu has on the action and the Wild might not be winners — a reality last season and throughout the 35-year-old's stint in the NHL as one of its best defensive forwards.

"I don't think he gets enough credit at all," winger Mikael Granlund said.

Such is the epitaph that's attached to Koivu's career, a businesslike worker bee who grinds without much glory.

Winning defensive-zone faceoffs and suppressing chances for opponents aren't typically the sequences that are rehashed around the water cooler the next day, but like the gears that crank behind the face of a clock, Koivu helps the Wild tick — and has for years.

Perhaps it's unfortunate, then, that as he closes in on 1,000 NHL games, all with the Wild and as captain for much of his tenure, Koivu hasn't received more recognition for the commitment he's invested into an organization that has become one of the steadiest in the league despite not capturing a Stanley Cup.



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The lack of public praise, though, doesn't bother Koivu because he knows he has the respect and appreciation of his teammates.

"To me," he said, "that matters the most."

When he was growing up in Finland, Koivu focused on scoring goals like most kids do once they choose hockey.

But he was always responsible, wanting to leave all areas of the ice better than they were when he arrived. Combine that outlook with his serious and focused demeanor, and it seemed like the two-way center position was made for him.

Still, it wasn't until he advanced with the sport, getting drafted sixth overall in 2001 by the Wild and beginning his first professional season in North America three years later, that Koivu began to realize just how much value could stem from his role — with the importance of faceoffs drilled in Koivu by current Oilers bench boss Todd McLellan, who coached the Houston Aeros of the American Hockey League when Koivu skated with them during the 2004-05 NHL lockout.

"At that point with me, he was young and willing to learn and he had an impact on the game," McLellan said. "I really enjoyed having him on my team."

Once Koivu graduated to the NHL the following season, then-Wild coach Jacques Lemaire accepted the baton and taught Koivu how to execute the details to have success.

Those lessons, along with the experience that ensued and his competitive drive, are what Koivu attributes to his effectiveness.

"We all have our strengths," Koivu said. "That's why we're in the NHL. So I think it's just trying to do the best with your strengths."

Dynamic on defense

Through 13 seasons, Koivu has surpassed 15 goals in a season six times and 50 points on seven occasions.

Aside from playing the most games (927), he leads the Wild franchise in assists (467), points (660), power-play points (232), shorthanded points (23), overtime goals (five) and multipoint games (144). Koivu is second in goals (193), power-play goals (57), shorthanded goals (10) and game-winning goals (33).

"He's definitely under the radar when it comes to offense," said fellow center and Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews.

His production dipped last season, to 14 goals and 45 points. So did his faceoff win percentage, to .514.

But Koivu has thrived on the defensive side of the puck.

"The best compliment that I could say of Mikko," said former NHLer Alex Tanguay, who regularly battled Koivu when Tanguay was with the Avalanche and Flames, "is that if I was a player that was going to play on his team, I would love to play on his line because I know he does everything well on the ice."

Last season, Koivu had the most defensive-zone starts among Wild forwards at 699, according to the website Corsica.hockey, and he faced the stiffest competition. Yet he still limited the opposition to 27.37 shots against and 1.91 goals against per 60 minutes of play at 5-on-5 — among the best outputs for regular Wild forwards.

Also, Koivu's 265 faceoffs taken on the penalty kill were tops in the entire NHL and his 117 faceoff wins were second.

"He's one of those guys who plays really smart, two-way hockey and always makes wingers better," Toews continued. "He's always going to get the tough matchups. He's always out there making your life miserable when you're trying to score, but he can also make you pay in your own zone as well."

All about 'D'

From 2015-16 through last season, Koivu's individual defensive play is estimated to have banked the Wild four additional wins — which ranks first in the league among forwards.

And that's what counts with Koivu: shining in the critical moments of the game to lift the Wild to victory, whether it be by scoring a goal or preventing one.

"I'd like him on my team," said another past adversary, former Coyotes captain Shane Doan. "If you could have a pick of the league, he'd probably be one of the guys I'd pick."

While he takes pride in being a 2017 finalist for the Frank J. Selke Trophy, which honors the top defensive forward, Koivu doesn't need an award to affirm his productivity.

He knows when he's played well, and the acknowledgment he merits from coaches, managers and his peers around the league as someone who's hard to play against resonates with him.

"For sure that gives you a good feeling," he said.

Leading with loyalty

This has become Koivu's reputation, an unheralded defensive specialist who makes those around him excel, but his imprint on Minnesota and the NHL has more to it.

With this his 10th season as captain of the Wild, he's one of the longest-running leaders in the league and among active players, only five have played more games with one franchise than Koivu — who has the potential to reach 1,000 as early as March.

"One thing I've always tried to be is that you can trust me on your team," Koivu said. "We'll talk, I'll listen and try to help as much as I can. You can trust that you can feel comfortable to come talk to me. That's not an easy thing to do in the hockey world."

Although he's had the chance, Koivu never has entertained the idea of leaving — cherishing a brand of loyalty that's almost become extinct in today's game.

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to stay here," said Koivu, who feels the Wild has offered him the "whole package" — an enjoyable lifestyle that his family — wife Helena and two children — likes and the chance to win.

Under contract for this season and next after signing an \$11 million extension a year ago, Koivu feels he has plenty of years left to play but does want to evaluate on a year-by-year basis. And he envisions himself finishing out his career in Minnesota.

"I know there's a winning team [here]," Koivu said. "There's been changes now, but that doesn't change the goal that we have."

More to give

As long as he continues to play, Koivu's legacy can evolve but the foundation already has been cemented — even if Koivu hasn't drawn the same conclusion about his time in the NHL.

"I don't know how people react to the game and me as a player," he said. "I think there's always going to be people for you and against you. That's just sports."

What is clear is that Koivu wants more, and that, too, is part of his personality — never being satisfied, even though he admitted he could be easier on himself.

"It's a hard way of living, I guess," he said. "But then I think that also pushes you forward."

He's not only motivating himself; he accepts the responsibility of elevating the entire team.

And once he does that, when the Wild is at the top, that's when Koivu will feel he's fulfilled his service to the franchise.



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Until then, he'll keep working.

"If you're able to win, Koivu said, "after that I wouldn't think twice that I had to do more."

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1109334 Minnesota Wild

Wild hoping to 'unlock' Joel Eriksson Ek with move to top line

By DANE MIZUTANI

Sometimes it's easy to forget that Joel Eriksson Ek is only 21 years old.

After being taken with the No. 20 overall pick in the 2015 NHL Draft — three spots ahead of Burnsville native Brock Boeser, who already has developed into a bonafide sniper — the baby-faced Eriksson Ek has become a recognizable name in the Twin Cities the past few seasons. He teased the Wild with his show of skills during a 15-game cup of coffee in 2016-17, then worked his way into the lineup last season.

Now it's time for the 21-year-old center from Sweden to take the next step.

"I think he's a 15- to 20-goal scorer," coach Bruce Boudreau said. "If we can unlock some of that, and he gets some confidence scoring the puck, that's a good thing for us."

Widely recognized for his skills as a two-way player, Eriksson Ek finished last season with 16 points (6 goals, 10 assists). He will need to produce at a much higher rate this season.

In an effort to tapped into some of that potential, Eriksson Ek has been moved up to the top line this week and will play alongside Eric Staal and opposite Jason Zucker in Thursday's home game against the Chicago Blackhawks.

"They are two of the best players on the team, so it's a great chance for me to play with them," Eriksson Ek said. "I'm just going to try to do my best and see what happens."

The key for Eriksson Ek this season will be putting the puck in the net. He went an astounding 50 games without scoring a goal last season, a slump that zapped his confidence.

"There's definitely more there offensively," Staal said. "That comes with confidence. If we can find a way to get that up, then it'll be good for us. He looked really good in training camp, so if he can see some go into the back of the net, it could go a long way for him."

"We're hoping to unlock some of the offensive talent he has," Zucker agreed. "We'll see how that goes. He's a good player and has a lot of talent. We're excited to play with him."

Eriksson Ek entered training camp last month with a swagger, though some of that has worn off after a slow start to the regular season. He didn't make anything happen on the third line alongside Jordan Greenway and opposite Charlie Coyle. But then, neither did anyone else for the Wild, who managed just two goals in two games.

Still, the hope is that elevating Eriksson Ek jolts him to life.

"He has such a good shot and a good release, and he's not afraid to go to the net," Boudreau said. "If he can figure out all of those things, then I think good things can happen for him."

Eriksson Ek says he's not putting too much pressure on himself now that he's on the top line. He knows that wouldn't do him any good.

"I try not to worry too much about where I'm at in the lineup," he said. I try to do my best every day and work as hard as I can. I'm the player that I am and I'm going to just do what I'm good at."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 10.11.2018

1109335 Minnesota Wild

Inside the Numbers: Keys to the Wild avoiding another last-place October

By Derek Peterson Oct 10, 2018

After only two games, the Wild find themselves with a bad taste in their mouth for the second year in a row. Just like in 2017-18, the Wild have opened the season with a regulation loss and a loss in a shootout in a game they probably should have won.

A year ago, that start turned into the Wild ending their first month with a record of 4-4-2, good for last place in the Central Division. The Wild were able to climb out of that hole last year, of course, but they really don't want to try to accomplish that feat for the second year in a row, with the Central Division looking stacked as ever and many analysts predicting this is the year it finally catches up with Minnesota.

There are 10 games left in October, and it could be easy to find themselves in that hole again if they don't address the many red flags we've seen up to this point. With that in mind, let's look at some keys to getting through this stretch.

Overcoming puck possession

The Wild finished last season ranked 30th in Corsi at 47.19 percent and they're 30th again in the small sample size of this season. But shot attempts alone don't tell the entire story, and not all shots are created equally.

One reason the Wild weren't sunk by the poor puck possession was due to the quality of the shots the Wild allowed. The Wild led the NHL in expected goals against last season. Based on the quality of the shots the Wild allowed, they were expected to allow 1.95 goals per 60 minutes. The Wild were the only team in the NHL to allow fewer than two expected goals per hour. That trend extends back as far as Corsica.hockey tracks data. Since the start of 2007, the Wild rank first in expected goals allowed at 1.97 per 60, despite having the fifth-worst Corsi-for percentage in that time at 47.8.

This doesn't mean that the Wild shouldn't worry about controlling the puck more, but it does mean they've historically done a great job managing the quality of shots they allowed. Mikko Koivu led the league with only 1.51 expected goals against per hour last year. Among forwards, Marcus Foligno (ninth), Mikael Granlund (10th) and Joel Eriksson Ek (14th) also make an appearance on the top-20 list from last season. A new addition this offseason, J.T. Brown, ranked 18th last season as well with 1.84 expected goals against per hour. Jason Zucker was 21st at 1.85. Among defensemen, the Wild had four of the top 10. New addition Greg Pateryn ranked fourth with Dallas last year.

Bend but don't break

The Wild have been average or worse at puck possession for years but have managed

to rack up the points by keeping shot quality low and pucks out of the net. A look at

the numbers from their six-year playoff run.



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Season	CF% (Rank) GA/60 (Rank)	SF% (Rank) Season pts.	xGA/60 (Rank)
2012-13 (18th)	49.78 (15th) 55*	50.43 (13th)	1.88 (4th) 2.35
2013-14	48.8 (21st) 1.8 (3rd) 98	49.55 (21st)	1.78 (2nd)
2014-15 (16th)	50.96 (17th) 100	52.19 (9th)	1.82 (1st) 2.21
2015-16 (5th)	47.86 (23rd) 87	49.66 (16th)	1.98 (6th) 1.95
2016-17 (12th)	49.34 (20th) 106	50.51 (14th)	1.91 (1st) 2.19
2017-18 (10th)	47.19 (30th) 101	49.69 (20th)	1.95 (1st) 2.19

* 48-game season. All data 5-on-5 and from NaturalStatTrick.com and Corsica.Hockey.

The Wild are off to a slightly slower start in terms of shot quality allowed so far this season. They've allowed 2.39 expected goals against per hour but have only allowed two actual goals at 5-on-5. Whether they can continue this bend-but-don't-break balance between puck possession and goals will be put to the test this month. The Wild play four of the current top-10 Corsi teams the rest of October, including two this week. The Chicago Blackhawks, Thursday's opponent, were the fourth-best team in puck possession last year (52.3) and rank ninth so far this season at 53.7 percent. The Carolina Hurricanes, Saturday's opponent, were No. 1 last year (54.5) and rank third with a gaudy 60.7 percent in four games this season. The Arizona Coyotes are also above the 60-percent mark so far, although they haven't yet scored a goal. Five of the opponents are currently top-10 in goals per game.

With all that offense coming up, the Wild may well still need to lean on Devan Dubnyk to help overcome some of their puck possession woes. Dubnyk has been brilliant so far this season, allowing only two goals against on 63 shots at 5-on-5 — the best save percentage for anyone with more than 60 shots faced. Perhaps one of the most encouraging signs we've seen from Dubnyk to this point is the lack of "soft" goals allowed. This was a sore spot last season with Dubnyk allowing 26 low-danger goals, more than any other goalie in the NHL. In two games so far, Dubnyk has yet to allow a low-danger goal at 5-on-5.

Being opportunistic with the schedule

Last season the Wild earned 62 of a potential 82 points at home. This season they're 1-for-2 after blowing a late lead and dropping a shootout to a Vegas team they swept last season, with six more opportunities coming this month. The Wild do get to face some of the league's recent underperformers at home this month in Carolina and Arizona, but the Hurricanes are off to a hot start and rumors of the Coyotes' improvement continue. The Blackhawks have basically been scoring at will. Patrick Kane has four goals and six points in three games already and Jonathan Toews also has six points, with five of those being goals. They also welcome the Colorado Avalanche and the Tampa Bay Lightning later this month. We've already seen what the Avalanche can do, and the Lightning are once again considered a Stanley Cup contender. The sixth opponent is Los Angeles, one of just three teams the Wild didn't beat last season — they suffered an OT loss in their home meeting with the Kings.

Still, the Wild got into the playoffs a year ago by being rock solid at home. Only the Jets picked up more points at their own rink in 2017-18. October gives Minnesota a chance to establish that trend again.

Also working in their favor: Two of the Wild's four road games this month are very winnable. In the last week of October, the Wild head to Western Canada to face the Vancouver Canucks and the

Edmonton Oilers. Both teams missed the playoffs last season and are expected to be on the outside looking in again this season. So far, Vancouver is nearly as bad as the Wild at puck possession. They've controlled 39.8 percent of the shot attempts at 5-on-5 and have managed only 48 shots on goal, tied for the fewest of any team at 5-on-5 with at least three games played. Edmonton has only played one game so far this season, a 5-2 loss against the Devils in Sweden, but they were one of the worst defensive teams last season, allowing 2.62 goals against per hour.

Resuscitating the offense

The Blackhawks coming to town Thursday brings the possibility of the Wild facing off against Cam Ward. Up to this point, Ward has been one of the worst goalies in the league and might be just what the Wild need to jumpstart their offense.

To put it mildly, the Wild's top nine have mostly been a disaster. In hopes of not scoring one goal per game for the entire season, the coaching staff has already started blending the top nine, and for good reason. Almost anything we saw from the top three forward lines was concerning. Perhaps the most concerning was the Wild's third line of Joel Eriksson Ek, Jordan Greenway and Charlie Coyle. Against Colorado, this line managed to register zero shots on goal in over six minutes together at 5-on-5. They were also on the ice for only a single shot attempt and it came from a defenseman. Against Vegas on Saturday the results weren't any better. The group combined for two shots on goal, both by Eriksson Ek and controlled a miserable 31 percent of the shot attempts. They were on the ice for a Matt Dumba goal, but it came roughly three seconds after a zone entry on a short pass from Coyle.

Trouble with the lines

In just two games, the Wild's offense struggled enough to force a re-shuffling. A look

at how each of the main forward lines fared against Colorado and Vegas at 5-on-5.

Line	TOI	CF%	SF-SA	GF-GA
Zucker-Staal-Granlund	24:10	42.86	13-18	0-0
Parise-Koivu-Niederreiter	23:07	37.5	8-13	1-1
Greenway-Eriksson Ek-Coyle	16:19	20	4-15	1-0
Foligno-Fehr-Hendricks	13:21	52.17	8-4	0-0

All data from NaturalStatTrick.com.

Zach Parise is probably the brightest spot of the forward group so far and he has one goal. But that one goal builds on his close to the season last year in which he scored 10 goals and 12 points in 12 games, including the playoffs. The fourth line has been the only other sign of encouragement so far besides Parise. In slightly over 13 minutes at 5-on-5 together this season, the combo of Eric Fehr, Marcus Foligno and Matt Hendricks held their own against some tough customers. Against Colorado, the fourth line spent the majority of their night matched against Gabriel Landeskog, Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen and broke even in Corsi — six shot attempts for and six shot attempts against. Only two of Colorado's shots ended up making it on goal. More importantly, the Wild fourth line didn't surrender a goal. That same group for the Wild played well again on Saturday against Vegas. The group actually came out slightly ahead in possession that night, controlling 71 percent of the shot share, five for and only two against. Again, they also didn't surrender a goal. You may want more than "well, at least they didn't get scored on" from your fourth line, but so far the results have been fairly encouraging.

The Wild were a good team last year. There's no denying that. They were one of the best defensive teams in the league and they earned over 100 points in the standings. There's also no denying the red flags we've seen so far. The Wild were able to climb out of the hole



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they dug for themselves in October last year, but in a season where expectations seem to weigh uber-heavy, it's imperative they get things figured out. And soon.

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1109413 Winnipeg Jets

A new kind of role model

By: Jason Bell

Posted: 10/10/2018 7:43 PM | Comments: 0

Mathieu Perreault is beginning to embrace somewhat of a new reality as he prepares for the 500th game of his NHL career.

The veteran forward, in his fifth season with the Winnipeg Jets and the second year of a deal that pays him US\$4.125 million annually until the summer of 2021, will not be relied on for offensive production.

There hasn't been much of that since about Valentine's Day, anyway.

Perreault's dogged puck pursuit, the sacrificing of his body to make a play and his veteran savvy, both on and off the ice, make him a coach's favourite, while his candor makes him a media darling.

So, it was no great surprise when Perreault, who has no points in three games to begin the 2018-19 season and just three goals and three assist going back nine playoff games and 25 regular-season games last season, said Wednesday he's focusing on contributing as a role player, at least for the time being.

"Personally, I haven't got a point yet, but my goal is always to try to make a difference every time I step on the ice, towards helping the team win the game. I think this is the role I'm going to try to be in this year. I won't be looking too much at personal production," said Perreault, who suits up for his milestone game tonight in Nashville against the Predators.

"I've always been a guy that gets points. But, now my career has maybe taken a different turn. Honestly, for me, I just like getting chances, being out there, helping the team win. That's all that really matters."

The Jets coaching staff tried Perreault with centre Bryan Little and high-scoring winger Patrik Laine during parts of the pre-season, the season-opener in St. Louis and Game 2 in Dallas, with minimal success.

Now, head coach Paul Maurice is determined to give dynamic but inconsistent speedster Nikolaj Ehlers another long look on the left side. While the season is still in its infancy, the Jets need another line to share the scoring burden with the Mark Scheifele unit.

"Very, very high," Maurice said when asked where finding second-line chemistry sits on the priority list.

That means Perreault has dropped from the top-nine and will keep cruising the wing on the fourth line with centre Jack Roslovic and Kristian Vesalainen, while playing limited minutes. In Tuesday's 2-1 win over the Los Angeles Kings, Perreault had just seven minutes, 30 seconds of ice time. That's his least amount of playing time — games shortened by an injury notwithstanding — in several seasons.

Even playing with Matt Hendricks and Joel Armia on the club's fourth line during a stretch early last season earned him 10-plus minutes a game — and the trio produced.

"Ice time definitely makes a difference. The more you get out there, the more chances you get," Perreault said. "But I'd rather be a fourth-line player on a winning team than a top-line player on a losing team any day, so I'm never going to complain about that.

"Every time I put on an NHL sweater I never take anything for granted, so for me just to be out there helping the team win a game, that's all I can ask for."

A high-scoring junior with the Acadie-Bathurst Titan of the QMJHL, Perreault, who hails from Drummondville, Que., has been a fairly consistent 40-point guy since he broke into the NHL with the Washington Capitals in 2010. His best season came two years ago, when he fired 13 goals and added 32 assists with the Jets.

Maurice said the aspects of Perreault's game make him a persistent contributor, despite what recent scoresheets might suggest.

"I see him as a really, really important part of our team. He can score more points if I move him up and play him with different people. But the structure of our team, we're a better hockey team," he said. "I go back to the start of last year when it was Hendricks, Armia and Perreault. And that was a real adjustment for him. That's the first time he got out of the top three (lines) here. And they scored big goals for us. When Matty did that, it hopefully changed the view of the rest of the players in the room about how important that role is, that fourth line, how important those minutes are to your team's success.

"He's a really big part of the team. And not just, 'He's a great guy.' He's a really good player for us. And when you have two young players on that fourth line and you know there's going to be injuries, he's an important player for us because he is going to go up and take more minutes and he's got to be ready to do that."

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1109414 Winnipeg Jets

Yes, it's just October, but c'mon... it's Jets-Preds

By: Mike McIntyre

Posted: 10/10/2018 7:00 PM | Last Modified: 10/10/2018 11:14 PM | Updates

NASHVILLE — They can't undo the past. But you can be sure the Nashville Predators are determined not to let history repeat itself as a familiar foe comes to town.

The Winnipeg Jets waltzed into Music City last spring and won not once, not twice, but an impressive three times to take their memorable best-of-seven divisional playoff series. That was no easy feat, considering the Predators dropped only nine of 41 home games in regulation during the regular-season.

And as if Nashville wasn't motivated enough, they're coming off a lacklustre 3-0 loss at Bridgestone Arena Tuesday night to the Calgary Flames. Now 2-1-0 to start the new campaign, they sport an identical record as the visiting Jets for Thursday night's Central Division showdown.

No one is suggesting the fourth game of the season will send a statement or represent a turning point for either club. But as far as early October matchups go, this is about as good as it gets.



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Both teams, along with their respective fan bases, have no doubt had the date circled on their calendars since the NHL schedule was released in June.

"Right now, it's hard to look forward," Nashville captain Roman Josi said shortly after his team went through the handshake line with the Jets. "We have all the players to be successful, but obviously everybody's really disappointed right now."

That was exactly 22 weeks ago. A long, long time to stew.

What makes this a marquee event is the fact Nashville and Winnipeg finished No. 1 and No. 2 overall in the league last year and have returned with nearly the same lineups. Not surprisingly, both are considered legitimate Stanley Cup contenders.

We figure it should take all of about 10 seconds for the competitive juices to get flowing and old grudges to flare up again. We're looking at you, Mark Scheifele and P.K. Subban.

There's also plenty of early indications the Central is going to be as competitive as ever, which makes these head-to-head contests even more important. Central teams are a combined 10-6-3 so far.

Winnipeg began the year with divisional games in St. Louis (5-1 win) and Dallas (5-1 loss) before beating the Los Angeles Kings 2-1 in their home-opener Tuesday night.

Nashville also started on the road, winning a pair of tight games in New York over the Rangers (3-2) and Islanders (4-3) before falling in their home-opener to the Flames.

This is the first of four meetings between the clubs this season. They'll play again in Nashville in Jan. 17 before the scene shifts to Bell MTS Place March 1 and March 23.

Not surprisingly, Nashville's impressive defence is setting the early pace. Subban (1G, 2A) and Mattias Ekholm (1G, 2A) lead the team in scoring through three games. There's also plenty of firepower up front with the likes of Viktor Arvidsson (2G, 0A), Filip Forsberg (1G, 1A), Craig Smith (1G, 1A), Colton Sissons (1G, 1A), Kyle Turris (0G, 2A) and Ryan Johansen (0G, 1A).

Gone from last year's playoffs are veterans Mike Fisher and Scott Hartnell, who both retired. And forward Austin Watson, a constant thorn in the side of the Jets, is suspended for the first 27 games of the season after pleading guilty in the summer to a misdemeanor domestic assault charge involving his girlfriend. He was given three months probation after admitting to shoving her during an argument at a gas station in June. He is appealing the ruling, and a decision is expected next week.

The only substantial new addition was defenceman Dan Hamhuis, signed as an unrestricted free agent to bolster an already loaded blue line.

Last, but certainly not least, is goalie Pekka Rinne. Nobody is under a brighter spotlight, especially when it comes to facing Winnipeg, than last year's Vezina Trophy winner. The veteran netminder absolutely imploded in the playoffs against the Jets, particularly in the seventh and deciding game when he was given an early pull after surrendering two quick goals in what turned into an eventual 5-1 loss.

He had a horrendous 4.93 goals against average and .848 save percentage in those four home playoff starts against the Jets.

"I feel very much responsible for our season ending at this point," a devastated Rinne said at the time. "The biggest moment of the season, it's a terrible feeling. You let your teammates down, and that's what happened tonight. That's tough to swallow."

We're guessing Rinne will be out for some personal redemption, assuming he gets the net Thursday. He won the season-opener in the Big Apple last week, then took the loss in Tuesday's home-

opener. Juuse Saros got the other start in Long Island and posted the win.

It's far too early to say how the 2018-19 story will end for both teams. But the latest chapter should be a real page-turner.

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1109415 Winnipeg Jets

Scheifele looking forward to Music City return

By: Jason Bell

Posted: 10/10/2018 10:30 PM

Mark Scheifele is going back to the building where it all happened.

The 25-year-old Kitchener, Ont., product and his Winnipeg Jets teammates return tonight to Bridgestone Arena — home of the Nashville Predators — for the first time since the two Central Division rivals met in the second round of the 2017-18 NHL playoffs. Game time is 7 p.m.

The Jets posted a well-earned 5-1 triumph in Game 7 on May 10 to advance to their first Western Conference final against Vegas, a series the Golden Knights wrapped up in five games.

But back to the battle waged between the league's best and second-best squads during the 2017-18 regular season — the Predators won their first Presidents' Trophy with 117 points, while the Jets were right behind with 114 — and the heroics of Winnipeg's top-line centre in Round 2 of the post-season.

Scheifele fired seven goals in the four games staged in the Tennessee capital, including two-goal performances in Games 1 and 2, and the clincher. He set an NHL record for most road goals in a playoff series.

Speaking after practice Wednesday in Winnipeg, Scheifele said it's a treat to return to a true U.S. hockey haven early in the new season.

"It's a loud building, and any loud building gets you going as a player. We got to experience it at a pretty heightened level last year," Scheifele said. "Obviously, we're excited for another tough test, another tough challenge, against Nashville. It's always a fun game against them. They play a hard game, and we saw that in the playoffs last year. After that series, obviously, there's a bit of a rivalry now."

Scheifele finished with 14 playoff goals, just one back of Washington Capitals marksman Alex Ovechkin, who scored 15, although he played in seven more games.

He's no philosopher, but Ben Chiarot maintains the importance of knowing himself continues to work in his favour.

The Jets defenceman, now in his fifth season in the NHL, has suited up for three straight games to begin the season and will be united with Dustin Byfuglien on the second pairing tonight. It's a spot he's familiar with, having partnered with big No. 33 for long stretches when the oft-injured, now-departed Toby Enstrom was sidelined in previous seasons

While Chiarot has gone pointless in games against St. Louis, Dallas and Los Angeles, he's been efficient and reliable. His playing style doesn't exactly lend itself to posting garish scoring stats — in 57 games last season, he scored two goals and added a dozen assists



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— so, Chiarot won't catch anyone's eye when judged by the usual performance markers. But he was a plus-15, dished out an average of two solid hits a night and kept overt giveaways to a minimum.

The 6-3, 220-pound rear-guard also played 16 of the Jets' post-season games, chipping in three helpers while providing a consistently physical element, particularly in the series against the Preds. Being flashy isn't Chiarot's style, and he knows it.

"I'm confident in what I bring to the team and my role. I saw last year, especially in the playoffs, how effective it can be and how valuable it can be, so I just play my game and bring the physical play every night," said Chiarot, 27. "I went through that lesson, I learned that, and now I think you just see me using it every night."

"I know better what my game is now, more than I ever have before, and what makes me effective out there, so there's no turning it on and off. For me, this is how I play and that's what I do."

Jets head coach Paul Maurice said defining himself as a forceful, stay-at-home blue-liner serves Chiarot — and the hockey club — well.

"That's something we talk about with every player. 'What are you really good at?' And he became that physical guy. He can move the puck, but (he's) a real hard man to play against," Maurice said. "That (was) the message to Ben coming back: before you think about taking the next step and start generating offence, make sure you understand how valuable what you're good at is. And he's protected that in the first three (games)."

Kyle Connor plays the 100th game of his NHL career tonight in Music City

Playing the left side with Scheifele and right-winger Blake Wheeler on the Jets' top line, the 21-year-old from Michigan scored the game winner in Tuesday's 2-1 triumph against the Los Angeles Kings and has a goal in three straight games to begin the season.

To say he scores crucial goals would be a huge understatement. Of his 36 career goals (including 31 last season, tops among all rookies) Connor has nine game winners, including five in his last 13 games dating back to last season.

"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," Wheeler said after the win over the Kings. "He came into camp, he's been one of our top guys. You can tell this 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."

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1109416 Winnipeg Jets

Perreault takes reduced role in stride

Paul Friesen

Mathieu Perreault realizes his days of a being a healthy point producer for the Jets might be over.

But at the age of 30 and still without a Stanley Cup in his career, dropping down to the fourth line alongside two kids is a sacrifice he's willing to make.

"I think this is the role I'm going to try to be in this year," Perreault said, Wednesday. "I won't be looking too much at personal production. Playing on that fourth line with two young guys, I'd rather be on a winning team and doing that, helping younger guys, than thinking about my personal production."

Perreault is pointless in three games this season, after putting up 17 goals, 39 points, last year.

He started the season on the second line with Patrik Laine and Bryan Little, but played Tuesday's game with 21-year-old Jack Roslovic and 19-year-old rookie Kristian Vesalainen.

While the top line centred by Mark Scheifele is carrying the offensive load right now, Perreault says it's only a matter of time before others break out.

If his own can contribute to wins now and then, he'll be happy.

"Every time I put on an NHL sweater I never take anything for granted," he said. "So for me just to be out there helping the team win a game, that's all I can ask for. As long as we're winning, I'll be totally happy with that."

"Yeah, I've always been a guy that gets points. But now my career has maybe taken a different turn."

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 10.11.2018

1109417 Winnipeg Jets

Jets top priority? Get second line going

Paul Friesen

A 2-1 record doesn't gloss over a glaring, early-season issue for the Winnipeg Jets.

This is basically a one-line team right now, at least when it comes to scoring.

Of Winnipeg's eight goals, five have come from Kyle Connor (three), Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler (one each).

The Jets' second line has yet to score at even strength, although Patrik Laine has one on the power play.

Bryan Little and Nik Ehlers have the same stat line: 0-0-0.

Same with Mathieu Perreault, who started the season on Line 2, before dropping to the fourth for Tuesday's 2-1 win over the L.A. Kings.

Asked on Wednesday how big a priority is getting his second line going, head coach Paul Maurice was quick to reply.

"Lowry's line's been great," Maurice said.

It was really only half a joke.

Because Adam Lowry's crash-and-bang unit, with wingers Brandon Tanev and Andrew Copp, has been the Jets' second-best line.

Tanev has one of Winnipeg's other goals, and Lowry scored one, shorthanded.

But really, the Little-Ehlers-Laine threesome has to be the Jets' counter-punch to the consistent left hooks being landed by the top unit.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 11, 2018

Most teams have one scary line. You need to land combinations to stand above the crowd in the NHL.

I don't see a higher priority for this team than unlocking the blockage on Line 2.

"Very, very high," Maurice acknowledged. "We have a tremendous advantage in our group when that line plays the way it's capable of playing."

It means better matchups.

Two games in, Maurice switched Ehlers with Perreault, but nobody was thrilled with the early returns against the Kings.

"Not great," Ehlers said. "We didn't create too many chances. We didn't skate. We didn't do what we needed to do. And that's something that we've got to go out and change (Thursday).

"Our line wasn't pretty, and if we can change that maybe we don't have to win 2-1."

Going into Tuesday's game, Maurice said getting Ehlers going has been "a project" going back to late January of last season.

Ehlers drop-off in goals actually goes back to the start of March.

By the end of February, he had 25 goals in 63 games.

After that, he scored four in the final 19 games of the regular season, and none in 15 playoff games.

Add three games this season, and Ehlers has scored just four times in his last 37.

That's not a gradual drop, it's a plunge.

"I honestly don't even care," Ehlers said, insisting he hasn't lost his scoring confidence. "That's how it's going right now. I feel good. I've just got to go out there and start playing the game the right way. And then everything else will come."

Ehlers had one shot on goal against the Kings, while Little didn't have any.

If that game was a chemistry experiment, it fizzled.

"Well, it was our first game back since last year, so it's obviously not what you wanted," Ehlers said. "But we've got to find each other again, and that's not going to take one day and it's all good. It's going to take a while."

Maurice says Ehlers can get out of his shooting mentality when playing with Laine because he's worried about setting up his Finnish linemate.

"Sometimes I probably have felt like that," Ehlers acknowledged. "But that's also something I've tried to change. And I did that in my last two pre-season games... so it's something I'm going to continue doing. I'm a good enough player I know when to shoot and when to pass it."

Ehlers is like any other player, in that he has to take what he's really good at and do it on a nightly basis.

"All the things we need to clean up and help, we can get better with that over time, as long as what you're really good at is of value to us," Maurice said. "Nikky's a dynamic player, a dynamic shooter, and we want him to be that threat all the time. The defensive parts of it, sometimes we give a little bit up there. But playing him in the hole they're in, they should be able to be a big advantage for our team."

So far, they haven't been.

"They haven't been at a point where we can judge their chemistry, yet," Maurice said of the line. "And there's some simplicity that has to come into their game. And when that happens we'll decide if they're a real good line together."

If the Jets don't figure that out, the losses are sure to come.

Because a good opponent can usually defend one punch.

It's the second one that often catches them.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 10.11.2018

1109418 Winnipeg Jets

Five keys to Jets vs Predators

Ken Wiebe

Winnipeg Jets at Nashville Predators

THE BIG MATCHUP

Mark Scheifele vs Ryan Johansen

Two elite centremen should see plenty of one another as the Jets and Predators renew acquaintances. The head coaches spent a lot of time going best on best during the second-round series last spring and you can expect more of the same on Thursday night. Scheifele has a goal and three points in three games while Johansen has been limited to one assist in three games.

Red-hot Connor

Jets left-winger Kyle Connor is riding a three-game goal-scoring streak and leads the Jets with four points through three games.

He's playing with confidence and is using his speed to create scoring chances for himself and his linemates. Connor is up to nine game-winning goals in his career, including five in his past 13 outings.

Keeping it tight

The Jets ran into penalty trouble in the first two games, as they were shorthanded nine times, but they tightened up the discipline – mostly eliminating the stick fouls as they took only two minors in Tuesday's home opener against the Los Angeles Kings. The Predators like to mix it up after the whistle, so the Jets patience could be tested in this game.

Start on time

The Predators are sure to be in a crusty mood after falling 3-0 to the Calgary Flames on Tuesday. Flames goalie Mike Smith had to be sharp, making 43 saves, including 21 during a second-period barrage. For two teams who know how to defend, the Jets and Predators play a lot of high-event hockey and the scoring chances are usually plentiful.

Offence from the defence

The Predators get a lot of production from the back-end, which is no surprise when you consider they feature one of the best defence corps in the NHL – with captain Roman Josi, P.K. Subban and Ryan Ellis leading the way. Coverage of the points will be an area of focus for the Jets in this one.

Nashville Predators defenceman P.K. Subban (right) smiles as he is grabbed by Winnipeg Jets forward Nikolaj Ehlers during Game 6 of their NHL playoff series in Winnipeg on Mon., May 7, 2018. Kevin King/Winnipeg Sun

The goalie battle



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 11, 2018

The last time the Jets saw Pekka Rinne, he was being removed from Game 7 of the Central Division final after giving up two goals on seven shots on goal, lasting only 10:31 before getting the hook.

Rinne, who won the Vezina Trophy last season for the first time, is sure to be motivated to have a strong showing as he goes up against Connor Hellebuyck, who was second in voting for top goalie in the NHL last season.

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1109389 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning journal: Mikhail Sergachev shows off powerful slap shot in practice

By Nick Kelly Published: October 10, 2018

BRANDON — In case you have ever wondered how much power Lightning D Mikhail Sergachev packs into his slap shot, he provided an answer in the form of shattered glass on Wednesday.

In between drills during practice, Sergachev fired a puck toward the net from the blue line. He didn't make it into the net. Instead, the puck cut right through the glass panel behind the net, prompting glass to come crashing down onto the ice.

Curious how much power a Mikhail Sergachev slap shot has? Here's your answer pic.twitter.com/HFWDIPiCvo

— Nick Kelly (@_NickKelly) October 10, 2018

A cleanup crew quickly took care of the glass on the ice and outside of the rink while practice continued.

Braydon Coburn deserving of shootout opportunity?

In its first game of the season, the Lightning had an early opportunity to try a couple of players out in a shootout.

The Lightning rolled out forwards J.T. Miller, Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point. Miller and Kucherov got the job done, but maybe D Braydon Coburn gets consideration down the line.

At the end of practice Wednesday, Coburn scored shootout goals against goaltenders Andrei Vasilevskiy and Louis Domingue. Teammates did everything from cheer for him to sprawl out on the ice in an effort to celebrate after Coburn surprised with scores against each goaltender.

Coburn probably won't be called on early in a shootout anytime soon, though. Still, kudos to the defenseman for showing a handful of fans at the Ice Sports Forum what he can do with the puck.

Practice lines ahead of game vs. Vancouver

Ondrej Palat – Steven Stamkos – Nikita Kucherov

Yanni Gourde- Brayden Point – Tyler Johnson

Alex Killorn – Anthony Cirelli – Mathieu Joseph

Adam Erne – Cedric Paquette – J.T. Miller

Cory Conacher – Danick Martel – Ryan Callahan

• Conacher and Martel likely will be healthy scratches Thursday if these lines are any indication and Johnson returns. Callahan continues to nurse a shoulder injury. He continues to be full contact, though. The five-month recovery process after shoulder surgery would put his expected return to game action in early November.

• Paquette was a full participant in practice Wednesday. He did not participate fully Monday after suffering a hand injury in the Florida game. He had also missed some of the game after another player skated over his glove during a faceoff.

• The only line that remains intact from the first game is the third line. Said Lightning coach Jon Cooper: "We are just trying to find chemistry a little bit."

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1109390 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning's Tyler Johnson set to return in a different role

By Nick Kelly Published: October 10, 2018

BRANDON – Barring a late setback, Tyler Johnson will make his season debut Thursday against Vancouver.

Lightning coach Jon Cooper needed to talk with the trainers after practice Wednesday but said Johnson should be good to go after missing the opener against Florida last week. Johnson has dealt with an upper-body injury for the past two weeks.

"I might have a little rust," Johnson said. "I don't know. We will see how it goes. But I am playing with some really good players that are going to help me out. Hopefully we get back into it right away."

Those players: Brayden Point and Yanni Gourde. At both practices since the Lightning's victory over the Panthers, Johnson has skated on the second line with them.

No, Point won't be moved from center to the wing as Johnson joins his line. Instead, Johnson will play on the wing.

It's a position he played in the NHL for the first time last season. Much of that versatility stems from the system the Lightning runs in which both positions fill similar roles. It has given Cooper the flexibility to plug Johnson in wherever the Lightning needs him.

"It definitely helps the transition the fact that there really isn't anything to transition into," Johnson said. "Kind of playing the same thing. Maybe a little different on face-offs, but that's about it."

No matter if you are a wing or a center, the first skater who can retreat back to the defensive zone to defend typically becomes the center in the Lightning's system. If the last player back is a center, he will switch to playing on the wing.

Jon Cooper was inspired by Tony Colton, who died from cancer at the age of 17 in 2017. "I will do everything in my power," Cooper told him, "to continue the fight." #TBLightning @TBLightning @CoopersLaw @TB_Times @_NickKelly #GoBolts <https://t.co/1xSt3MdK7o>

— TampaBayTimesSports (@TBTimes_Sports) October 10, 2018

Having the versatility to play both makes Johnson — and his new linemates Point and Gourde — valuable.

"All three of us have been playing center throughout our career, and I think it is good because you never know if Brayden falls down in the (offensive zone) and can't get back into the d-zone, for sure me or Johnny can jump in at the center position for a second or two," Gourde said.

Gourde had trouble not smiling when he started talking about Johnson joining his line. After all, Johnson has finished with at least 45 points in four of his five full NHL seasons.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"He's so good," Gourde said. "There's not much he doesn't do out there. I love playing with him because he brings some energy similar to the energy I bring, and I like that."

It's a start the Lightning players needed in an area perceived to be perhaps this team's greatest weakness. #TBLightning #GoBolts @TB_Times @_NickKelly <https://t.co/OdDKKZ5TVs>

— TampaBayTimesSports (@TBTimes_Sports) October 9, 2018

It's the speed and energy Johnson brings that make him a fit on the wing, Cooper said. Cooper also listed Johnson's ability to take pucks off the wall and ability to pull away from opponents as attributes that make wing natural for him, despite limited time at the position.

"He is one of the top players on our team," Cooper said. "We are going to fit him in where it gives him success and gives our team success. Sometimes it's on the wing. Eventually, I'd like him to play in the middle a little more regularly."

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1109422 Websites

The Athletic / 'These young kids are beginning to take over' — Oral history of the day the NHL's future arrived

Craig Custance

Oct 10, 2018

It was Sept. 21, 2016, the day a bunch of kids took down an international hockey powerhouse.

Team North America, a wild card collection of players 23 years old and under from Canada and the United States put together to compete in the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, beat an experienced Team Sweden 4-3 in overtime of a game that would determine the fates of both groups.

If you were there, it was breathtaking. The speed. The skill. The raw confidence.

If you were on the ice, well, it felt like one of the best games ever played.

"Ever," agreed Maple Leafs star Auston Matthews, who had just turned 19 when the game was played. "I wouldn't debate that either. It was an unbelievable game."

Maybe it didn't determine an Olympic tournament or decide a Stanley Cup or really have any serious consequence whatsoever, but let's not allow that to interfere with the legend. It was Connor McDavid playing on a line with Auston Matthews. It was Nathan MacKinnon being set up by Johnny Gaudreau. It was Team Sweden veterans Erik Karlsson and Henrik Lundqvist and the Sedins matching the youthful star power shift for shift. The first 95 seconds of regulation had two goals and a penalty shot. The last 90 seconds of overtime was even better.

It was incredible.

"The goalies were good, the defense was good, the forwards were great," McDavid said. "It was an outstanding game."

While it didn't carry the weight of an Olympic gold showdown, the short space in time between now and when it was played has given it even more perspective. For one, at the time we suspected these kids were the future of the game. Now, we know it.

The way Team North America played was a glimpse of what was to come in the NHL. Scoring is up. The game is blistering fast. So

much of what makes the NHL product so good is rooted in their style — uptempo and fearless.

"They showed it could happen against the best in the world," said Team North America coach Todd McLellan. "It probably encouraged scouting staffs and management teams to look at the speed and pace the game was played at and draft that way."

"It was an exciting young team," Matthews said. "The future of the NHL."

It was all on display in that window of just a few hours in Toronto. A hint of what we're seeing right now, every night.

The most memorable aspect of that game — that it featured two generational stars in Connor McDavid and Auston Matthews together on one line — almost didn't happen. We start the story there:

STAN BOWMAN, Co-GM of Team North America with Peter Chiarelli: The interesting thing that I remember was Auston Matthews, that was his draft year, right? We talked about him but he wasn't really even in consideration when we were doing all our predictions and our roster. I remember I was working for Team USA in the World Championships, we were in Russia and Auston was on the team. ... He was dominant and he was like the best player on our team. I remember calling Peter and I'm like, 'We have to rethink this. You have to see him.'

TODD MCLELLAN, Team North America head coach: My first viewing with Auston at a high level, when we went over to the World Championships in 2015, the American team was playing against a team from Austria. We were in Vienna. Auston was playing over there, he played the one game and went home. I think he was the best player on the ice that night and he wasn't even drafted yet. At that point, he piqued my interest.

BOWMAN: At the time he was just a guy who played in Switzerland who had a ton of potential. Nobody really knew him. You knew him from the U.S. team before but you had to be in the hockey scouting community to know him. The world at large didn't know anything about Auston Matthews.

JON COOPER, Team North America assistant coach: Auston Matthews came in and I just remember, in the beginning he was listed as the 13th forward. We're like, we'll see how good this Matthews kid is. We think he's good ... but we don't know. He found his way up the depth chart pretty quick.

MCLELLAN: He was initially picked as perhaps the extra forward. We got into practice, his skill set, his ability to handle the puck, he could keep up with the pace. In fact, there were times with his mind and creativity he dictated the pace. He kept working his way up the lineup.

COOPER: One of my biggest memories. It was Sept. 4 or whatever. We got on the ice at the Bell Centre for the first practice. Usually that practice, even in training camp, there's no execution, guys are ripping all around and nothing gets done. I remember that first couple drills going, 'Holy shit, we look like the '76 Russians in warp speed.' It was unreal.

JAY WOODCROFT, Team North America assistant coach: Before the tournament and we were talking about the team and whatnot, and Dave Tippett mentioned — everyone thinks of Tipp as being so organized defensively and great neutral zone — and I remember him clearly stating that with these young horses we have, sometimes you have to let them out of the stable, open the barn door and let them run. I remember him saying that. And that is how we played.

MCLELLAN: We looked at what we had. We felt we had players that would want to play fast, play exciting and they would want to take some risk in their game. When we approached them we told them that was fine, we could accept that as a coaching staff and we felt we could win like that.



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TIPPETT: You wanted to maximize all their abilities. You have to try and put a little responsibility in them just to give them a chance. But we had so many fun players to watch.

MCLELLAN: They're artists and we encouraged them to paint. Mix colors. Get creative. You don't have to paint by numbers here. It was our job to write our own story. Nobody knew what we were going to be, how we were going to play. Could we stand up to the competition, could we make a mark on the tournament? We opened the book, we left the pages empty and it was up to the players to fill them in.

The most memorable masterpiece for this team was its game against Team Sweden, the final game of their round robin schedule. Sweden entered this game undefeated and the kids were 1-1, needing a win to keep their hopes of advancement alive.

RIKARD GRONBORG, Team Sweden head coach: When we actually got the schedule, we knew this was going to be the game somehow. We played against the Russians the first game, and then we had the day off, then we played an afternoon game against the Fins, which was the day before this. We had less than 24 hours to turn around and play against a very explosive team. We knew this game was going to be very tough. Meanwhile, Team North America sat idle the night before and we knew they were going to come out flying.

MCLELLAN: I remember walking to the rink before the game even started, there was a huge Swedish following. There was a ton of yellow and blue and chanting and singing. There was excitement all around our team, Team North America. Just the energy and walking to the building that day was significant. Our players were ready. They didn't need much of a pep talk or anything like that.

BOWMAN: I just remember that there was no fear. I think normally when you're playing a big game with the team you're with, there's always a little — not uneasiness — but you feel like, 'boy, I hope we're ready to play tonight.' With this group, you wanted to play the games because it was fun.

RYAN MURRAY, Team North America defenseman: Why it was so fun for us is because we didn't have anyone looking over our shoulder. We didn't have a management group looking over our shoulder. We didn't have any expectations. It was kind of split between Hockey Canada and U.S. and they had their own thing going on. So they just let us go.

ANTON STRALMAN, Sweden defenseman: We had a really tough game against Russia in the first game. I can't remember if we had the day off. Then we played Finland, which was also a tight game. Then we played Team North America. We were pretty tired after those two. ... I remember stepping on that ice and this was definitely a pace quicker than the previous two games.

BOWMAN: It was like a blitzkrieg from the start. I remember that. We're fans at that point. It's like, 'Wow, this is such an entertaining game.' There was so much up and down. There really was no clogging it up or regrouping or slowing it down. It was just go go go.

GRONBORG: Right before the game, I went up to Johan Garpenlov, who was my assistant coach. ... We talked about it, 'Should we do something against the McDavid line?' We felt so strongly, with our core of players and our experience that if we can just win the first faceoff and play a puck possession game and let them chase us a little bit and let the game go our way from there on (we'd be fine). Obviously we had to change that coaching, five or six minutes into the game. They came out absolutely flying on us.

MCLELLAN: The tone we set in the first three or four minutes of the game was the tone we followed the rest of the night. Sometimes you come out with a lot of energy and piss and vinegar, and then you settle in. We played hard and played hard and played hard.

CONNOR MCDAVID, Team North America forward: I just remember like the first shift, for me, we got the puck back and A-Mats and I went up the ice and we scored and we were like, 'No Way.'

BOWMAN: I heard from somebody, I don't want to misquote them because I don't know who it was, one of the Swedish players, maybe one of the Sedins. Just like, a minute into that game, there were a couple breakaways. It was a crazy start. I remember them saying, 'Wow, we didn't know what the hell was going on. These guys were just flying around.' I heard through one of my players, what was being said on that Swedish team, like 'Holy shit. Who are these guys?'

DAVE TIPPETT, Team North America assistant coach: "When you have a player like Connor, and we had a lot of other great fast players too, he's just at another level where he just sets the pace. I think it just draws everybody along. He's such a nice kid, quiet, respectful kid. The ability for him to just get up and down, the explosiveness for him, it just helps everybody.

VICTOR HEDMAN, Team Sweden defenseman: It was obviously an eye-opener. If I remember correctly, they scored on the first shift. I think Matthews was on his knees and I had the puck and all of a sudden, it was not on my stick anymore and he had it. It was tic-tac-toe go. After that first shift, it was like 'Here we go.'

AUSTON MATTHEWS, Team North America forward: I remember everything. I was just trying to catch up to (McDavid). He went through everybody. He barely missed. I got the puck, was like on my knees, made a play. I saw (Morgan Rielly) wide open for a one-timer, the puck popped right out to me. That was unbelievable. The rink was going crazy. We had so much support from all the fans and everything. It was crazy. The rink was just like an earthquake.

VINCENT TROCHECK, Team North America center: First goal, Matthews scored quickly and it was just like, 'Alright, we're in this. We can do it.'

MCDAVID: I got the puck in the neutral zone and went down and got a shot off and I remember A-Mats making his play and he went through the seam, the rebound and the next thing you know it's in. It was 30 seconds into the game. You couldn't have drew up a better way to start the game.

Team North America kept rolling. With less than a minute off the clock, Johnny Gaudreau had a penalty shot but Henrik Lundqvist stood tall and Gaudreau missed the net. But the kids would keep on charging.

JACK EICHEL: I think Johnny had a penalty shot in the first period. You get lost. So many things happened.

HENRIK LUNDQVIST, Team Sweden goalie (to The Athletic's Rick Carpinello): They had three breakaways and a penalty shot within three minutes of the game. They were going. They kind of showcased the new game. It's all about speed.

COLTON PARAYKO, Team North America defenseman: The (coaches) kind of emphasized the fact that our forwards are fast, we had a fast group of forwards. If us D-men were able to get (the puck) in their hands, it would be really dangerous.

HEDMAN: It was like the new generation coming into the league. They're so fast but at the same time the puck goes just as quick and they have great technique and good hand-eye coordination. It's not like they're flying around doing nothing, they have unbelievable skill set and their puck management is phenomenal. It was definitely an eye-opener. To watch them on tape is a different thing than playing against them.

GRONBORG: At 1:30, (Vincent Trocheck) scored to make it 2-0. You can call the timeout, but with the rules today you can't just call the timeout because you could lose a challenge at the end of the game. It was one of those things, survive until the commercial break.



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TROCHECK: That was the first game I was playing with (Jack Eichel) ... It was a battle on the wall. Eichel had the puck and he was shielding a little bit, I was just behind him for support. He threw it to me, I threw it to Ghost (Shayne Gostisbehere) and I found a soft area in the middle of the ice. Ghost made a fake shot, fooled everyone including me. The puck just so happened to land on my stick. I had to make a move on Lundqvist and backhand in the net.

HEDMAN: Everyone looked at one another and was like, 'You know, we've got to pick this up before it gets out of hand.' They had a breakaway, a penalty shot and they scored another goal. We had to calm down a little bit and have a little bit better puck management. Don't feed into their transition. Make them go the full 200 feet. We did a better job as that went on.

GRONBORG: We did some changes when we were matching lines, we had to do something about the McDavid line, the first two shifts they had was 2-3 goal scoring opportunities and the goal. We put the (Marcus) Kruger, (Jakob) Silfverberg and (Carl) Hagelin on them and they did a great job. They put a wet blanket on them.

TROCHECK: We were a little nervous. A lot of young guys, we wanted to make sure we weren't doing anything to cost us a goal at that point, being up two. Obviously they scored a couple late that tightened us up a little bit but we were pretty aware of how good a team we had and that we were capable of winning.

HEDMAN: That first goal settled us down a little bit and focused more on our gameplay. It's tough to keep up the pace they had in the first period for 60 minutes. We knew we had to refocus and get better as the game went on. I think that was the game in a nutshell. We took over a little bit but they obviously had their chances. Good thing we had Hank back there stopping a lot of pucks.

Filip Forsberg opened the scoring for Team Sweden, who got another goal from Nicklas Backstrom near the end of the first period to cut the lead to 3-2. Johnny Gaudreau made up for his missed penalty shot with his second goal of the tournament, continuing a strong tournament for the young American winger.

GRONBORG: Gaudreau was probably the best player on the ice that game.

TROCHECK: He's different. You'll get one of him in an era, basically. He's a completely different player than the normal star you see in the league. He's obviously quick, he has a phenomenal set of hands. He's a little guy who is extremely shifty. He has his own way of making do with what he's got.

NATHAN MACKINNON, Team North America forward: I was playing with Johnny Hockey and (Ryan) Nugent-Hopkins and we were awesome together. I'd love to play with Johnny Hockey on a line. He's amazing.

TIPPETT: Johnny was really good the whole tournament. He was a sleeper. All the other guys were getting the attention. Johnny was just dynamic in games. He'd control games. The other teams would focus so much on McDavid and Johnny would get lost in the shuffle and he'd play against the lower end, then bottom end players, and he would just control games.

GRONBORG: I was upset about the start of the game. I thought it was a great job from our standpoint coming back into the game. It could have been a heck of a lot worse. The Backstrom goal ... that was a huge goal for us. I felt OK after that period. The first 5-6 minutes, they were all over us. At the same time, we bounced back well.

HEDMAN: We had a team with experience that hadn't seen a team like that but had been through stuff before and knew what to expect going into the second period. We were happy we scored, relieved we scored a goal to be down just one going into the second period. Momentum swings are huge in hockey.

TIPPETT: The game kind of settled in. We had to kill a penalty and it kind of slowed the game down a little bit. There was a little bit of a lull there. It just seemed like there were spikes in that game, whether it was a great play, a goal or a great save that kept you on the edge of your seat all the time.

STRALMAN: I think we finally settled in a little bit after that first period. I can't remember if we did do some adjustments, but we found our legs a little bit and that helps.

MCLELLAN: I can remember the feeling was like, 'Wow. This thing is moving. We've got to regroup, we've got to fill our tanks between periods and put our foot back on the gas.' Their team was so talented, if we took our foot off the gas pedal we would have been in trouble.

With 13:10 remaining in the game, Erik Karlsson fired a shot on Team North America goalie John Gibson that was tipped by Sweden forward Patrik Berglund to tie the game 3-3. Sweden just needed to get to overtime to earn a spot in the next round. Team North America needed a regulation win for the automatic berth. As well as the kids were playing, Karlsson wasn't going to make it easy.

GRONBORG: It was a great play on Karlsson, shooting in the right area and Berglund — it's tough to defend against that. He tipped it in, it was a great play.

HEDMAN: Erik is one of the best in the world when he has the puck on his stick. When he gets the puck, as a forward, you just have to get open. He's so good at reading where the traffic is and where his teammates are. For him to get that puck through and Bergy made a great tip. That was a big goal for us. When you give the puck to Erik Karlsson, good things are going to happen.

GRONBORG: The more the game went on the more we wanted to play him. Going into the third period, he played every other shift and played quite a bit, it meant a lot to him. I think going into the third period, he felt a huge responsibility for the success of the team.

HEDMAN: That's the kind of player he is. I've known Erik for such a long time. He's the same guy he was 12-13 years ago. Just the way he plays the game, he's very vocal on the bench. He's very demanding. He wants to win, that's the bottom line. Being such close friends to him, he's always been that way, always been vocal.

MCLELLAN: It's a coach's dream and a coach's nightmare to be in those tournaments. You love working with your own team, you feel like you have so much talent. Then you look at the other team's lineup and you're going 'Holy shit, this group is pretty damn good.' You look down, you see Karlsson, you see Hedman, you see Sedins — it was never ending talent, it was veteran talent. That group knew how to win, they knew how to play, they had won Olympic medals, they had won World Championships. They were talented and they were all together at the same time. Karlsson was a big factor in it. Lundqvist was a big factor. The Sedins were huge factors.

GRONBORG: One thing that really surprised me about Team North America is they didn't come out harder on us after we tied it up. There was still 12-13 minutes left in the game, we expected them to come really, really hard. Now they needed a goal, we didn't. That never really happened in regulation time.

MCLELLAN: As it got close, in the third period, tie game, we started to thread it throughout the bench, we likely needed to win in regulation. We played that way.

TIPPETT: I remember the whole staff on the bench — 'We've got to go, we've got to go. We need it in regulation.' The last 5 or 6 minutes, we were playing to win. I was running the D. 'Go. Go. Go. Get up there.' Most of them you didn't have to tell them. There were a couple of them that were a little more defensive-minded. But between Gostisbehere and Rielly, they had no issues going.



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TROCHECK: Our impression was that we just had to win, it wasn't that we had to win in regulation. We're just thinking, if it goes to overtime, it goes to overtime. We just have to win that.

GRONBORG: We expected them maybe to pull the goalie at the end. They never did. We were preparing our guys and setting up our lines, 'Hey, they might potentially pull the goalie. We have to be ready.' They never did.

COOPER: You know why you couldn't pull the goalie? Then if we lost, you had no chance to get in. You can't give up your chance.

MCLELLAN: There was a lot made after that game about, 'Hey, did the coaches tell the players this or that?' We didn't walk into our pregame meeting and say, 'We've got to win in regulation.' That wasn't what we needed. We needed to play well, we needed to put our foot on the gas. That's all we talked about.

GRONBORG: We were cheering after the regulation time, the buzzer went. We were pretty excited about it.

The game went into overtime. And then overdrive. By getting to overtime, Sweden had advanced to the next round but Team North America could still advance with an overtime win and some help from Finland in their game the next day against Russia. It set up an overtime for the ages.

TROCHECK: Overtime was incredible. I was just a fan.

MCLELLAN: I remember the tension, the excitement. The belief system on our team was so strong, we thought we could win with that type of situation with our speed and skill. Puck drops, I think we maintained possession for a little while.

WOODCROFT: It was unbelievable chances. Fantastic goaltending. Instinctual hockey. And man, it was beyond exciting.

MURRAY: I was on the bench for that whole overtime. I didn't step on the ice, it was back and forth, back and forth. We're all sitting on the bench and we're like, 'What's going to happen here? Something has to go in.'

STRALMAN: I think we were just happy to know we were through to the semifinals at that point. We survived that game, somehow we managed. I don't know if we deserved to take that game to overtime. We did what we needed, at that point it didn't matter anymore if we won or not.

MARK SCHEIFELE, Team North America center: "I actually made a cross-crease pass to McDavid in overtime and he missed it – he actually got robbed by Henrik. I'm still mad at Connor for missing that one.

MCLELLAN: Scheifele sets up Connor. Lundqvist makes an unreal save on a real short 2-on-1 out of the corner. I remember the emotions on the bench, everybody was halfway out of their seat. Lundqvist makes the save, now it goes back the other way.

LUNDQVIST: Overtime, there were chances both ways.

MCDavid: I remember that overtime, we had 10 chances, they had 10 chances. It was 'next shot wins' type thing. The goalies were good, the defense was good, the forwards were great.

GRONBORG: Daniel, Henrik and Karlsson started out really well. We had a scoring opportunity right away on the first shift. It went back and forth a few times. But right before they scored the game clincher, I think we had one breakaway, Daniel had a breakaway. Right before that we had a 2-on-1 more or less with an open net as well.

MCLELLAN: The first true scoring chance, I think it was a 2-on-1 by the Sedins, cross-crease pass that just got deflected wide. We pick it up, we go the other way. Now it's going back and forth. You're trying to get fresh guys on the ice. You're looking down at the menu of players you have and almost everybody deserves a chance to be

out there, they're that talented. MacKinnon was having an unreal game. Eichel went. McDavid went. Scheifele.

HEDMAN: I wish I was on the ice, to be honest with you. I think I was going on right after they scored. You put Erik with Danny and Hank on the ice, you had MacKinnon. It was back and forth action. We could have scored, they could have scored. It was just insane.

EICHEL: I don't know if there was (a whistle). There was a couple chances on the first shift, a couple chances on the second. I just remember back and forth action.

TROCHECK: It was every two seconds, you saw something and you're like 'Oh my God, what just happened?' The last shift of the game was the most ridiculous minute and a half I've ever seen out of three players.

MACKINNON: I made some bad plays to start. We got lucky. I think they had a couple breakaways themselves.

MCLELLAN: They were well on their way to another 3-on-1. (Gaudreau) knocked the puck away from a Swedish player and tapped it down to MacKinnon.

SETH JONES, Team North America defenseman: They turned it over and Johnny Hockey passed it to MacKinnon. And that move was something you can't forget. Toe drag and right under the bar. It wasn't really fair.

TIPPETT: Somehow Gaudreau keeps it in. What MacKinnon was doing standing back there, I have no idea what he was doing back there.

MACKINNON: I was so tired when, I guess I was standing. I don't know what I was doing really. I was standing by the net. I wasn't anticipating anything. Johnny made a great play to me.

PARAYKO: Unbelievable. That was crazy. I've never seen a move like that. It was insane.

STRALMAN: He made a pretty nice move there.

EICHEL: Nate gets the puck and dangles Lundqvist for a great goal.

LUNDQVIST: I remember I tried to poke check MacKinnon.

HEDMAN: Watching that from the bench was ridiculous. Just the speed and skill set. MacKinnon's goal was pretty dirty.

BOWMAN: He had unbelievable quick hands. He had four dekes and then he put the puck in the net. It was like, holy cow. He really impressed me in that tournament. I knew he was good, I didn't know he was that good.

WOODCROFT: That has to be one of the best sequences in the last 30 years.

MACKINNON: I wasn't planning on doing that move. I started stick handling and it kind of happened that way. ... I wanted to go backhand but then he poke-checked so I had to toe drag. It looked cool for sure. One of my favorite goals. I definitely watched it a few times that night.

COOPER: We played this one game after practice all the time, part of it was you had to be in tight with the goalie and it was kind of a rebound game type deal and that's what he does. He just has those quick hands, but to watch him do it (at practice) and do it against Lundqvist. It was sick.

MACKINNON: I remember I saw (Lundqvist) drug testing after the game. He was pissed he poke checked, 'I should have been patient.' I was like, 'OK.'

PARAYKO: First off, it was an unreal move and second off, we all thought we were moving on.



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MATTHEWS: We didn't really know until after. We celebrated so hard. Looking back on it now, who cares? It was still a great moment. That was an unreal play.

TROCHECK: We literally felt like we had won the Stanley Cup. That's how excited we were. We thought we were advancing. Obviously we weren't advancing but it was still a ton of fun while it happened.

HEDMAN: They started celebrating the way they did and we were like, 'Hmmm maybe we're not through?' But we were through and they weren't through. But at the same time, you won a game. You might as well celebrate. I don't think we cared too much about that. We were just happy we went through.

MCDavid: I definitely knew we were not totally through. There were some guys who thought we were 100 percent in. Ultimately, it didn't really matter, if you're a coach you're not going to sit down and say, 'We need to win in regulation.' It didn't matter. We just needed to win. We found a way to get a win and give ourselves a chance. Ultimately it didn't work out.

MURRAY: I remember we won the game and I think it was right after in the dressing room, we realized that (we didn't advance). It was a heck of a hockey game.

MCLELLAN: It was real emotional. We got into the room and everyone was happy, excited. They were what they're supposed to be after a big win like that. I didn't break it to them but the word got out that, 'Hey, we needed a win from Finland.' We were OK with that, it was out of our control. We did everything we could.

TROCHECK: We were at such a high. We were acting like we won the Stanley Cup. To have a chance to play against Canada and prove what we had. Then they came in and said that, and I was like, this could be it.

SCHEIFELE: We wanted to play against Canada. We would have been so excited if we'd had the chance. Obviously, it sucked that we never got to, but I'm sure that would have been a game people would have talked about for years to come."

JONES: I wanted to play Canada, to be honest. Just to see.

BOWMAN: In one game we could have beaten them, for sure. ... That's not putting Canada down. We had a ton of talent. We could score goals. That's the hard part about those tournaments, it's a one-shot deal. If we would have played a five-game series against Canada, they would have beat us. For one game? I think we could have.

TIPPETT: I still say it would have been nice to play one game against Canada to see how it would have went. You go to your grave wishing you had that game.

The following day, Team Russia beat Finland to advance to the semifinals and eliminate Team North America from the tournament. The dream of playing Canada was gone. Only the what-ifs remained. Canada would go on to win the World Cup.

EICHEL: It was great for our league, but just personally, it was so cool to just play with a lot of those guys and get to know them. I started relationships and friendships from that team that I have really good relationships with now. I didn't know Nate at all when I started and then we became really close from that tournament. There are a lot of guys similar like that. I talk to Shiefs a lot and I met him through that team. You meet a lot of guys through that team and that experience opens a lot of doors for you.

TROCHECK: I still talk to all those guys, as much as I can. When we play them in their cities we try to hook up as much as possible. It was like we knew each other for a long time, when we started getting together. At the rink, obviously it was a fun team to play with. Away from the rink, we had 30 days of festival. It was pretty awesome.

PARAYKO: I got one of our team jerseys. I've got a team signed stick. That's pretty impressive with all those names on there.

COOPER: That was the one thing. That was probably the best team, when I look back now, that will (be) the best team I was ever on the bench for. When you look at the talent assembled, what team is going to have Schiefele, McDavid, Matthews — just go down the list of the guys who were on that team.

MCLELLAN: It created a bond amongst the group. I think that bond will be there a long time simply because these players are the league's stars. They're leading the league in scoring. There's no disrespect to the other players that were playing on the other teams. These young kids are beginning to take over and they should.

MATTHEWS: That whole tournament was just a blast. To play with players like that. I hadn't even played a game in the NHL. To be in that setting, it was definitely pretty nerve-wracking. To be able to perform the way I did, and have as much fun as I did, it was pretty awesome.

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The Athletic / One billet, one dream: How Juuso Valimaki and Michael Rasmussen's life-long friendship blossomed

By Scott Cruickshank

Oct 10, 2018

Tenants, under his care, made more than 1,700 appearances in the WHL.

Meaning Jon Peschong — as a billet dad for nearly 20 years on behalf of the Tri-City Americans — discovered a few things about the preferences of puck-chasing teenagers.

For instance?

"Frankly, I've learned players from Saskatchewan ate a little bit differently than the ones from British Columbia from the ones from Alberta," Peschong said. "So you learn to cook a variety of things."

He stopped for a hearty laugh.

"But those prairies boys, they all like bread," Peschong continued. "They love French toast and pancakes and waffles."

Given regional tastes, what was the common ground for Juuso Valimaki, a kid from Finland, and a Vancouverite named Michael Rasmussen?

"A piece of fish of some sort, right? Makes perfect sense," Peschong said. "I'd stop off at the fish store on the way home from work and pick up the freshest-looking thing."

He paused to ponder the fare of a typical spread: "Tonight, I'd probably be coming home with halibut. Then preparing some sort of acorn squash or some spaghetti squash. And a nice salad. Maybe some rice.

"And not too much Hamburger Helper — none of that."

Last season's lodgers, impeccably fuelled and exquisitely talented, are carving out one remarkable journey these days. Straight from the WHL, Valimaki has caught on with the Calgary Flames, while



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Rasmussen earned a spot on the Detroit Red Wings' opening-day roster.

Quite the feat.

Because of that stunning success, it's amazing that there's not a lineup of juniors on the doorstep of Peschong's spacious digs on Highlands Boulevard, in the shadow of Candy Mountain in West Richland, Wash., all hoping to cash in on the landlord's golden touch.

But, in a billet dad's version of hitting a homer in your final at-bat, he is hanging up his apron after propelling the precocious pair to the promised land.

Chuckling, he downplayed his role. But he truly relishes the storyline.

"Oh, it's fantastic," Peschong said. "For sure, it's great whenever you're associated with young people and they realize their dreams. It's a big step for both of them, right? Not a lot of players make that step from the WHL to the NHL.

"And to have two of them that have been friends for a long time in one house be able to do that? It's once in a lifetime.

"I know how rare that is. It's special, right?"

Valimaki realizes that. Rasmussen, too.

Thrown together as billet-mates three years ago, the lively blueliner and the mammoth centreman became the closest of pals. Now, even as their hockey fortunes have carried them to opposite sides of continent, they keep daily tabs on each other's progress, offering bursts of encouragement.

When Valimaki made his debut last week at Vancouver, Rasmussen reached out with good luck messages.

"He texted me before the game and told me he's really proud of me," Valimaki said. "He said we've come a long way from the first year together. Now we're both here (in the NHL), what we've talked about for a long time."

The day of the Red Wings' season-opener, Valimaki returned the favour, sending a batch of pep texts in Rasmussen's direction.

In other words, despite two time zones and 3,000 kilometres separating them, despite new addresses – Valimaki is stationed in the Flames' dressing room between goalies Mike Smith and David Rittich, while Rasmussen perches between Frans Nielsen and Anthony Mantha at Red Wings headquarters – they remain close.

Rasmussen is fully abreast of Valimaki's accomplishment of barging his way onto Calgary's blueline as a newcomer.

"Yeah, it was unreal," he told The Athletic's Max Bultman in Detroit. "He had a lot of competition. It's pretty cool to see him there. It was a tough situation for him. He really battled hard, played really good hockey.

"We've been in touch the whole time, we text a lot, FaceTime a lot, play Xbox and stuff like that together. He's pretty excited. He's one of those kids that just loves hockey, loves working hard and loves the game. Pretty unreal to see."

Unreal, sure.

But talk to the hockey folks who know Valimaki best, the ones who monitored his 161 appearances and refined his game for the Americans, and there is little shock over the development.

"A very focused and driven kid," Tri-City associate coach Brian Pellerin said. "Obviously, an elite player at the junior level and I think he'll be a very good player, eventually, in the NHL. So I'm not surprised that he's worked himself into the starting lineup."

After the Americans grabbed the Finn 14th overall in the 2015 CHL import draft – the Madison (Wis.) Capitals had taken a sixth-round

flyer on him in the USHL's entry draft – Tri-City head coach Mike Williamson was introduced to the boy, then only 16 years old.

"I was really impressed with his maturity," Williamson said. "He seemed pretty humble. We knew he was a top player and he was going to impact our team. He had a chance to be a prime-time player in our league. He had his head on his shoulders ... you could tell right away he was very focused.

"When we saw him on the ice for the first time in training camp, we knew right then it wasn't going to take him long to adjust. He skated well. Good agility, good mobility. He had poise and calmness. Good habits. Good stick. And he really, really slowed things down on the ice. Didn't panic at all."

Away from the Toyota Center, however, he felt unsettled. Living in another country, nowhere near his family, his English decent but choppy, Valimaki wanted to find his comfort zone.

When a fellow freshman – a Canadian behemoth who had been the seventh pick in the 2014 WHL bantam draft – moved into Valimaki's billet home, there was a fit.

"He helped me a lot at the start, getting used to everything, off-ice stuff," Valimaki said of Rasmussen. "I always had a close friend walking by my side and helping things out."

However, there was little Rasmussen could do once the puck was dropped. Integration into the North American brand of hockey was something the defender needed to figure out himself.

Opening night is one game that Valimaki remembers well. He was in the starting lineup against the Spokane Chiefs.

"First shift – a guy, three or four years older, asked me to fight two seconds into the game," he said, with a laugh. "He told me, 'Let's go.' I didn't speak very good English then and I didn't want to chirp – or even knew how to do it – so I just laughed in his face and skated away.

"But I was kind of like, 'What's going on? What the heck?'"

He didn't freak out or shy away, though – nor did he gripe about the meanie to his coaches, who don't even recall the specifics of the confrontation. Not that they doubt his version of events.

"He had a target on his back, for sure," Pellerin said. "European kids get tested right away. Guys will go after them a little bit. But he's a confident kid. I think he knew he was a good player and he'd be all right."

Valimaki, acclimated, and Rasmussen motored through their rookie campaigns, putting themselves on the Central Scouting radar for the following winter. (Their draft year, they lived with Valimaki's mom, Mia, who'd relocated temporarily to the Tri-City area.) Mid-term rankings slotted Rasmussen sixth; Valimaki ninth.

The blue-chippers were inseparable. NHL scouts even talked to them at the same time. And in-game, they gave the Americans a formidable attack.

"Every time we were on the ice, something was happening, I honestly feel that," Valimaki said, smiling. "I don't even know how many power-play goals we scored together, especially the last two years. I used to shoot the puck and he used to tip it in – just like that. In our draft year, he probably got 10 or 15 goals like that. And five-on-five, every time we were out there we knew where we were going to be.

"Obviously, we were pretty good players in the league ... so it was pretty easy to play with him."

Numbers bear out that 2016-17 success – 61 points in 60 games for Valimaki, 55 in 50 for Rasmussen – which led the Red Wings to draft the pivot ninth overall, while the Flames corralled the rearguard at No. 16.



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Closer, suddenly, was the NHL.

To their credit, these youngsters were no strangers to pro-hockey demands. Proper preparation and nutrition meant something to Valimaki and Rasmussen. Even rest, they took seriously.

"They are very similar ... two kids that were really in the same mindset," Pellerin said. "They were like seasoned pros. A lot of guys when go through their (pro) careers, it takes them a few years to figure out, 'Hey, I've got to start taking care of my body.' They were definitely ahead of the curve."

Peschong, billet dad for the duo's third year in Tri-City, vouched for that devotion, insisting there were no blown curfews, no nonsense. He recalled some of his former boarders making a habit of arriving 10 minutes late – every single night. But these lads? Always back early – that is, if they went out at all.

"Unfailingly strait-laced," Peschong said. "Not once, to my knowledge, was the wrong choice made. They were home and happy to be home."

Valimaki noted that this hockey-first approach was entrenched well before he left his home town of Nokia. Getting it into his head that a career overseas was within reach, he took control.

"I've heard from a (Finnish) national-team coach that I was the first 15-year-old kid who said it out loud, 'The NHL is my goal,'" Valimaki said. "It was my goal. It has been my goal. I've always tried to work for it. It was always in the back of my mind."

"Every time you step on the ice you do the right things. Every time you go off the ice ... life is full of decisions. You can go out and have a couple beers and do whatever, like a regular teenager. That might not be good for you, (so) you can do something else and be a professional athlete."

Committed, Valimaki expected the transition into The Show to take place a full year ago. At Flames camp, though, it had been clear – and not unexpected – that he was short of polish.

Back to Tri-City he trudged.

"He was really disappointed because his whole mindset was that he was going to play in the NHL as an 18-year-old," Pellerin said. "That (kind of belief) sets those elite guys apart, for sure."

This fall, neither Valimaki nor Rasmussen was going to be denied.

The Finn has shown his employers that he's a contributor – even if, at times in rookie camp, he'd looked like he was determined to make the most plays, not necessarily the best plays. But once the NHL preseason began he settled down – still displaying plenty of dash, but exhibiting more patience.

In the process, he leapfrogged up the Flames' depth chart and found work on the third pairing.

"A lot of fun so far," Valimaki said. "As the (exhibition) games went on I realized I can play here – and not only play, I can actually play my game and do the things that I'm good at, make plays and keep up with the pace."

"Obviously, this is just the first step. Obviously, the competition is going to go up and the games are going to get harder, so the actual work is ahead. But same idea – I got better every day during the camp, so I'll just keep doing that."

He dressed for the season-opening home-and-home series against the Canucks. Wearing No. 8, he skated 10 minutes the first night. The second night he got 13 minutes – and turned 20 years old.

"I don't really know how to describe it. I don't think I've realized it yet," Valimaki said of his NHL baptism. "I've worked for this all my life. It feels amazing."

Rasmussen, meanwhile, is operating on the right side of Detroit's third unit with Nielsen and Tyler Bertuzzi.

"It's fun to see these young guys getting an opportunity ... that we were able, in a small way, to help a little bit," Pellerin said. "It's neat to see when kids are focused and they want to do it. To get to that level is a pretty amazing thing."

Valimaki – who, at six foot two and 210 pounds, is already built like a man – has the frame to survive the rigours of the NHL. And he may not be done growing. Worth noting: his father, Tommi, is six foot three and broadly built.

"He has huge muscles," Valimaki said, cracking up. "He hasn't been in the gym for 20 years, so it's kind of funny that he can actually be that big."

Physically girded – coaches always mention his powerfully built legs – Valimaki, like all inexperienced players, will still face hurdles.

"One thing – Juuso can be really hard on himself," Williamson said, who left the Americans in the offseason. "If he's having success and things are going well early, he's just going to continue to take off. But there's going to be a bump in the road ... and that'll (test) the mental side of the game. He'll have to learn to fight through that. It wasn't a problem at our level. But I know he takes a lot home from the rink with him."

"There's obviously a different (expectation) playing in the Saddledome, in front of the crowd, and seeing the articles and the pressure to win at that level. That's going to be something that's part of his evolution, I think."

Valimaki knows that support is nearby – in the form of his current roommate, Dillon Dube, another recent graduate of the junior ranks.

Rivals only months ago – Tri-City squared off in the WHL's first round against the Kelowna Rockets ("We actually had some beefs on the ice," Valimaki said, "but that's old stuff now.") – the lads have bonded.

"Now we're a lot closer," he said. "It's good to have someone basically in the same boat with me."

Which isn't to say that Valimaki has forgotten his former housemate. Online engagement – featuring, no surprise, Fortnite – is ongoing.

"I'm really happy for him," Valimaki said. "We always talked about playing in the NHL and now, for both of us, it's right here. It's really cool."

"Last year, both of us being drafted, we were trying to help each other, battling in practice, getting the best out of each other and (getting ready) for this next stage."

Peschong won't soon forget last winter, either – the meals, the appetites, the grocery bills. They ate well, they ate wisely and they ate loads.

"Oh, man. I can't tell you how much," Peschong said, with a good-natured groan. "But if you're cooking for them, there's no greater honour than to have them eat it all. It took a bit of adjusting to (learn) how much to cook, but ... after 16 years, you're able to read that pretty quickly. It was a great honour to put that food on the table."

And because they were respectful, because they were well behaved, the billets were treated like grownups by Peschong.

"He wasn't always on us," Valimaki said. "We had time to do our own stuff. Obviously, he cared what we were doing and where we were, but there was healthy room for us, too."

Non-negotiable, however, was suppertime's routine.

Every evening – in the dining room or at the kitchen bar or on the back patio – Peschong, Valimaki and Rasmussen sat down and



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broke bread. Between forkfuls of the catch of the day, the three would exchange updates and share stories.

"I can't describe how fantastic both of them are," Peschong said. "Focused. Dedicated. Unselfish. They are kind, considerate people. You know what? Whether it's the NHL or wherever, they're both going to succeed wherever life takes them. There's no doubt in my mind.

"It was a real privilege to spend time with them."

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Who's the best GM of all time? Just follow the trade chain

By Sean McIndoe

Oct 10, 2018

Who's the best general manager in the history of the NHL?

On the surface, that seems like the sort of question that we can't really answer. You'll have your opinion and I'll have mine, and we can have fun debating it back and forth. But ultimately, it's all a matter of opinion.

Or is it? When it comes to these sorts of questions, I've always been a big fan of stripping away emotion and hometown bias and going with a calculated, scientific approach. And there's an opportunity to do that here, because part of a GM's job involves occasionally going head-to-head with their colleagues. We can never read too much into a matchup between goalies or coaches or players, because the results will be determined by the rosters around them. But when GMs sit down to hammer out a trade, it's just them. Just two men, locked in a battle of wits to see who can get the best of the other.

That should give us an opportunity to answer the question of who was the best in an objective way. All we need to do is go back through the trading records and see who got the best of who. After all, you can't be the best GM ever if some other GM took you to the cleaners in a head-to-head matchup. We just need to work our way down the chain, looking for any trades that were clearly lopsided, and we'll eventually get to an answer we can all agree on. It's practically foolproof.

The only question is where to begin. That's tricky, but I think there's a logical answer: We start with the reigning GM of the Year. After all, if the league says a guy is the best in the business at this very moment, that seems like as good a place as any to start our search.

As it happens, the current GM of the Year is a legitimate contender for our Best Ever crown. That would be George McPhee, who won the 2018 award after working a near-miracle with the Golden Knights. He has nearly two decades of experience as an NHL GM, and he's taken two teams to the Stanley Cup final. If you're looking for someone to call the best, you could do a lot worse than McPhee.

Except that for all McPhee's success, he made one of the worst trades in recent history back in 2013, when he sent Filip Forsberg to the Predators for Martin Erat and a minor leaguer. It was a disastrous trade, as Forsberg quickly developed into one of the league's best young wingers while Erat barely did anything in Washington. The deal has been referred to as a "dumpster fire". And

who was the GM who robbed McPhee blind in that deal? That would be David Poile.

So McPhee clearly can't be the best GM ever. Instead, it's Poile. See how this works? Simple and straightforward.

Except that while Poile certainly won his fair share of trades over his 36 years on the job, his record isn't exactly spotless. Back in 1992, Poile was GM of the Capitals when he traded winger Dino Ciccarelli to the Red Wings in a straight-up deal for Kevin Miller. The 31-year-old Ciccarelli had scored over 100 goals in his three full seasons in Washington; he turned out to have over 160 more left in him, on the way to joining the 600-goal club and making the Hall of Fame. Miller lasted all of 10 games in Washington.

So sorry, David, you can't be the best GM of all-time when you get robbed like that. Instead, we'll hand those honors over to the man that fleeced you: Red Wings' GM Bryan Murray.

Murray's a solid pick; he was a GM for four different teams over the course of a quarter century. Unfortunately, he also had some shaky deals. Back in 2013, he traded Jakob Silfverberg, Stefan Noesen and a first-round pick to the Ducks in a deal for winger Bobby Ryan. That pick ended up being in the top 10, and the Ducks used it on Nick Ritchie. Meanwhile, Ryan has largely been a bust in Ottawa, and the team is currently trying to unload his massive contract. It was a clear loss for the Senators, and a win for Anaheim GM Bob "No Relation" Murray.

So Bryan can't be our best-ever GM. But maybe Bob can be.

Unfortunately, the best GM ever wouldn't have traded one of the top defensemen in the league without getting any impact assets back in return. That's what Murray did back in 2009, when Paul Holmgren got him to part with Chris Pronger for the low price of Joffrey Lupul, Lucas Sbisá and two late first-round picks. Pronger immediately led the Flyers to within two wins of a championship, making the deal a big win for GM Paul Holmgren.

So Murray isn't the best GM after all. Paul Holmgren is.

Except that he can't be, because he once traded James van Riemsdyk to the Maple Leafs in a straight-up deal for Luke Schenn. That was a bad deal on the day it went down, and has been getting worse ever since. Schenn was barely a useful third-pairing guy, while van Riemsdyk had multiple 30-goal seasons in Toronto and just got a ton of money to come back to the Flyers. Chalk up a big win for Leafs GM Brian Burke.

So Holmgren is out. The best GM ever was actually Brian Burke.

But while Burke was an aggressive trader who won more than he lost, he still missed on a few. That includes one of his most memorable deals, the 2009 swap that brought Phil Kessel to Toronto in exchange for a package of picks including two firsts. Kessel was very good in Toronto, but the picks turned into Tyler Seguin and Dougie Hamilton, exactly the sort of players the rebuilding Maple Leafs desperately needed. Instead, it was Boston GM Peter Chiarelli who got to reap the rewards, and both he and Seguin had their names on the Cup two years later.

So our scientific method tells us that Burke isn't the top GM of all-time. Peter Chiarelli is.

That will probably come as news to fans in Edmonton, many of whom want to see Chiarelli fired. So maybe we need to take a closer look. And of course, Chiarelli can't be our guy; the Taylor Hall trade alone sees to that. Chiarelli handed a future MVP to Ray Shero in return for a decent defenseman and nothing more. Nobody who does that can be anywhere near the "best GM" conversation.

So scratch Chiarelli off the list. Instead, Ray Shero moves to the top.

But that's the same Ray Shero who once traded two second-round picks for Douglas Murray, a deadline deal that Doug Wilson and the Sharks were happy to jump on even though they were still in a



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playoff race at the time. Even San Jose fans couldn't figure the deal out at the time, calling Murray "undoubtedly the team's worst blueliner," and all Shero got for his two valuable picks was a slow and short-term rental who left in the offseason.

You can't make that sort of deal and top our list. So Shero's out, and Doug Wilson is our guy.

But then again, Wilson wasn't exactly great when it came to dealing for veteran defensemen either. He once decided that he absolutely had to have a 30-something Craig Rivet, and so he gave Bob Gainey and the Canadiens a young Josh Gorges and a first-round pick. Gorges played seven solid years in Montreal, but it was the first rounder that turns this deal into a laugh – the Habs used the Sharks' pick on Max Pacioretty.

So Wilson is out. Bob Gainey is in.

Of course, Montreal fans know where this is going. Gainey made a terrible move in 2009, when he acquired Scott Gomez and his massive contract from the Rangers. The cap implications alone made the deal a mistake, and Gomez would get a buyout after only three seasons. But that wasn't the worst of it – somehow, Rangers' GM Glen Sather got Gainey to also cough up blueline prospect Ryan McDonagh in the deal. It all added up to one of the worst moves in the history of the franchise.

So Gainey can't be the best. Glen Sather is.

Sather's not a bad choice, actually, if only based on his five Stanley Cup rings with the Oilers dynasty. But then you remember some of the deals that dismantled that team, and you have second thoughts. In fairness, he often didn't have much choice – we can't even really count the Wayne Gretzky trade as a Sather deal since he was barely involved – but he still wound up on the losing end of some of those moves. For example, back in 1987 Sather was backed into a corner by Paul Coffey, and ended up sending the future Hall-of-Famer to Eddie Johnston and the Penguins for a middling package built around Craig Simpson. Simpson had one big year in Edmonton before seeing his production drop, while the move is often seen as the trade that started the Penguins down the road to a future dynasty.

So Sather's out of the running, and Eddie Johnston is our man.

But unfortunately for Johnston, that Coffey deal wasn't the best one he ever made for Pittsburgh. That trade came in 1991, when he was the GM of the Whalers and sent Ron Francis to GM Craig Patrick and the Penguins in what's widely considered one of the worst deadline deals ever.

So scratch Johnston off the list. Craig Patrick sits at the top of the heap.

Or does he? This is the same guy who once traded Mark Recchi to Jim Rutherford and the Hurricanes at the 2006 deadline. Recchi was a future Hall of Famer who helped Carolina win their first Stanley Cup. Sure, he re-signed with the Pens that summer, but by then Rutherford was shining his Cup ring, and none of the assets the Penguins got in the deal turned into anything meaningful.

So Patrick's out, and Jim Rutherford is the best there ever was.

Well, as long as you ignore the 1997 deal that saw Rutherford and the Whalers send Brendan Shanahan to Detroit. That was a tough one, since Shanahan wanted out, but all Rutherford could get back were a pair of unhappy headaches in Coffey and Keith Primeau. Meanwhile, longtime Detroit GM Jimmy Devellano (who was sharing the job with Scotty Bowman by then) had just added the final piece to a multi-Cup dynasty.

So Rutherford can't be our top pick. All hail the real king, Jim Devellano.

Then again, Devellano once traded a young Adam Oates to the Blues for one year of veteran Bernie Federko. That deal is

considered one of the worst in Red Wings history, and a clear win for Blues GM Ron Caron.

So Devellano isn't our guy after all. Instead, it's The Old Professor, Ron Caron.

It's tempting to leave things here, since Caron was a legend – just watching him react to the action from his suite was often more entertaining than the game itself. But this is about science, not emotion, so we have to acknowledge that Caron lost an Adam Oates trade of his own, when he shipped the playmaker to the Bruins in 1992. He got two decent players in Craig Janney and Stephane Quintal, but Oates went on to record one of the greatest offensive seasons of all-time the very next year, racking up 97 assists and 142 points in Boston. Advantage, Harry Sinden and the Bruins.

So Caron is off the board. Make way for the best of the best, Harry Sinden.

That feels like a reasonable choice, since Sinden held the job in Boston for nearly 30 years and set the NHL record for consecutive playoff appearances. But his trading record, impressive as it may be, was hardly perfect. We won't ding him for the Ray Bourque deal with the Avalanche, since that was more about finding the right home for a fan favorite than actually winning the trade. But Sinden had other moves that didn't work out. For example, he may be the only GM to ever lose a trade with Alex Delvecchio, when he sent soon-to-be point-a-game center Walt McKechnie and a draft pick to Detroit in 1975 for not much of anything.

So Sinden can't be our best GM ever. But then again, neither can Delvecchio, because he lost the league-mandated Marcel Dionne transaction to Jake Milford and the Kings. And it can't be Milford, who lost the Rick Vaive trade to Punch Imlach and the Leafs. And Imlach lost the Lanny McDonald trade to Ray Miron and the Rockies.

So the best GM in the history of the NHL is ... Ray Miron? That can't be right.

And it isn't right, because Miron's five years as GM of the Colorado Rockies included a disastrous 1976 trade that saw him acquire a pair of marginal youngsters in Ron Andruff and Sean Shanahan in exchange for a future first-round pick that would end up being the first overall choice. And if suckering a fellow GM into trading a future high pick sounds familiar, it should. We've finally worked our way down to the man that many experts would absolutely consider the best GM in league history: Montreal Canadiens legend Sam Pollock.

Trading for future draft picks was Pollock's trademark move. He got Miron with it, although the Habs eventually blew the pick by taking Doug Wickenheiser over Denis Savard. Years earlier, Pollock also pulled it off against teams like the Kings and Golden Seals, using those future picks on guys like Guy Lafleur, Steve Shutt and Larry Robinson. By the end of the '70s, Pollock had built a dynasty that would win four straight Cups and is often mentioned among the greatest teams ever.

So we've done it. Our scientific method has wound its way down through the history books, and it's settled on the right answer. Sam Pollock is, without question, the greatest general manager in NHL history.

Except...

I mean, look, I want this to end with Sam Pollock wearing the crown as much as you do. But this is a scientific endeavor, and we have to follow it wherever it goes. And in this case, the facts are as undeniable. In 1972, Pollock had an accomplished 24-year-old college goaltender in his system. Rather than find a spot for him backing up Ken Dryden, Pollock traded the kid to the expansion Islanders for cash and a draft pick. The pick ended up being Glenn Goldup, who played all of 18 games in Montreal, recording just one point. The goalie was Glenn "Chico" Resch, who'd go on to a 14-year career, was a two-time all-star, won a Masterton, and helped



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the Islanders go from expansion jokes to the team that would eventually supplant Pollock's Canadiens as the league's reigning dynasty. A loss is a loss, and Pollock took one here pretty decisively. And the man who gave it to him was rookie GM Bill Torrey.

So as stunning as it may be, Sam Pollock turns out not to be the greatest GM ever after all. Bill Torrey was.

Torrey's also a pretty great choice; he won four Cups and held the Islanders' job for 20 years before moving on to help build the expansion Panthers. Unfortunately, he also once traded Pat LaFontaine to the Sabres for Pierre Turgeon. The deal wasn't a disaster, since Turgeon was pretty good, and we have to acknowledge the minor detail that LaFontaine had sworn that he'd never play for the Islanders again. Still, the team that gets the best player wins the deal, and only one guy in that trade is in the Hall of Fame. That means Sabres' GM Gerry Meehan gets the win.

So Torrey's not our winner either. Gerry Meehan is.

Admittedly, Meehan seems like a step back from immortals like Pollock and Torrey. But he did a solid job over the years in Buffalo, including pulling off the franchise-defining Dominik Hasek deal. But a year after that heist, he overpaid Cliff Fletcher when he sent Dave Andreychuk, Darren Puppa and a first to Toronto for veteran Grant Fuhr. Fuhr got hurt in the playoffs and only lasted that one partial season as the starter in Buffalo before Hasek took over, while Andreychuk posted back-to-back 50-goal seasons in Toronto.

So Meehan isn't our guy. Instead, the honor goes to Cliff Fletcher.

Well, it does until you remember that Fletcher once swung the "draft schmaft" deal with the Islanders that saw him give up Kenny Jonsson and a first-round pick that became the fourth overall choice, all to bring Wendel Clark back to Toronto. I love Clark as much as anyone – OK, more than anyone – but the pick turned into future Hall-of-Famer Roberto Luongo. So we have to give the Islanders' GM credit for a win here.

So Fletcher is out, and the new reigning champ is ... oh god ... Mike Milbury? Something has gone horribly wrong here.

Luckily, it's not all that hard to find a deal that moves the needle away from Milbury. We could use the Alexei Yashin trade, or the one that sent Luongo to the Panthers, or the Trevor Linden deal with the Canucks, or pretty much any other move he ever made. But let's keep it simple and use another Leafs/Islanders swap – the one that sent recent first overall pick and Calder winner Bryan Berard to Toronto in exchange for Felix Potvin. Berard never lived up to expectations due to a serious eye injury, but Potvin only won seven games for the Islanders before moving on. Even knowing how Berard's career turned out, the trade was still a win for Leafs' GM Pat Quinn.

So thankfully, Milbury is out. Pat Quinn now tops the leaderboard.

But Quinn can't be the best GM ever, because he once traded for Aki Berg, handing the second-round pick that turned into Mike Cammalleri over to Dave Taylor and the Kings. And Taylor lost the Rob Blake trade to Pierre Lacroix and the Avalanche. And Lacroix lost the Chris Drury deal to Craig Button and the Flames. And Button once gave Marc Savard away for basically nothing to Don Waddell and the Thrashers. And Waddell came out on the wrong end of the Ilya Kovalchuk trade with Lou Lamoriello and the Devils.

So ... that leaves us with Lamoriello holding our title belt. And that seems like a decent place to stop. Thirty years in the business, three Cup rings, and more than a few one-sided trade heists. It took us a while, but I think we can all live with Lamoriello as the best of the best. The scientific method worked. Trust the process.

Unless...

I mean, Lamoriello was great in New Jersey and did a reasonably good job in Toronto, but the whole Islanders thing is off to a rocky

start, right? It's only been a few months, but he's already generated headlines like "The Islanders seem intent on finishing at or near the bottom next season" or "What is Lou Lamoriello trying to do, exactly?" He lost John Tavares, made some weird signings, and then went out and traded for Matt Martin. Martin is an honest player, but he's a fourth-liner with two years left on a deal that carries a \$2.5 million cap hit, and Toronto seemed more than happy to give him away for next to nothing. Even without getting anything in return, the Leafs won that deal.

Which means Lamoriello is out, and our new leading candidate is Kyle Dubas.

But if we've learned anything by now, it's that we have to dig deeper. And when you look at the rest of the deals Dubas has made over the course of his career as an NHL GM, you realize that...

Wait.

Wait a second.

Kyle Dubas has never made any other trades involving NHL players. He swapped some picks around at the draft, and sent an unsigned college player to the Oilers. But as far as NHL trades, so far it's been Matt Martin and that's it.

Do you realize what this means?

The chain ends here. The torch has been passed down the line, from reigning GM of the Year George McPhee on to David Poile to Glen Sather to Jimmy Devellano to Harry Sinden to Sam Pollock to Bill Torre to Cliff Fletcher to Lou Lamoriello (and also Mike Milbury but we will never speak of that again), and it wound up in the hands of Dubas. And since he's never lost an NHL trade in his entire life, it's his to keep.

The debate has been laid to rest, once and for all, by our completely objective and bias-free system. You can't argue with science. Kyle Dubas is the best general manager in the history of the NHL.

Just as long as he never makes another trade ever again.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.11.2018

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The Athletic / Sizing up the NHL: 2018-19 NHL teams by age, height and weight

By James Mirtle

Oct 10, 2018

We're back.

Six hundred and twenty-seven players appeared in NHL action as of Monday's games, giving us more than enough sample size to dig into and look at how teams stack up by various basic demographic figures.

For reference, this is the same post from last season here.

Credit to Natural Stat Trick for the data.

NHL average age this season (as of today): 27.1

Gone are the days when NHL teams could have an average age over 30 and be competitive. The league's average age has come down in recent years but seems to have settled around 27.



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Edmonton makes another appearance as the league's youngest team, largely thanks to the fact they have just three players over the age of 27. Vegas, meanwhile, surprisingly went from one of the league's youngest teams to one of its oldest in the off-season, thanks in part due to the additions of Stastny, Nick Holden and Pacioretty.

I included goalies this year, so that affects teams like Ottawa, the Rangers, Vegas and Florida a little.

Let's do size.

NHL average height this season: 73.2 inches (6 feet, 1.2 inches)

Seven of the eight tallest teams in the NHL are in the West this year. Maybe that means something. Maybe it doesn't.

I used the picture of DeBrincat and Dominik Kahun at the top as both are listed under 6 feet, and Chicago is really small this year. A full 10 per cent of skaters in the NHL now are 5-foot-10 or under, with 26 listed at 5-foot-9 or less. Ten of those 26 weren't drafted and another five were taken in rounds six and seven.

By comparison, just 25 skaters leaguewide are 6-foot-5 or taller. The vast majority of those (17) were drafted in the first round.

Other than in goal, this league is becoming more of a small man's league than it has in probably 40-plus years.

NHL average weight this season: 199.3 lbs

I know that the Habs have been called The Smurfs for a while, but I'm betting they've never had an average weight of under 190 pounds. (This includes Carey Price, too. But not Shea Weber, who's out with injury.)

Ten of Montreal's 18 skaters are listed at 185 pounds or less, including Paul Byron at 162, Noah Juulsen at 175 and Matthew Peca at 178.

Often what we see in the NHL is the younger teams are the smaller teams. There's an obvious correlation there.

Overall, the NHL's average weight dips under 200 pounds. I believe that's the first time that's happened in about 20 years. You go back as recently as 2005-06, the year after the lockout and the end of the Dead Puck Era, and the average NHLer was more than 206 pounds.

Some of the biggest shifts in this department have been on defence. I wrote about really small defencemen like Samuel Girard and Joey Hicketts last season, and they have even more company this year. Fourteen per cent of the D that have played in a game this season have been listed at 185 pounds or less, including nine defencemen who are 177 pounds or less.

Extremely few of the small D were first-round picks, although that is changing. Chicago rookie Henri Jokiharju is a good recent example from the 2017 draft.

Speaking of the draft...

NHL average draft position: 58th

Again, this is just kind of a fun one I threw in there. I left out any players who were undrafted, so that might skew things a little.

(The Blackhawks lead the league with six undrafted players in the lineup: Brandon Manning, Chris Kunitz, David Kampf, Jan Rutta, Kahun and Andreas Martinsen.)

Buffalo is pretty incredible if you think about it. The Sabres have seven top eight picks in their lineup right now: Dahlin, Eichel, Reinhart, Skinner, Okposo, Mittelstadt and Ristolainen. Only Edmonton matches that. (Toronto has six with the addition of John Tavares this year.)

Couple more new charts to close this post out.

Canada is down to less than 44 per cent of NHL players, a number that has been falling ever since the European invasion started in earnest in the early 1990s. (Goaltenders are under 40 per cent Canadian, as the result of trends like this.)

No country has made bigger gains than the U.S. over the past 20 years, but Sweden has been really impressive, too. Their style of play and unique development system has really meshed well with the direction the style of play in the NHL is going.

With Russia, the Czechs and Slovaks falling off as much as they have, 86 per cent of the NHL is now coming from just four countries: the big three plus Finland. Switzerland and Denmark are coming along slowly, but they've got a long way to go to replace the European countries that have fallen off.

Seventy per cent of the NHL still comes from North America, so I figured I'd go a bit more granular there. Ontario remains a massive contributor, with most of those players coming from the Greater Toronto Area. In my lifetime, the trend I've noticed in this country is more and more NHL players from urban centres, as training and flat-out family wealth has become a bigger factor. (It's not uncommon to walk into a dressing room these days and the parents of those players are lawyers, executives and CEOs.)

Per capita, the Prairie provinces still do pretty well, but more and more my sense is that's being driven by Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg instead of the small towns. (Global warming means the outdoor rinks don't even freeze nearly as much as they used to.)

In the U.S., Minnesota's system is really incredible given we're talking about a state that's roughly the same size of a place like B.C. They're basically producing hockey players at a similar rate to a Canadian hotbed.

The Michigan and Massachusetts development systems have slowed a little, but they've been more than offset by the fact places like upstate New York, Connecticut, Illinois and others are producing more and more elite level players. (At some point, I'll do a more comprehensive look at the American numbers because they're interesting and far more driven by the NHL teams in those markets than in Canada.)

That's all for this post. Hope you enjoyed this quick look at the demographics of a league which continues to evolve. Happy to take suggestions for future analysis like this we could do.

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: NHL embracing new era of fun, personality

Elliotte Friedman

October 10, 2018, 11:28 AM

Well before the Carolina Hurricanes publicly unveiled their new victory celebration — featuring a team-wide leap into the glass — they discussed it with new head coach Rod Brind'Amour.

"The captains brought it up early and we talked about it as a group," Brind'Amour said Tuesday, driving home from a 5-3 victory over Vancouver. "They were tired of the salute at centre ice."

What did you think?



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"I thought it was great," he replied. "Guys play hard and they should enjoy themselves. It should be fun when you win. It used to be that when you won you'd go out and have a good time, but guys don't do that anymore — they're serious about things all the time. You have to find other ways to blow off steam.

"I'm not sure coaches (back when I played) would have allowed it, but we're living in a different time."

In a wild first week, we've seen a magnificent showdown between Patrick Kane and Auston Matthews, where Matthews put his hand to his ear when scoring late against the Blackhawks, only to see Kane mimic the move after his own goal minutes later. (Matthews smiled on the bench in reply. I'm convinced we're about to discover a whole new side of him.)

Nashville's Roman Josi was on GQ's "best-dressed of the week" list, joining Orlando Bloom, Ryan Gosling, Gucci Mane and Tom Hardy.

Even Gary Bettman got into the act. As the Ducks celebrated their 25th anniversary with a shootout win over Detroit, Anaheim colour analyst Brian Hayward got Bettman to blow a duck call during an intermission interview. There was precedent for this, as the commissioner did the same thing in March 1993, when the team was first introduced. But I never thought we'd see him do it again.

Ever since last year's NHL Awards, where Winnipeg GM Kevin Cheveldayoff, Florida's Roberto Luongo, Vegas GM George McPhee and Nashville's P.K. Subban were trusted to lead more serious segments, I've been wondering if we're heading into a new era. That was bold, and they shined.

Reigning Super Bowl championship coach Doug Pederson came out with a book called *Fearless: How an Underdog Becomes a Champion*. In it, he writes: "One of the things I've told players repeatedly is I want them to show their personalities. Be who you are.... I am not coaching robots.... Your career is going to last two years or ten years, or somewhere in between. Then it is over. So while you are playing, enjoy it, man. Don't hide. Don't mask anything. Doing that helps cultivate our culture, and if dancing around on the field helps you win games, do it."

Not sure if Brind'Amour's read this book, but his philosophy is the exact same.

There's always a clash in hockey of team vs. individual. I get that. It is very, very hard for an individual to win in the NHL. You just don't get the same opportunity to impact the game as an NBA star or a top NFL quarterback would. But what that often suppresses is the fact that you can be both a great individual and a great teammate. And if it is not what you want, no one's forcing you.

We're off to a fun start. Hope it stays that way.

1. A quick whistle erased Sam Bennett's first goal of the season Tuesday night in Nashville, but he did play 13:27 — his highest of the year. He saw 8:47 and 7:01 in the opening two games against Vancouver. The list of teams who've inquired about him through the years includes Anaheim, Montreal, Philadelphia and Tampa Bay. I'm not convinced the Flames want to trade him, knowing he's 22 and could blossom elsewhere. Just something to watch, as he searches for a fit with a new coach and changed roster.

2. Alexander Edler is playing 25:19 a game, 12th in the NHL. This is someone who does not want to leave Vancouver. He's made that very clear. His contract is up after the season, and Tampa was interested a year ago. Someone's going to want him as a rental, even if he returns to British Columbia next year.

3. We've seen stronger-than-expected openings for Montreal and Ottawa, who are both under different offensive setups than what we were used to. The Canadiens, realizing they would not be able to overpower teams, especially along the boards, placed emphasis on offence through the middle.

"Own the area between the dots," one player said.

"Beat the swarm," said another.

"The fourth player up the rush is much more active," says an opposing coach.

The organization was encouraged by a home pre-season game against Toronto, where the Maple Leafs dressed both Matthews and John Tavares for the first time. The Canadiens lost 5–3 thanks to one ugly stretch of two shorthanded goals allowed in 20 seconds, but battled to a draw at even strength and were competitive.

4. Kelly Hruddy showed during last week's pre-game show how Carey Price has moved his legs closer together, providing video evidence of a six-inch difference between his skates from 2017–18 to 2018–19. In the short-term the adjustment looks good, as he stopped 44 of the 48 shots he faced in nearly ruining the Maple Leafs' home opener and blowing out the Penguins. The Canadiens wanted to see him regain his swagger, and felt the first week was a great opportunity for that.

Two things stood out: Price celebrating when the Canadiens got to overtime in the Ontario capital, knowing that would be good for confidence. Second was a lengthy solo practice with goalie coach Stephane Waite Tuesday in Montreal. Years ago, then-Canadiens coach Jacques Martin complained about Price's work habits, wanting to see him work as hard on the ice as Patrick Roy would after a bad performance. Price is putting in the time after good work.

5. The Senators are completely different, almost unrecognizable in the offensive zone. They aren't afraid to play three below the face-off dots, and it's noticeable how players are covering for each other when a fourth comes down to make a play.

"We knew in the past our left defenceman was coming up — now everyone reads the third forward or both 'D,'" one player said.

Added another: "It reminds me of what New Jersey did last season. As long as we're willing to get back, this can work."

Coach Guy Boucher said it wasn't quite correct to call it a copy of the Devils.

"You design a system to fit your players. Our guys are fast enough to play this way."

They definitely caught people by surprise.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

6. Not long after being put through waivers, Zack Smith has four points in his first three games. Smith had some interesting things to say about how he handled it, from the number of surprisingly supportive texts he received to the fact he's a new father (daughter Rae was born in August).

"When you go home to see her," he said, "things don't bother you as much."

Best text?

"There was one from Nick Foligno that was pretty good."

But what Smith said helped the most was that he realized 2017–18 simply wasn't acceptable.

"This year was always going to be a fresh start for me. I was in the mindset that I was going to be better. That didn't change with what happened."

7. Ottawa owner Eugene Melnyk took the floor at the Board of Governors meeting to let the rest of the NHL know that he's not selling the club. We've heard that before, but it's interesting that he



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was given the opportunity to do it in that setting. Clearly, he wanted the other owners to hear it from him — directly.

One governor said what he took from it is the downtown building process is going to take a long, long time.

8. At the Board of Governors meeting last week, the NHL provided 2019–20 cap estimates ranging from \$81.4 million (no NHLPA inflator) to \$85.4 million (the full five per cent). (The players committed to 1.25 for 2018–19.) Looking at the last six Stanley Cup champions and their four highest-paid players, the percentage of the cap spent on them ranges from 35.5 (Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, Corey Crawford and Patrick Sharp on the 2015 Blackhawks) to 45.2 (Evgeni Malkin, Sidney Crosby, Kris Letang and Phil Kessel on the 2017 Penguins).

The advantage Pittsburgh had that Toronto doesn't is Crosby and Malkin are on back-diving contracts no longer allowed under CBA rules. The defending-champion Capitals were at 40.2 for Alex Ovechkin, Evgeni Kuznetsov, Nicklas Backstrom and Braden Holtby. Those deals all have acceptable structure. We already know John Tavares is at \$11 million, so if the Maple Leafs want to stay at 45 per cent, they have between \$36.6 million (low end) and \$38.4 million (high end) for Matthews, Mitchell Marner and William Nylander. Matthews is going to come in above Tavares, and Marner will wait to see what he signs for. It's a tight, tight squeeze.

9. Chicago and Pittsburgh alleviated cap stress with five-year second contracts for Crosby, Kane, Malkin and Toews. It's unlikely Toronto would want that term for Nylander, since it takes him right to free agency. Maybe six is the answer. I do believe they've looked at something in the three- or four-year range, but the gap remains. The other issue is that I don't see many easy trades, if Toronto ever decides to go that route. Monetary differences aside, they like the player. A lot.

10. Early-season prediction: The number "34" shows up somewhere in whatever extension Auston Matthews signs.

Sportsnet insiders ranked the 100 best players in the NHL for the 2018–19 season, from Alex Radulov to Connor McDavid. Check out the list, then create your own top 10.

11. "Here's one for you," an amateur scout said. "Can you find the NHL team that had [Elias] Pettersson No. 1 on its draft board?"

12. The Canucks produced a draft video after Pettersson's fifth-overall selection in 2017, revealing they felt safe trading down one spot with Vegas, but were worried about the Rangers — picking seventh. One executive indicated that if Pettersson had followed top pick Nico Hischier to North America the season beforehand, the current Canuck would have been No. 1. Another disagreed, if only because it is so hard to be dominant with his body structure.

"You need to be special if you're built the way he is," a third said of Pettersson, who's currently listed at 6'2" and 176 pounds on the Canucks' website. "I had no doubt that he was the most talented player in his draft class. Him not playing in North America and being so physically raw prevented him [from going] first overall in my opinion."

The Canucks were handed a tough, tough schedule to start this season, but that's probably good for Pettersson, who will learn what it's like to be the focus of a game plan when you don't have last change.

13. If you're wondering who might be next to follow John Tavares's free-agent setup, the betting money is on Artemi Panarin.

14. It's been reported that the NHL and potential plaintiffs in concussion lawsuits were ordered into mediation. About two weeks ago, there were rumours about "movement" towards some kind of resolution. Multiple sources warned not to call it a settlement, that the language of any reporting would be very important. Obviously, it is complex. We'll see where it goes.

15. Sportsnet producer Jeremy McElhanney went to Russia for Ovechkin's time with the Cup. The piece will air this weekend on Hockey Night in Canada. We were in Washington for extra interviews during the pre-season, and asked Ovechkin about not having to answer any more questions about winning his first Cup or getting past the Penguins or whatever. He wasn't buying it.

"Well, you have to figure out what's the next question. What's the next question for me?" he asked.

It was a great response.

Added Braden Holtby, "They're all over Tom Brady right now. You're always going to have to answer questions."

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16. Two weeks ago, we interviewed Dallas Green (City and Colour) for 31 Thoughts: The Podcast. He talked about his friendship with Holtby, laughing at how he went to see the goalie play in Nashville, only to see him get yanked after six goals in 25 minutes. He did add that there was a better story about their friendship, but we'd need Holtby's permission to tell it.

Holtby told it himself.

"I don't know if my wife (Brandi) is going to be mad at me for telling everyone this," he smiled. "My wife and I, when we first met had that common ground of City and Colour. We were big fans. I kind of took a shot in the dark and asked [Dallas] if he'd play 'The Girl' for me and record it [so] I could play it at our Cup party for Brandi. I think that's one thing that gets forgotten in all this is the support we get from our families and especially our wives and our kids.... They took on a lot to go through that playoff run. We weren't being the best fathers or husbands because we were busy, and when we were home we were sleeping. I just wanted to find a way to say thank you."

17. Best story heard from the Capitals' Stanley Cup celebration: The morning after they won, the travelling party could not find Alex Chiasson for the bus ride to the airport.

"We were like, 'Where is this guy?'" said Mike Vogel, well-known to fans for writing the "Dump 'N Chase" blog at washingtoncaps.com. "We went knocking on the door and there was no answer.... So security opens the door, and there's no one in this room."

They packed his stuff, stepped out of the elevator into the hotel lobby and walked right into Chiasson. He had been in Starbucks.

"He said, 'That's not my luggage; mine is on the bus.' I said, 'No, we went to your room and packed it.' He said, 'No, it's on the bus.'"

It turned out Chiasson was unhappy with his original room and changed it.

"I can't imagine this guy going back to his room and... 'Why is all my stuff packed?'"

18. Philadelphia's had a couple of rough losses after an impressive start in Vegas, but one player who looks much better is Wayne Simmonds.

"I'm close to fully healthy," he said this week.

How close?

"I'd put it at 95 per cent."

It was an intense, gruelling summer of rehab after pelvic and abdominal surgery in May. Asked if he considered changes to his skating style to ease the workload, Simmonds responded that when he missed seven games last winter with torn ligaments on his left thumb, he worked with the team's skating coach on making his stride less choppy.



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At the Bio Steel camp in 2017, other players said Simmonds has tried just about everything to add weight — not easy for someone with such a lean physique. He is a bit heavier to start this season.

"I didn't do as much cardio because of the rehab, so I'm close to 190 (pounds)."

What's normal for you?

"Between 180 and 185," he answered.

One fact I never knew about him: Simmonds went to the Ontario high school track and field championships in the 1500-metre run, qualifying by finishing 10th in the city of Toronto. His parents were distance runners, too.

19. Prior to their home opener Tuesday night, the Flyers announced Simmonds would be a permanent alternate captain to Claude Giroux. He's a pending free agent, with the Flyers saying they'd like to keep him, and the player responding that he'd like to stay.

"I'm going to let my agent (Eustace King) handle that," Simmonds says.

He's kept his spot in front of the net on the Flyers' first power-play unit, which was uncertain after Philadelphia signed James van Riemsdyk. The two were linemates between Mikhail Vorobyev before van Riemsdyk was injured in the team's second game, at Colorado.

"He's very smart," Simmonds says of the Russian rookie.

Vorobyev looked hilariously stone-faced with his first goal puck, scored in the 5-2 defeat to the Avalanche.

"I don't think he was mad (at taking the photo after a loss)," Simmonds laughed. "I think that's just him. He'll sit quietly on the bench during the game, then say something out of nowhere."

20. Another guy who can't put on weight? Tyler Seguin.

"I have struggled with keeping my weight up throughout a season. Most years I'll lose 10 to 13 pounds."

During playoff runs in Boston, Seguin said it wasn't unusual to lose 15 to 17. Now he's hired a chef to cook for him, and this summer he's up 15 pounds.

"The boys joke about my body fat, just because it is so low. This is the first year I got it over four per cent."

Four per cent!

"I'm happy about that. Hopefully I can keep it up."

Jeff Marek wondered if this means Seguin has to change his stick during the year, and he replied it does happen, for both kick point and flex.

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.

21. Winnipeg's players joke that captain Blake Wheeler has two distinct personalities — an easygoing one, and "grumpy Blake" for when things aren't being done properly.

"I think there are times that I can boil a little bit," he admitted. "I think as I've gotten older, I've gotten better about controlling when and where, time and place, and who's involved in that. All in all, it all comes from a good place. I have a high level that I expect from myself every single day. I have a high level I expect from my teammates every single day. More than anything I try to dish out positive reinforcement, but there's going to be days where we don't have it, or I don't have it. So the intensity gets revved up a little bit. That's a healthy thing."

Wheeler said he picked up that attitude by hearing how people talked about Nicklas Lidstrom.

"He was doing the same thing every day. An 82-game season is a marathon. There's days where it's no fun doing things in the gym or doing things to warm up. Seeing a guy like that who found a way to love doing that stuff and make himself great every single day, that stuck with me. So, I've tried to trick myself on those days to making it fun and enjoying it and putting a smile on my face even though inside you're burning up. Carrying a positive attitude goes a long way."

22. Brind'Amour's Hurricanes have 17 goals in four games. Did he think they could score like this?

"I don't think we expected it. We're a bit fortunate that we are scoring on chances that would not go in last year or the year before. We're not going to do this all year, but it's good to see them coming together, playing hard."

How does one of his era's best two-way players handle this?

"You can handle it as long as we win them," he laughed.

Brind'Amour is off to a 3-1-0 start in his coaching debut. He didn't really celebrate his first victory, but the players did.

"I walked in, told them 'Good job' and walked out. They grabbed me back, presented me with the team puck. I still don't view myself as coach.... It's very strange. I feel like a player in a lot of ways. The first win wasn't as overwhelming as my first goal."

What has he learned so far?

"How important your staff is."

23. Brind'Amour, with enormous praise for Jordan Staal: "He's as good a player as there is in this league, our MVP. Shift after shift, he dominates. He may not score, but he always does it right. He can do everything, penalty kill, power play, our glue for sure. He's a horse out there."

24. Finally, the coach on Warren Foegele, with three goals in four games: "He keeps his mouth shut, works his butt off. We told him to earn his spot. He did it."

25. Asked to remember a favourite play, Josh Gorges didn't mention a goal, a blocked shot or a big hit. He remembered his fourth game in the NHL, Dec. 23, 2005. His San Jose Sharks hosting the St. Louis Blues.

"Evgeni Nabokov went out to play the puck, and he clipped skates with a forechecker."

Gorges went in to defend his goalie, engaging in his first fight.

"That opened the door. Our coaches saw how competitive I was and looked at me differently."

Do you remember the player?

"Yes, it was Mark Rycroft."

Each week, Jeff Blair and Stephen Brunt tackle the most impactful stories in the world of sports and their intersection with popular culture. Come for the sports; stay for the storytelling and cigars.

26. After 783 NHL games, Gorges is back in Kelowna with his wife and two young children, helping out the WHL Rockets. Is coaching in his future?

"I've thought about it. There's a lot that's appealing, a lot that is not. But as I transition, I know the owner and the GM (of the Rockets). It's nothing official, just hanging out with the young guys to see if I want to pursue it or not."

At 34, Gorges wanted to continue his career, but things did not materialize.



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"I wanted that chance to win a Stanley Cup. It is the thing that was driving me, another shot at it. But, as the summer went along, I saw the writing on the wall. It's different. Since the age of four, I've never not played hockey come September. But there's nothing to hang my head or be embarrassed or upset about."

That's for sure. His older boy is four, and starting to try hockey.

"I get to take him skating. Those are things you miss when playing, so that makes it easier on me."

His greatest moments? Easy.

"Twice for the Canadiens, we got to play in the conference final. In Montreal, the first round is so spectacular. I always told guys, 'You've got to experience what it's like, the playoffs in Montreal.'"

27. Also returning to British Columbia was Derek Dorsett, who needed to take his physical with one year remaining under contract. You'll remember that after the final game of Daniel and Henrik Sedin's careers, they presented the puck to Dorsett in Edmonton's visitors dressing room.

"It just shows what kind of guys they are," Dorsett told Sportsnet's Joey Kenward last month. "They knew I was going through a tough time.... That puck means a lot to me. It actually sits on the nightstand beside my bed. I'll remember that for the rest of my life."

Even more impressive than being on receiving end of that gift is that his wife, Allison, gave birth to the first Dorsett girl in three generations — Emmie Rose.

"She's going to be spoiled," he told Kenward.

28. I think the pressure on the Department of Player Safety to give Tom Wilson a large suspension was as great as any decision the department's faced since its inception. Bettman will hear the appeal. Wilson has the right to go to an independent arbitrator if he doesn't like Bettman's decision.

29. During this year's trip to China, Bettman said he wanted to bring regular-season hockey to the country, not just exhibition games. That's going to be interesting, simply because teams might not want that. One governor suggested taking four clubs instead of two, so they don't have to move between cities while overseas, adding that you can make a little more impact when you stay put longer. There is no question clubs will be afraid of the toll the travel and time change could take on their regular seasons.

30. We are seeing earlier goalie pulls than normal at the start of this season. It's not unusual to see nets empty with three minutes to go. This is something analytically inclined minds have been pushing for years. But the bigger storyline might be if it means front offices are taking more control of coaching strategy. We've seen that in baseball, where the manager is now an extension of the GM as opposed to an independent mind. There's always been a separation of church and state in hockey. Is that line blurring?

31. Coming soon to a liquor store near you: NHL Alumni Whisky. Several retired players went to the JP Wiser's factory to create their own concoctions and be part of the process. The first three are to be launched this month, from Wendel Clark, Lanny McDonald and Larry Robinson. As a Scotch/whisky person, I'm looking forward to trying it. If I were Ron MacLean, I'd probably say Clark's will pack a mighty punch.

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Sportsnet.ca / Kadri embracing new role in Maple Leafs' offensive attack

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

October 10, 2018, 5:50 PM

DETROIT – Nazem Kadri has learned to embrace the best of both worlds in hockey. But he knows deep down that it may be harder than ever for him to strike the perfect balance between scoring goals and preventing them on this version of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Kadri is one of 12 NHL players who has at least 30 goals in each of the last two seasons and will likely encounter difficulty stretching that streak to a third now that he's playing behind two other members of that exclusive club: Auston Matthews and John Tavares.

He's already seen a small dip in playing time early this season. And there's been a fairly large drop in the offensive capabilities of his linemates, which is probably why Kadri sounded so realistic about his chances of tucking 30 more during a recent conversation.

"Yeah, of course I want to," he said. "I don't plan on having any setbacks, I don't really want that to happen. I mean if I don't get it, is it a huge deal? I mean is it the end of the world? I think I contribute a lot more than just scoring.

"But that's certainly a mark I'd like to get to again."

The truth of the matter is Toronto doesn't need him to do it. Matthews and Tavares have both been fired out of a cannon to start the year and could legitimately challenge for 30 goals each by the all-star break.

The expectation is that Kadri will again be counted on to neutralize top competition, especially with last line change on home ice, although it's interesting that Mike Babcock hasn't really deployed him in that role just yet in 2018-19.

The coach phoned Kadri after Tavares joined the Leafs this summer and told him to be ready to reprise his matchup responsibilities. It's something he's taken pride in since first being trusted with the job two seasons ago.

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"You've got to understand that I've got to start every shift in my D-zone so it's tough for me to create offence all the time," said Kadri. "That's my role, that's the impact I have on this team. You know, I'm just trying to bring both components – the physicality, the grit, along with the scoring and the skill.

"I'm always trying to find a balance with that."

In the two games where the Leafs controlled matchups, Kadri most frequently faced Montreal's second line (Jonathan Drouin-Jesper Kotkaniemi-Joel Armia) and Ottawa's third line (Alex Formenton-Chris Tierney-Bobby Ryan). On the road, he got a steady diet of Chicago's third line (Chris Kunitz-Artem Anisimov-David Kampf) and Dallas' second line (Mattias Janmark-Jason Spezza-Blake Comeau).

Kadri has just two assists for the NHL's highest-scoring team this season, although he's produced favourable possession metrics while playing alongside Connor Brown on the right and either Josh Leivo or Par Lindholm on the left.

The addition of Tavares has given Babcock a good problem to have. It's altered the way he typically manages his bench while trying to keep his big three centres engaged, which is why he hasn't gone chasing matchups for Kadri too aggressively. He's prioritized creating a rhythm instead.



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"I'm just going to figure out my lines and get everyone on the ice as much as I can," said Babcock. "If the situation in the game dictates that then I'll have it. Naz has got a different type of line than he has in [the past], too, and so that reflects on that as well. Right now the way we're going is we're trying to get people on the ice as much as we possibly can and see them in all situations."

Kadri is coming off consecutive 32-goal seasons and got there the same way each time – scoring 20 at even strength and 12 on the power play. His offensive cookies can still be had with the man advantage while playing the bumper position on a unit with Tavares, Matthews, Mitch Marner and Morgan Rielly.

So it's really only at 5-on-5 where he's felt a change in usage.

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He frequently played between Patrick Marleau and Leo Komarov early last season and saw Marner promoted to his right side in place of Komarov during a torrid second half. The only way he might eventually see something similar this year is if William Nylander starts off on the third line when his contract stalemate ends, or if Kasper Kapanen and/or Andreas Johnsson find their way there.

A few days past his 28th birthday and now the longest-tenured player in the organization, Kadri gives off the impression he'll remain patient while the roster evolves. The Leafs are 3-1-0 heading into Thursday's game against the Detroit Red Wings and Tavares has been an instant hit.

Plus, he understood immediately what it meant to land the big fish in free agency.

"I was pretty surprised, myself, and obviously over the moon when I heard," said Kadri. "I was very excited because that puts us in contention, I think."

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers know they can't repeat last season's poor start

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

October 10, 2018, 4:57 PM

BOSTON — "We've got to get off to a good start this season."

As a journalist, I throw that quote on the scrap heap next to, "I really like playing with that guy," or "our goalie is one of the best in the league."

Until we start hearing players routinely say, "Our lousy 'tender is one of the worst in the NHL," or, "It would be fine if we lost four of our first five games. No problem," those platitudes about the good starts becomes just another cliché.

But we'll give you this: when it is uttered by a member of the Edmonton Oilers this fall, well, perhaps it has a touch more gravity. Heading into their second game of the season against Boston on Thursday, the 0-1 Oilers emotions lie somewhere between panicking over a loss in Sweden, and playing it cool the way they tried to a year ago, when it took them 25 games and two months to collect 10 wins.

How did the latter work out?

"It's easy to say, 'Aw, we have 81 (games) left,'" began Milan Lucic, who opened his season with a two-point night in a 5-2 loss to New Jersey. "But we kept doing that last year. 'It's OK, we have 60 games left.' 'It's all right, we have 55 left.' Then, all of the sudden it was like, 'Whoa, we've got 40 games left and we're completely out of the mix here...'"

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Somewhere between nonchalance and sheer panic lies the nirvana known as urgency. An Oilers team that won its opener last season, then went on a 2-6-0-1 run the rest of October, knows well how fast things can get away. Before you know it, you're chasing the season.

"The results are what everyone looks at and evaluates — the outside world. We look at how we played; at what we did and didn't do," said head coach Todd McLellan. "It was a disappointing first night. But it was that: a first night. There's no panic. We lost our first game. That's happened to numerous teams who have gone on to win Stanley Cups.

"We weren't very good against Jersey. We'll be better against Boston."

It was, as McLellan said, a "disappointing" loss because of the many things that went wrong. Cam Talbot, who has vowed to have a better season, let in four (with an empty netter). The defence, where there are many questions, gave mostly negative answers. The depth forwards, a cadre that was supposed to be improved, hurt the club with a poor collective performance.

"We weren't any good in our own end, and I don't mean defending it, I mean coming out of it," explained McLellan. "We were a little bit slow; we didn't have good board work. As a result, any time the puck was cleared we didn't have possession, or we weren't together as a five-man unit.

"That was the disappointing part of the game."

The coach was shuffling his bottom six forwards at practice Wednesday, moving Jujhar Khaira from left wing to third-line centre, and Ryan Strome down to fourth-line centre. Could that leave newly acquired fourth-line centre Kyle Brodziak in the press box only two games into the season?

"We haven't made any decisions yet," McLellan said. "We need more from our third and fourth lines. They didn't give us much the other day. It's a four-line league and they have to be more productive (in providing) momentum, physicality, defending, pace, energy... We need more from those lines."

Does line juggling after 60 minutes of a season constitute panic? Or simply proactive coaching?

By moving people around after one game, is McLellan telling his charges that there is greater urgency this October than last? That he will not — as Lucic referenced — just chill, because there are 81 games left to play?

Our guess would be that Brodziak centres the fourth line with Zack Kassian and Tobias Rieder on Thursday at the TD Garden, and perhaps Khaira and Strome swap places on the third line, with Jesse Puljujarvi manning the right wing.

We've watched McLellan work for long enough to know that changing things at practice is his way of issuing the warning that, if things don't improve, he'll start making changes during games.

After a lack luster opener, you can't blame the coach for trying to light the fire. Not this season, with this team.

"Good teams show up and bounce back right away," said Lucic. "The Bruins lost 7-0 in their first game and they've won three straight



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since. That's the sign of a good team. We need to find a way to do the same thing."

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Sportsnet.ca / Kings' Ilya Kovalchuk already back into NHL spotlight

Damien Cox | @damospin

October 10, 2018, 6:48 PM

WINNIPEG — Ilya Kovalchuk is gassed. He leans forward, soaked in sweat and still breathing hard, wearily but willingly trying to answer questions about his comeback to the NHL.

Except this doesn't feel like a comeback. It feels like a second act. The resumption of the show after a lengthy intermission.

The set, which started as an immigrant story below the Mason-Dixon Line and shifted to a scene of urban decay in New Jersey, has now shifted again, this time based in Los Angeles. La-La-Land. We, the audience, wait to see if the second act is anywhere close to be as good as the first.

This night, in only his third game back after missing five full years of NHL competition, the 35-year-old Kovalchuk has good reason to be fatigued. Los Angeles Kings coach John Stevens had ridden this old horse hard, giving him slightly more than 23 minutes of playing time against the tough, physical Winnipeg Jets. Any sense that Kovalchuk is going to be able to ease himself back into the NHL spotlight has vanished.

The Kings lost and managed only 19 shots. Kovalchuk scored the team's only goal, a pretty re-direction off a Drew Doughty pass in the first period past Connor Hellebuyck, a Vezina Trophy finalist last season and the kind of elite goalie Kovalchuk hadn't faced very often during five seasons in the Kontinental Hockey League while he was contemplating a return to North America.

"I prefer to win rather than score goals," pants Kovalchuk when asked about the goal. "It wasn't enough."

True, but it was his first NHL goal since getting one against Pittsburgh on April 25, 2013, and he was the best L.A. forward on the ice all night. Dangerous. Creative. Eye-catching. He orchestrated better chances for his teammates than they did for him.

By coincidence, Kovalchuk did all this as, in theory, the leading scorer in Jets franchise history. That was the team known as the Atlanta Thrashers that went out of business in Georgia after he left. He had been the franchise player and when he moved on, well, the NHL's second attempt to sell hockey in Atlanta was over. For that, hockey fans in Winnipeg are eternally grateful.

Before leaving the NHL, Kovalchuk scored 418 goals in 815 games with Atlanta and the New Jersey Devils, more than one every two games. In the KHL, he scored another 120 goals and helped a team of Russians that wasn't allowed to be called "Russia" to win Olympic gold earlier this year against non-NHL competition. Whatever that tournament meant to the hockey world, it clearly meant something to Kovalchuk. His work in Russia was done, and he declared himself in search of a roster spot with an NHL squad again.

Only John Tavares, and possibly James van Riemsdyk, were more attractive free agent forwards. Kings general manager Rob Blake, meanwhile, knew he had to find a shooter, a proven goal scorer. So

did team president Luc Robitaille, who had once been that player in Los Angeles.

The team had scored only 237 goals last season. The worst came in the post-season when they managed only three goals in the first round of the playoffs against Las Vegas and were swept in humiliating fashion.

The Kings made an offer to Montreal for Max Pacioretty but that fizzled. When Kovalchuk was in California meeting with San Jose, the presumptive favourite, the Kings made their own pitch. Kovalchuk bought it to the tune of a \$6.25 million cap hit over three years.

L.A. general manager Rob Blake admits he was surprised that the Kings turned out to be Kovalchuk's choice.

"I can tell you he came into our meeting really well prepared," said Blake. "He knew we were missing that specific piece. Other teams had it, but we didn't."

It wasn't precisely clear what the Kings were getting. It was, to some degree, a leap of faith. Jaromir Jagr had left the NHL for the KHL as a 36-year-old superstar and returned three years later as a fitter and friendlier player, but nothing like the force he had once been.

People marvelled at him, but he bounced around over the next seven seasons. Kovalchuk had left at younger age than Jagr, but stayed away longer. What would that do to his game?

Long ago, players like Syl Apps and Max Bentley had given up two years to the military in World War II, and returned to be stars again. Jacques Plante retired for three seasons, then came back at age 39 with the Blues in 1968 and was pretty darn good. Carl Brewer retired from the Leafs in 1965 at age 26, played for the Canadian national team, Muskegon of the IHL and in Finland on his quixotic hockey journey before returning after missing four seasons to play for Detroit.

Ken Dryden skipped the '73-74 season to clerk for a Toronto law firm, came back the next year and went on to win four more Vezinas. Guy Lafleur retired in 1985, then returned in 1988 at age 37 to score 18 goals for the Rangers.

So what Kovalchuk is attempting isn't exactly unprecedented. But that doesn't make it easy to predict. He looks leaner, suggesting he's certainly not back just to float. He's not trying to be like Lafleur, to squeeze a little more out of an aging body in a nice warm climate, to hopefully just not embarrass himself.

"It doesn't look like he's lost a step," says Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice. "Definitely there's a maturity to his game, as you would expect with a player as he gets older. He understands how to use the players around him. And we certainly didn't want him to shoot the puck tonight."

The league has changed significantly, become younger, faster and less reliant on "heavy" hockey than it was when Kovalchuk took his final strides with the Devils before shocking the hockey world by announcing his exit in 2013. It seemed like betrayal, really. The Devils had signed him to a \$102 million contract that was ruled to be a blatant attempt to circumvent the salary cap, and they were penalized heavily for it. Three years after that, after helping Jersey get to the Stanley Cup final, he just left. Went home. Bye-bye.

What brought him back? He says a chance to win a ring. Maybe that's it. Kovalchuk was never one to explain himself before, and he doesn't have a great deal to explain about himself now.

He seemed open to playing for a number of teams. It was the Kings, the aging former champions, who were truly desperate. They could tell Kovalchuk, an aging athlete, exactly what he wanted to hear about how he would be used. Both sides of this relationship were looking to turn back the clock.



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There was a talented centre, Anze Kopitar, for him to play with, and Doughty, an elite offensive defencemen. The Kings needed to prove to those players that they weren't planning to retreat from being a team competing for the Cup.

"Our power play has been a struggle basically every year I've been here, 10 years now, and he's a weapon. So he can help us out in that area," says Doughty. "They told me they weren't going to rebuild. That's why I re-signed here. They wanted to keep pushing for the Cup. So it was great that they showed that by (signing Kovalchuk)."

Tuesday's game supplied the most encouraging evidence yet for the Kings that the Kovalchuk signing will play dividends. His line, with Kopitar and youngster Alex Lafallo, began to look like a cohesive unit.

It's been a slow process. Stevens had his staff make a video recording of practice one day just so the trio could see why things weren't working.

"We have seen some chemistry develop," says Stevens. "Alex is a good fit on the line. He's such a worker, such a detail guy. But now you're seeing (Kovalchuk) and (Kopitar) get a feel for each other in terms of reading off each other, when they're going to dart, when they're going to drop in behind, or maybe head to some open ice.

"They both shoot the puck so well, obviously we'd like to see them do that more as a first option, then make plays on recovery. But it does take time. Every day there's a better understanding."

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Kovalchuk says his body feels good. It's his head that needs to get in shape.

"I feel pretty good from the first game," he says. "My legs, you know. But decisions will take a little longer."

When the Kings finally got a power play against the Jets in the third period, Kovalchuk was on the right side of the formation, not the left side where he could unleash his feared one-timer. That didn't make much sense. By the time Stevens pulled goalie Jack Campbell for an extra attacker, Kovalchuk was on the left side, more sensible for a goal-scorer who had 138 power-play goals in the NHL before heading home. He didn't get a shot off, but his presence there sure got Winnipeg's defensive attention.

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So far, the second act hasn't been as compelling as the first. But we're intrigued.

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1109430 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Brian Burke explains why he rated Morgan Rielly No. 1 in 2012

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

October 10, 2018, 9:25 AM

Former Toronto Maple Leafs GM and president Brian Burke appeared full of hot air at the time when he said he'd have taken Morgan Rielly No. 1 in the 2012 NHL Draft.

He's not looking so bad right now.

Rielly went fifth overall to the Leafs that night in Pittsburgh, with three of the four players taken ahead of him having already switched teams at least once (Nail Yakupov, Alex Galchenyuk, and Griffin Reinhart).

Burke was on Sportsnet's Starting Lineup Wednesday, to discuss making that pick, and his bold claim at the time that Rielly was atop Toronto's list of prospects.

"I told Morgan that cause it's true. Morgan was injured his draft year, he only played a handful of games at the end of the year," said Burke. "I did not go in and watch him play, (but) we scouted the hell out of him though. We had like eight people at some of those games. And then I had our video guy break down every shift he played, I watched every shift he played that year and then I watched him again and I watched him again.

"To me, his skating was so advanced – and you could see it was going to get better with some power – that he could skate the puck out of trouble at all times, his decision-making was good. His maturity as a kid was good; this is a guy who when he was hurt he'd go meet the team when they'd come back after a road trip at 3 or 4 in the morning, he'd go and meet the bus on crutches."

(You can hear Burke tell commissioner Gary Bettman that he had Rielly No. 1 at 7:22 of the video below.)

The 24-year-old is off to a stellar start to the 2018-19 season, having picked up two goals and 10 points in just four games so far. He had a career-high 52 points last season.

Burke also weighed in on the William Nylander contract standoff and what the Leafs should do with their vacant captaincy, drawing on the time Dion Phaneuf wore the C in Toronto.

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1109431 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Kings' Ilya Kovalchuk already back into NHL spotlight

Damien Cox | @damospin

October 10, 2018, 6:48 PM

WINNIPEG — Ilya Kovalchuk is gassed. He leans forward, soaked in sweat and still breathing hard, wearily but willingly trying to answer questions about his comeback to the NHL.

Except this doesn't feel like a comeback. It feels like a second act. The resumption of the show after a lengthy intermission.



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The set, which started as an immigrant story below the Mason-Dixon Line and shifted to a scene of urban decay in New Jersey, has now shifted again, this time based in Los Angeles. La-La-Land. We, the audience, wait to see if the second act is anywhere close to be as good as the first.

This night, in only his third game back after missing five full years of NHL competition, the 35-year-old Kovalchuk has good reason to be fatigued. Los Angeles Kings coach John Stevens had ridden this old horse hard, giving him slightly more than 23 minutes of playing time against the tough, physical Winnipeg Jets. Any sense that Kovalchuk is going to be able to ease himself back into the NHL spotlight has vanished.

The Kings lost and managed only 19 shots. Kovalchuk scored the team's only goal, a pretty re-direction off a Drew Doughty pass in the first period past Connor Hellebuyck, a Vezina Trophy finalist last season and the kind of elite goalie Kovalchuk hadn't faced very often during five seasons in the Kontinental Hockey League while he was contemplating a return to North America.

"I prefer to win rather than score goals," pants Kovalchuk when asked about the goal. "It wasn't enough."

True, but it was his first NHL goal since getting one against Pittsburgh on April 25, 2013, and he was the best L.A. forward on the ice all night. Dangerous. Creative. Eye-catching. He orchestrated better chances for his teammates than they did for him.

By coincidence, Kovalchuk did all this as, in theory, the leading scorer in Jets franchise history. That was the team known as the Atlanta Thrashers that went out of business in Georgia after he left. He had been the franchise player and when he moved on, well, the NHL's second attempt to sell hockey in Atlanta was over. For that, hockey fans in Winnipeg are eternally grateful.

Before leaving the NHL, Kovalchuk scored 418 goals in 815 games with Atlanta and the New Jersey Devils, more than one every two games. In the KHL, he scored another 120 goals and helped a team of Russians that wasn't allowed to be called "Russia" to win Olympic gold earlier this year against non-NHL competition. Whatever that tournament meant to the hockey world, it clearly meant something to Kovalchuk. His work in Russia was done, and he declared himself in search of a roster spot with an NHL squad again.

Only John Tavares, and possibly James van Riemsdyk, were more attractive free agent forwards. Kings general manager Rob Blake, meanwhile, knew he had to find a shooter, a proven goal scorer. So did team president Luc Robitaille, who had once been that player in Los Angeles.

The team had scored only 237 goals last season. The worst came in the post-season when they managed only three goals in the first round of the playoffs against Las Vegas and were swept in humiliating fashion.

The Kings made an offer to Montreal for Max Pacioretty but that fizzled. When Kovalchuk was in California meeting with San Jose, the presumptive favourite, the Kings made their own pitch. Kovalchuk bought it to the tune of a \$6.25 million cap hit over three years.

L.A. general manager Rob Blake admits he was surprised that the Kings turned out to be Kovalchuk's choice.

"I can tell you he came into our meeting really well prepared," said Blake. "He knew we were missing that specific piece. Other teams had it, but we didn't."

It wasn't precisely clear what the Kings were getting. It was, to some degree, a leap of faith. Jaromir Jagr had left the NHL for the KHL as a 36-year-old superstar and returned three years later as a fitter and friendlier player, but nothing like the force he had once been.

People marvelled at him, but he bounced around over the next seven seasons. Kovalchuk had left at younger age than Jagr, but stayed away longer. What would that do to his game?

Long ago, players like Syl Apps and Max Bentley had given up two years to the military in World War II, and returned to be stars again. Jacques Plante retired for three seasons, then came back at age 39 with the Blues in 1968 and was pretty darn good. Carl Brewer retired from the Leafs in 1965 at age 26, played for the Canadian national team, Muskegon of the IHL and in Finland on his quixotic hockey journey before returning after missing four seasons to play for Detroit.

Ken Dryden skipped the '73-74 season to clerk for a Toronto law firm, came back the next year and went on to win four more Vezinas. Guy Lafleur retired in 1985, then returned in 1988 at age 37 to score 18 goals for the Rangers.

So what Kovalchuk is attempting isn't exactly unprecedented. But that doesn't make it easy to predict. He looks leaner, suggesting he's certainly not back just to float. He's not trying to be like Lafleur, to squeeze a little more out of an aging body in a nice warm climate, to hopefully just not embarrass himself.

"It doesn't look like he's lost a step," says Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice. "Definitely there's a maturity to his game, as you would expect with a player as he gets older. He understands how to use the players around him. And we certainly didn't want him to shoot the puck tonight."

The league has changed significantly, become younger, faster and less reliant on "heavy" hockey than it was when Kovalchuk took his final strides with the Devils before shocking the hockey world by announcing his exit in 2013. It seemed like betrayal, really. The Devils had signed him to a \$102 million contract that was ruled to be a blatant attempt to circumvent the salary cap, and they were penalized heavily for it. Three years after that, after helping Jersey get to the Stanley Cup final, he just left. Went home. Bye-bye.

What brought him back? He says a chance to win a ring. Maybe that's it. Kovalchuk was never one to explain himself before, and he doesn't have a great deal to explain about himself now.

He seemed open to playing for a number of teams. It was the Kings, the aging former champions, who were truly desperate. They could tell Kovalchuk, an aging athlete, exactly what he wanted to hear about how he would be used. Both sides of this relationship were looking to turn back the clock.

There was a talented centre, Anze Kopitar, for him to play with, and Doughty, an elite offensive defencemen. The Kings needed to prove to those players that they weren't planning to retreat from being a team competing for the Cup.

"Our power play has been a struggle basically every year I've been here, 10 years now, and he's a weapon. So he can help us out in that area," says Doughty. "They told me they weren't going to rebuild. That's why I re-signed here. They wanted to keep pushing for the Cup. So it was great that they showed that by (signing Kovalchuk)."

Tuesday's game supplied the most encouraging evidence yet for the Kings that the Kovalchuk signing will play dividends. His line, with Kopitar and youngster Alex Lafallo, began to look like a cohesive unit.

It's been a slow process. Stevens had his staff make a video recording of practice one day just so the trio could see why things weren't working.

"We have seen some chemistry develop," says Stevens. "Alex is a good fit on the line. He's such a worker, such a detail guy. But now you're seeing (Kovalchuk) and (Kopitar) get a feel for each other in terms of reading off each other, when they're going to dart, when they're going to drop in behind, or maybe head to some open ice."



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"They both shoot the puck so well, obviously we'd like to see them do that more as a first option, then make plays on recovery. But it does take time. Every day there's a better understanding."

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

Kovalchuk says his body feels good. It's his head that needs to get in shape.

"I feel pretty good from the first game," he says. "My legs, you know. But decisions will take a little longer."

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Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.11.2018

1109432 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: Extremely Small Sample Size Edition

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

October 10, 2018, 8:19 AM

The Toronto Maple Leafs are on track to pour in a mellow 410 goals, with Auston Matthews outscoring nine NHL teams by himself.

The Carolina Hurricanes will go undefeated as they snap their 10-year playoff drought.

And Elias Pettersson wins the Calder Trophy in a walk.

That's right, kids. The best predictor of future behaviour is this past week's behaviour.

It's our annual NHL Power Rankings: Extremely Small Sample Size Edition, in which we use the trends of hockey's first seven days to wildly and confidently extrapolate season-long conclusions.

All 31 teams are ranked in order of the power they've showed since Opening Night. The write-ups glance into the future with the assumption that Week 1's trends are only bound to continue.

It's science.

With 6 grams of delicious, crunchy, energy-giving protein, there's nothing you and almonds can't do. Visit Almonds.com for more ways to slay your day.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning

Despite some numbskull picking them to win it all, due to a deficit in games played, Tampa ends up finishing sixth in the Atlantic — a stumble all the more remarkable considering Andrei Vasilevskiy's record-breaking .977 save percentage.

2. Nashville Predators

Nashville's top two scorers will both be defencemen. (Note: This one might actually hold up.)

3. Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin will kick off 33.3% of all games by skating out with the Stanley Cup and kissing it gently.

4. Anaheim Ducks

No Anaheim forward is healthy enough to play hockey. Which makes the Ducks' 82-0 record all the more impressive.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs

Auston Matthews' 144-goal Rocket Richard campaign is something to behold, but his 41 spreads in fashion magazines rankle old-school hockey men.

6. Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes' new choreographed celebration keeps getting more and more elaborate. By February, they're chartering a post-victory jet to Green Bay just so they can all do the Lambeau Leap.

7. Chicago Blackhawks

With their identical 164-point seasons, Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews remind the world they're worth every penny.

8. Winnipeg Jets

Kyle Connor bucks the sophomore slump with a tidy 109-point campaign.

9. Colorado Avalanche

The Avalanche have a tough time deciding which they're more excited about next spring: their 55-27 regular-season record or their four first-round picks.

10. Dallas Stars

Acquired for a song, Connor Carrick leads all Dallas defencemen in scoring, piling up 123 points. Roman Polak doesn't get any.

11. Pittsburgh Penguins

Kris Letang's goal-a-game pace and 40 per cent shooting percentage put him in the hunt for the Rocket Richard Trophy and the William Karlsson Commemorative Plaque.

12. Florida Panthers

Frank Vatrano wrecks 82 of his own goalies' knees, repeatedly sending an infuriated NHL Power Rankings author back to his fantasy league's waiver wire, where he sees nothing but scrubs left over.

13. Boston Bruins

Brad Marchand's remarkable, unusual 2018-19 stat line — 0 goals, 191 assists, 519 penalty minutes — is reason to celebrate, just not around him.



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14. Columbus Blue Jackets

By the trade deadline, eight Blue Jackets will let the media know they don't intend to stick around Columbus beyond this season.

15. Philadelphia Flyers

Forever looking to improve his club's goaltending, Ron Hextall claims a record 27 goaltenders off the waiver wire. Gritty says they can crash at his pad if they don't mind the mess.

16. New Jersey Devils

Cory Schneider's delayed recovery grows tiresome, but Keith Kinkaid's continued progression toward the 280-emoji tweet puts a smile on everyone's face.

17. Calgary Flames

Mike Smith's 246 goals allowed is not a good look. But his series of throwback masks honouring every Flames goaltender who came before him is.

18. Vegas Golden Knights

The Golden Knights' 55-point season sparks a zillion told-you-so columns from sportswriters who just knew Vegas's early success was too good to be true.

19. Montreal Canadiens

To hell with the critics: Marc Bergevin decides to exclusively draft centres with his first pick from now until eternity.

20. Los Angeles Kings

Jonathan Quick's tender lower body continues to give 36-year-old Peter Budaj legitimate NHL work in April.

21. Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres get booed off the ice 27 times but rally to secure a playoff berth.

22. Ottawa Senators

Thomas Chabot outscores the departed Erik Karlsson 137-27 and wins the Norris.

23. San Jose Sharks

Erik Karlsson will skate 28:14 a night but never score a goal for the Sharks. Although his minus-109 rating will cripple his worth on the UFA market, the stylish defenceman's suit choices will earn positive reviews every Saturday on "Coach's Corner."

24. New York Islanders

If Robin Lehner posts a 1.000 save percentage at home but no one is there to witness it, does it still count?

25. St. Louis Blues

Blues fans hit send on 5,989,872 angry Jake Allen tweets.

26. Minnesota Wild

The Wild waste Devan Dubnyk's .963 save percentage by only mustering a grand total of 82 goals.

27. Vancouver Canucks

Elias Pettersson's 82-goal rookie showing makes him a unanimous Calder champion.

28. Detroit Red Wings

The colour of the seats at Little Caesars Arena get changed from red to black to white to blue to yellow to green to purple to pink to gold to beige to...

29. Edmonton Oilers

There is a silver lining to the Oilers' inability to win any actual NHL contests in 2018-19: They absolutely own the Cologne Sharks, going 41-0 in the friendly series and racking up crazy Airmiles.

30. Arizona Coyotes

Ah, to heck with it. They move to Houston.

31. New York Rangers

Henrik Lundqvist stays loyal as the Rangers tumble to 0-82. Kevin Shattenkirk, New York's big UFA prize in 2017, gets healthy-scratched 26 times.

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1109433 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' De La Rose, Scherbak face uncertain future with team

Eric Engels

October 10, 2018, 4:12 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — With Jacob De La Rose on the verge of being cleared for game action after a cardiac episode saw him relegated to the injured-reserve list 10 days ago, the Montreal Canadiens are going to have to cut a player in short order to be compliant with the NHL's 23-man roster limit.

Chances are that player will be De La Rose or Nikita Scherbak.

Unfortunately for the Canadiens, if they can't swing a trade involving either one of those two, they'll be forced to subject one of them to waivers — and no matter who they choose to do that to, it's more likely than not that the player will get claimed by another team.

If both De La Rose and Scherbak were so essential to the mix, they'd be in the lineup instead of skating as extras in practice.

But even if they figure into the plans as depth options, Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin isn't going to want to lose either one of them for nothing. He was the man at the helm when De La Rose was selected in the second round of the 2013 NHL Draft and when Scherbak was picked in the first round of the 2014 Draft. And with both players exhibiting NHL potential since, not obtaining some type of return — however marginal — would be perceived as poor asset management.

It's a decision Canadiens coach Claude Julien classified as a "tough one."

"I'm one of those coaches that looks at what group of guys will form the best team," said Julien after Wednesday's practice.

He's also the type of coach who isn't going to let on as to which way he's leaning, and guessing seems like a fruitless endeavour considering how different De La Rose and Scherbak are from each other.

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De La Rose is a 6-foot-3, 215-pound left winger who skates like the wind, can play centre, and can be a really effective penalty killer. He



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has 119 games of NHL experience and is further along the developmental path than Scherbak is.

But De La Rose can't score the way the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Moscow native can, and he doesn't have as much untapped potential, either.

Scherbak has produced 94 points in 140 AHL games and has managed five goals in 29 games with the Canadiens. He has the skills to potentially replace a top-six winger if the Canadiens lose one to injury over the coming months.

It's hard to say which of De La Rose or Scherbak the Canadiens could use more of down the line. They ranked 29th out of 31 teams on the penalty kill and in goals per game last season, and they rank 12th in both categories through their first two games this year.

The decision isn't going to come down to health, either.

De La Rose has practised for three straight days, exhibiting no signs of distress, and he says he's ready to go whenever the medical staff is willing to clear him to play in games. And Scherbak, who dealt with a slew of different injuries over the last three seasons, said early on in training camp that he's feeling the best he has in a long time.

"I'm just trying to work hard and work on the things I need to work on and keep my pace up," Scherbak said on Wednesday. "Just give everything, give a full effort."

"I'm only focused on getting better every day," said De La Rose.

Neither player wants to think about the proverbial axe that's dangling above their heads, but they both acknowledge it's a subject they can't distance themselves from.

And there won't be much of a relief for whichever one of them does get to stick once De La Rose is cleared, because both of them might be gone once Nicolas Deslauriers returns from the facial fracture he suffered in a fight with New Jersey Devils forward Brandon Baddock on Sept. 18.

Julien said on Wednesday he expects the 6-foot-1, 215-pound, rough-and-tumble Deslauriers will be back in action within the next two weeks, and it's hard to imagine the Canadiens parting ways with him considering they rank as the shortest and lightest team in the NHL.

Deslauriers' 10 goals last year—and his willingness to fight for his teammates—earned him a two-year, \$1.9 million contract, and Bergevin recently referred to trading for him as one of the best moves he's made in six years as Canadiens GM. He's a virtual lock to stick around when all is said and done.

In light of that, it'll be interesting to see how the roster gets sorted out in the coming days.

"We've got some options," said Julien. "But at one point we're going to have to face the music here and make those decisions. It's coming, it's coming pretty soon."

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1109434 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks aren't worried as Brock Boeser catches up to speed

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

October 10, 2018, 11:08 AM

TAMPA, Fla. – The only extra weight Brock Boeser feels these days is not scoring.

The Vancouver Canucks' Rookie of the Year runner-up is adamant his slow first week – at times, literal – of his second National Hockey League season is wholly unconnected to adding about 10 pounds of muscle during the summer.

Only he would know. But Canucks coach Travis Green voiced after Tuesday's 5-3 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes what everyone can see: "He's not sharp right now."

In 18:17 of ice time in Raleigh, Boeser registered one shot on target, hit the side of the net on another and had one attempt blocked. He did pick up a second assist on Bo Horvat's power-play goal for his first point of the season, but hasn't yet scored a goal since training camp began. His last goal was Feb. 28.

There have been only three games that matter for the Canucks, who are 1-2 heading into Thursday's match with the Tampa Bay Lightning, and ordinarily no one should be concerned about a 21-year-old needing a little time to find his game at the start of his second NHL season.

Three times last season, for instance, Boeser went six games without scoring and he was still the best Canuck.

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Two things, however: Boeser had 29 goals in 62 games as a rookie straight out of the University of North Dakota and is anything but ordinary; and he is returning from back and wrist injuries that prevented the winger from training fully until July.

After five goalless pre-season games and the first three of the regular season, Boeser simply looks behind others as he tries to make up for lost training time. He looks like some players do at the start of training camp, working to get his legs under him and trying to rediscover his timing and feel for the puck.

Boeser has three shots on goal and is minus-7 in the first three games.

"I know he's pressing; he wants to score a goal," Green told reporters after the Carolina game. "I just don't think ... he's not sharp right now. He's a smart kid, though. He's got to stay with what works. He can't just start cheating. He's got to play good at both ends of the rink, and that's when you usually end up finding a goal that gets you out of a rut."

"You just have to work through it," Horvat said of his linemate. "He's a heckuva player; there's a reason he scored 29 goals. For him just to find his confidence again is the main thing. Have fun. Have fun playing this awesome game because you don't know how long your career is going to be. He's a great player, and I think he's going to have many more great years to come."

Horvat, who followed his own strong rookie NHL campaign with an epic 27-game goal drought early in 2015-16, said his sophomore slump was made worse by putting so much pressure on himself that his mind got in the way of his body.

"It's all mental games, honestly," Horvat told Sportsnet before the Canucks took Wednesday as a day off. "The more positive you think, the more you have fun and just go and play hockey. If you're overthinking it and thinking about scoring, that's exactly what backfired on me. Eventually, when one goes in for him a bunch are going to go in. We have no doubts about Brock, for sure."

Considering Boeser's off-season and age, his start is understandable. But it doesn't make it any easier on the Canucks, whose offence is being driven largely by 19-year-old rookie Elias Pettersson and Vancouver's power play.



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Green split Boeser from Horvat on Tuesday and moved him onto a line with Pettersson and Nikolay Goldobin.

"I'm getting a lot more chances than I did in the pre-season, and that's a positive," Boeser said. "It makes me not worry too much because I know once I get one, they will come in bunches.

"Obviously, it was a shorter summer. But that's what happens when you have a big injury like that. It's tough, but it's part of the game. I'm doing everything I can to make sure that I take a step in the right direction each and every game. I can feel that it will be coming soon."

Boeser, who said in September that his injuries forced him to do "nothing for four months straight," conceded he hasn't been skating as well as he would like but that, too, is getting better each game.

"Last year, the games he was scoring goals were not games he was just standing still shooting pucks," veteran Brandon Sutter said. "He was really good at both ends of the rink. When he's more engaged, he has that shot that he can get off and score goals. For him, it's just about playing well. I thought tonight he was much better and I think he felt that, too."

Canucks general manager Jim Benning said Wednesday there are no issues about Boeser's size – "it was good weight he added" – or recovery, and that it usually just takes longer for a player to find his game when he has missed as much time as Boeser did.

"He hit a post in Calgary (on Saturday) and if that goes in, we're probably not having this conversation," Benning said. "He just needs to concentrate on his two-way game and keep his speed up. He'll figure it out. It's just his second year in the league.

"He's no different than any other player except the expectations are much higher."

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1109435 Websites

TSN.CA / 'Friendly competition' between Tavares, Matthews drives Leafs

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team practiced for 30 minutes at American Airlines Center in Dallas before flying to Detroit for Thursday's game against the Red Wings.

The Maple Leafs have exploded out of the gate with a league-high 20 goals in four games. Thirteen of those goals have come from superstar centres Auston Matthews and John Tavares. The kid from Arizona has seven while the hometown hero has six. The pair will share the spotlight all season in Toronto.

How much will they push each other?

"I think a great deal," said Tavares. "We're both very driven and, obviously, you want to put yourself in that elite company and when you're able to go up against each other in practice and then play together, see what each other does on a daily basis, I think it's very motivating and a lot of fun to be around. I think when you have the competitiveness that we have it's just naturally going to push yourselves and make you better players."

Head coach Mike Babcock describes it as a "friendly competition," one which will benefit the team as a whole.

"When those guys are leading, I think the rest of the guys will follow suit," said defenceman Morgan Rielly. "When those guys are playing as well as they are, you know, it makes for a good feeling in the room. Guys want to up to the ante, their linemates want to be able to keep up and I think that's good. That's contagious and that's what good teams do."

Making the duo all the more interesting is how different they appear to be. Matthews is a fashion-forward 21-year-old from Arizona while Tavares, 28, seems to be more reserved. What unites them is the pursuit of excellence.

The Maple Leafs have exploded out of the gate with 20 goals in four games. 13 of those goals have come from superstar centres Auston Matthews and John Tavares. The pair will share the spotlight all season in Toronto and have already engaged in a friendly competition to be the best, Mark Masters has more.

Matthews, for example, worked on his skating throughout the summer and enters this season feeling more explosive than ever. Where is it helping him the most?

"I think just through the neutral zone," he said. "Sometimes you got to put the puck in and (get) there when the puck arrives and kind of being on top of their D, and (I'm) just skating through the neutral zone and trying to get through guys and create those chances."

Babcock is quick to point out Matthews was always a good skater and was only slowed a year ago by a series of injuries.

And yet, as good as he already was, teammates insist he's definitely a step faster now.

"He's taken it to a whole new level with speed," said Rielly, "and the way he can cut back and create room for himself."

The speed is one factor, but Matthews has also become even more elusive as well.

"He's always putting himself in a position to shoot the puck," noted Mitch Marner. "He's always moving out there and getting in open space."

Matthews spent about 10 minutes on the ice with Barb Underhill, the team's skating consultant, last week to fine-tune some of the adjustments they worked on in the summer.

Matthews says improved skating helping him the most in neutral zone

Auston Matthews worked hard on his skating this summer and he believes his improvements are helping him most through the neutral zone. His teammates agree that he has taken his speed to a whole new level this season.

Tavares, meanwhile, has impressed his new teammates with just how good he is down low in the offensive zone. He's an expert at maintaining possession.

"He's really shifty," noted Rielly, "and likes to use his size, has great hands and likes taking the puck to the net. He works very hard on his game and that's an area that he takes a lot of pride in."

"His stick is like a crowbar; I mean you can't lift it off the ice," observed Babcock.

How did Tavares develop his down-low ability? The answer, he says, is quite simple.

"It's not a lot of fun playing the game without the puck and that, in itself, is very motivating," Tavares said. "And it's where you want to be, in the offensive end making plays and playing with it and not having to chase and work for it so, I don't know, maybe it's that inner drive to win your battles."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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When he was recruited to the Leafs in the summer, Tavares told Babcock it was his preference to play the net-front role on the power play and so far he's fit in well on a stacked first unit, which has connected on five of 10 chances.

"What I like about the power play is we're not trying to make any highlight-reel plays," Tavares said after Tuesday's 7-4 win over the Dallas Stars. "I think we're just 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, the odds tend to be in your favour, especially when we've got the type of guys we've got on the ice. Just keep taking what's given and continue to work at it and understand who we're going up against on a nightly basis, what tendencies we face and make adjustments when we need to."

Entering Wednesday's games, Tavares leads the NHL in tipped shots (five).

What makes John Tavares so dominant down low in the offensive zone? According to Maple Leafs head coach Mike Babcock its because his stick is like a "crowbar" that can't be lifted off the ice.

The Leafs lines remained unchanged at Wednesday's practice and that's no surprise considering how happy Babcock was with the win over Dallas.

"I liked our game throughout much more than I have liked our other games," he said. "We had good intensity, good battle, everybody was focused, we had good detail in our game. I liked our game ... That was actually the most engaged we've been. We've done it once and now we've got to do it again."

Frederik Gauthier remains the fourth-line centre while Kasper Kapanen continues to look good on the right side of Matthews.

"Kappy's had two and now Goat's got to get to two," said Babcock. "You have to learn to do it every day. Those guys are in the process of figuring that out."

Leafs Ice Chips: Kapanen, Gauthier remain on trial

The Maple Leafs practised in Dallas on Wednesday before flying to Detroit for Thursday's game against the Red Wings. Frederik Gauthier continued to skate as the fourth-line centre and Kasper Kapanen remained as the right winger on the Auston Matthews line. But both young players, head coach Mike Babcock warns, still have a lot to prove.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Smith steals one for the Flames

Scott Cullen

Smith backstops the Flames to victory; Marnier, Seguin, Matthews, Tavares, Radulov, Rielly, Monahan and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

The Calgary Flames took a surprising 3-0 decision in Nashville Tuesday, thanks to veteran goaltender Mike Smith, who stopped all 43 shots that he faced for the shutout. That raises his save percentage to .906 in three games. He had previously allowed eight goals on 42 shots.

Predators winger Craig Smith and Kevin Fiala were the two most frustrated by Smith, as they combined for 11 shots on goal, including several high-quality chances.

Smith's injury was such a big part of the Flames falling off of the playoff pace, so it comes as no surprise that he is an important part of the Flames' hopes this season.

Smith has a .916 save percentage in 58 games with Calgary since the start of last season. His expected save percentage in that time (via Corsica Hockey) is .908, and his delta save percentage (save percentage minus expected save percentage) of .081 ranks seventh among starting goaltenders.

So, while his career has had some ups and downs, Smith has been very good since arriving in Calgary.

HEROES

Mitch Marnier – Toronto's playmaking winger put up a goal and three assists in a 7-4 win at Dallas, doubling his point total to give him eight points (2 G, 6 A) in four games.

Tyler Seguin – Dallas' top centre notched a goal with three helpers in a 7-4 loss to Toronto, giving him eight points (3 G, 5 A) in three games.

Auston Matthews and John Tavares – The Maple Leafs centres both scored two goals in a 7-4 win at Dallas. They have combined for 13 goals between them in four games.

Alexander Radulov – The Stars winger produced a goal and two assists against Toronto, and has seven points (3 G, 4 A) in three games.

Morgan Rielly is riding Toronto's early-season scoring wave.

Morgan Rielly – Toronto's top defender continued his stellar start to the season, posting four assists at Dallas. He has 10 points (2 G, 8 A) in four games.

Sean Monahan – Calgary's first-line centre scored a pair of goals in a 3-0 win at Nashville and has five points (4 G, 1 A) in three games. His left winger, Johnny Gaudreau assisted on all three Flames goals, giving him seven points (1 G, 6 A) in three games.

Nick Foligno – Columbus' captain tallied two goals and added an assist in a 5-2 win over Colorado, giving him four points (2 G, 2 A) in three games.

Kevin Labanc – The Sharks winger put up four assists in an 8-2 win at Philadelphia and has five points (1 G, 4 A) in four games.

Sven Baertschi – In a 5-3 loss at Carolina, the Canucks winger delivered a pair of goals plus an assist, his first points of the season.

ZEROES

Andrew MacDonald – It was a rough night for many Flyers, but the veteran defenceman was on the wrong side of the puck (9 for, 29 against, 23.7 CF%, 6-15 scoring chances) and on the ice for three goals against in an 8-2 loss to San Jose.

Brock Boeser – The sophomore Canucks winger had a tough game (8 for, 18 against, 30.8 CF%) and was on the ice for three goals against in a 5-3 loss at Carolina. He also had just one shot on goal, his third shot on goal in three games this season.

Mark Barberio – Colorado's blueliner struggled (1 for, 10 against, 9.1 CF%) in a 5-2 loss at Columbus.

Ben Bishop – The Dallas netminder surrendered six goals on 29 shots in a 7-4 loss to Toronto.

Brian Elliott – When your team gives up 48 shots as the Flyers did against San Jose, it's obviously not all on the goaltender, but eight goals against is still eight goals against.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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VITAL SIGNS

Kristian Vesalainen, Jack Roslovic, and Mathieu Perreault – The Jets' third line was benched against Los Angeles, with all three finishing under eight minutes of ice time.

SHORT SHIFTS

Sebastian Aho and the Hurricanes are off to a strong start.

Sharks LW Evander Kane and C Joe Pavelski both scored twice in an 8-2 rout at Philadelphia. Kane has four goals in four games and those were Pavelski's first points of the season...Sharks D Erik Karlsson and D Marc-Edouard Vlasic both had a couple of helpers and now both have three assists in four games...Flyers RW Wayne Simmonds recorded a goal and an assist in an 8-2 loss to San Jose, giving him four points (3 G, 1 A) in three games...Flyers LW Claude Giroux added a pair of assists and has four assists in three games...Hurricanes C Sebastian Aho had a goal and an assist in a 5-3 win against Vancouver. He has six points (2 G, 4 A) in four games...Hurricanes RW Teuvo Teravainen and D Jaccob Slavin both had a pair of assists. Teravainen has four points (1 G, 3 A) in four games and Slavin has three assists in four games...Canucks D Alexander Edler chipped in a couple of assists in a 5-3 loss at Carolina, giving him four assists in three games...Maple Leafs D Ron Hainsey had a goal and an assist in a 7-4 win at Dallas, his first points of the season. Maple Leafs RW Kasperii Kapanen added a couple of assists, his second straight multi-point game...The Sharks line of Marcus Sorensen, Antti Suomela and Joonas Donskoi controlled play (22 for, 2 against, 91.7 CF%, 12-2 scoring chances) at a ridiculous rate in an 8-2 rout at Philadelphia...Kings G Jack Campbell stopped 37 of 39 shots in a 2-1 loss at Winnipeg. He has a .948 save percentage in two starts.

FIRSTS

Sheldon Dries – The undrafted winger out of Western Michigan made his NHL debut for Colorado in a 5-2 loss at Columbus. He scored 10 goals in 22 AHL playoff games for Texas last season.

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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



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 11, 2018

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 Kasper 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.

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.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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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 Vasilevskiy 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.

1109439 Websites

TSN.CA / The inside story of Gritty's rise to fame

Frank Seravalli

PHILADELPHIA - He came in like a wrecking ball.

No, really, hockey's biggest offseason addition - Philadelphia Flyers mascot Gritty, not John Tavares - swung suspended from the rafters like a wrecking ball as he dropped into his regular-season debut at Wells Fargo Center on Tuesday night.

It was a monstrous night for the Broad Street Beast, who was born on Sept. 24 to reviews so ugly that he somehow became the internet's most lovable fur ball in 12 hours.

Not only was Gritty the most googled term in North America for the first day of his life but he also required a four-person security detail with earpieces at the Flyers' home opener to manage the swooning Gritizens of Philadelphia.

He was the Flyers' unquestioned MVP as they were thumped 8-2 by the San Jose Sharks in their worst season-opening loss in franchise history.

"Some of it comes down to Grit," goaltender Brian Elliott correctly said postgame.

"Gritty became like a little brother. You know, I can pick on him, but you can't. I think that's when people really jumped on-board."

Grit happens.

But how did this all happen? Is Gritty's popularity a case of accidental marketing brilliance or all part of the Flyers' plan? Maybe a bit of both.

Tuesday night marked Day 16 A.G., or "After Gritty," as it is now known in Philly. Here is an inside look at Gritty's first 24 hours in the world:

SARAH SCHWAB, Flyers director of marketing: "We were excited for him to be out in the world, but we were nervous. Gritty's first appearance was at a museum with 600 kids. We were all set up in the back, kind of waiting and thinking: 'We'll see how this goes ...'"

JOE HELLER: Flyers vice-president of marketing: "There were a little bit of nerves. We knew the reaction was going to be mixed."

SHAWN TILGER, Flyers chief operating officer: "It was a risk."

HELLER: "The reaction wasn't good. We were checking our phones, the tweets were pouring in. 'What is this thing?' We watched it in real time."

KEITH JONES, Flyers/NBC television analyst: "My first thought was that thing is curiously Philadelphian. It's a mascot with an edge."

OSKAR LINDBLOM, Flyers winger: "We'll see how gritty he is."

SCHWAB: "The rest of the afternoon went by, it was like: FIRE THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT! Fans wanted to tie cinderblocks to our shoes and throw us in the Delaware [River]."

CLAUDE GIROUX, Flyers captain: "First days are hard, but it gets better."

HELLER: "Part of it was tradition. We haven't had a mascot, so why did we need one now? The truth is we'd been talking about a mascot since the 2016 All-Star Game. We did over 100 different sketches.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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We figured no animal can represent who we are. We didn't want to go into aviation. A human-type character doesn't work unless you're a university. We needed a monster-type creature.

"That's when we said we need something you would see from Monsters Inc."

SCHWAB: "Let's just say he's got a unique look. He's more endearing in person."

HELLER: "It came down to safe or crazy. We looked around the league and said, 'Let's go crazy.'"

SCHWAB: "We planned for the mixed reaction. Our mascot consultant said it would be two weeks to two months for a mixed reaction time and that we needed to be ready with a plan to further integrate him."

HELLER: "The Penguins kind of did that for us. The reaction wasn't good until the Penguins sent a tweet that said, 'lol ok' in reply to Gritty's first tweet."

GRITTY: [inaudible grumbling]

Gritty responded: "Sleep with one eye open tonight, bird."

HELLER: "All of the sudden, our fans started turning, like, 'Okay, Gritty is going to stick it to the Penguins, I'm on board with that.'"

TILGER: "Gritty became like a little brother. You know, I can pick on him, but you can't. I think that's when people really jumped on-board."

HELLER: "Twitter started to light up with his antics on the ice that night for his first game. Gritty was on his back seconds into his first skating act. I'll never forget, I was up there and I turned to a Flyers colleague and I was like 'Did that look planned to you?' He said 'No, he just fell square on his back.' Then he shot someone in the back with a T-shirt cannon."

SCHWAB: "By the time I walked back to the office, which is like five or six minutes, he put out a tweet that said, 'Nobody told me ice was slippery.' Barstool picked it up. Within about 10 minutes, Good Morning America called and said, 'We're obsessed with Gritty.' It was late at night. That was really the first time I'd heard anyone say that."

HELLER: "The cherry on top was the Kim Kardashian tweet."

SCHWAB: "That was all Gritty. He's hilarious; he walks around with his phone in his back pocket. He sent that tweet at like 10:30 or 10:45 p.m."

HELLER: "I remember walking in my door, sitting on my step and seeing the likes on Twitter – it was like 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 – it just kept climbing, all the way to 58,000 likes. It was blowing up; it was like, 'Holy [bleep].' I think that's when Gritty started winning everyone over."

"You figure, he debuted at 11 a.m. and before 11 p.m. he was totally liked. I mean, there were a couple people hung up on his looks, but we had stuff lined up for the haters – like mean tweets and stuff – but we didn't even need that. People changed their minds already. It was a combination of him in the suit, his antics on the ice and social media. It was like the perfect storm."

Like a mother of any newborn, Schwab said she barely slept that first night.

SCHWAB: "I don't think anyone slept that night. I know I slept for maybe two hours. I had to be back at the rink at 4 a.m. for Gritty's appearance on Good Morning America. I came in and Gritty was having his coffee. I'm like, 'Did you sleep?'"

GRITTY: [shakes head no]

SCHWAB: "Jimmy Fallon set the rest in motion. We had a game that night. I knew we were going to take him up to Fallon's show, but there was no way we were going to get him out of Midtown Manhattan and back in time for the game."

HELLER: "By then, everyone was anticipating his next game. We needed to have him there."

TILGER: "I said let's get a helicopter. We had to have him back. You can't have him miss the game making an appearance – then he would be a sellout."

SCHWAB: "I never would have ever imagined that we would need a helicopter to ferry our mascot around because of demand."

HELLER: "We knew Gritty made it when Conan [O'Brien] and John Oliver used replicas of him. I have no idea how they made a suit in four days that took us four months."

SCHWAB: "He had a dressing room right next to Ricky Gervais. An intern brought in an autograph book. I was paging through it, the autographs were Steven Tyler, Hillary Clinton, Ethan Hawke, John Cena – all these big names, and Gritty had his own page. He even trolled Jimmy Fallon. He wrote, 'James, loved you in Fever Pitch – Gritty.'"

"What a trip. He was in his full gear in the helicopter, helmet on, and 20 minutes later we were back in Philly. He even had his own police escort back to the arena. We've gotten police escorts for famous acts like Bono and U2, but our building operations were more nervous getting Gritty back inside for our preseason game."

HELLER: "The popularity, we would've never guessed in a million years. There was a plan. We wanted to go all-in, we wanted to make waves. But the scale is beyond our imagination."

GIROUX, to Gritty: "Thanks for making time for the little people."

SCHWAB: "Each day has just gotten wilder and wilder."

TILGER: "We knew that like any icon in Philadelphia, he was going to have to earn his respect. Gritty is just like Philadelphia. We can pick on each other, but when somebody else tries to get involved, we stick up for each other."

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USA TODAY / NHL overreactions: Has Golden Knights' magic run out? Can Maple Leafs' offense carry them?

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

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Jumping to early conclusions is an NHL tradition as much as playoff beads and overtime goals.

Here are five overreactions in the first week of the season mixed in with some reality.

1. Golden Knights are falling back to earth

Reality: Better times are ahead. No one expects the Golden Knights to replicate last season's magical run to the Stanley Cup Final, but they are a sharper team than they have been in the first three games (1-2-0). They have scored five goals and allowed 10. This a Stanley



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Cup contender trying to find its rhythm after adding new pieces in the offseason (Paul Stastny and Max Pacioretty) and managing without top defenseman Nate Schmidt, who is sidelined by a 20-game suspension for a banned substance. Another truth: Goalie Marc-Andre Fleury's save percentage isn't going to stay at .841.

2. Ducks goalie John Gibson cannot sustain this level of play

Reality: Maybe he can. He's 25, and entering the prime of his career. When he was a teenager, scouts said he had the potential to be one of league's best. Since he entered the NHL, he owns a .924 save percentage. His save percentage has improved every season. Gibson, who has given up four goals on 95 shots, is a game-changer. He has the ability to keep the Ducks competitive even when they are overrun by injuries, like they are today.

3. Maple Leafs might be able to win it all on the strength of offense

Reality: No they can't. As bullish as we are on the Maple Leafs, they still must address their defensive shortcomings. Even with John Tavares in town and Auston Matthews playing like an MVP, the Maple Leafs are not going to average five goals per game all season. The test for first-year general manager Kyle Dubas will be to find a dependable 20-minute, defense-first blueliner to stabilize the back end. The 3-1-0 Maple Leafs are giving up 4.3 goals per game. You don't win Stanley Cups with defense like that.

4. Hurricanes are finally going to make the playoffs again

Reality: Way, way too early. What we know for sure is that this is an exciting and spirited group. Their skill on defense ranks among the best. Younger stars Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov are fueling considerable hope up front. General manager Don Waddell's offseason moves (acquiring Micheal Ferland, Jordan Martinook and Dougie Hamilton) have given the team a spark. The Hurricanes' post-game celebration of slamming into the plexiglass seems to signify the franchise's renewed energy. But it is still going to come down to goaltending for the Hurricanes, who are 3-0-1 and have given up 11 goals. Peter Mrazek's ability to be a No. 1 is questionable, while Scott Darling, who is injured, stumbled with his chance last year. Journeyman Curtis McElhinney is probably not a long-term solution.

5. Elias Pettersson will make Canucks forget about the Sedin twins

Reality: Too strong. But Pettersson will be a superstar. Maybe he already is one. Pettersson, the fifth pick in the 2017 draft, was the regular-season leading scorer and playoff MVP in the Swedish League last season. While registering six points in his first three NHL games, he has shown himself to be a dynamic, crowd-pleasing presence. Vancouver fans will love him as much as they loved the Sedins.