



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

In the big picture, the Carolina Hurricanes are doing what it takes to win

By Luke DeCock

It's easy to get caught up worrying about the malfunctioning special teams or Martin Necas' unfortunate failure to make a quick adjustment to the NHL or any of the other flaws in the Carolina Hurricanes highlighted over the past four days.

It was just as easy to overlook all of that over the first 10 days of the season when everything else was going right and the Hurricanes had yet to lose in regulation, when the goals came in bunches and 81-0-1 seemed so tantalizingly within reach.

There's only one real takeaway from the Hurricanes' 4-2-1 start and the losses in Winnipeg and Tampa to close it out: Amid all the noise and static, the Hurricanes have played, in all seven games, the way they want to play. The way that should, eventually, bring them whatever degree of success they're going to have. In the big picture, at even strength at least, it's just about everything they could have wanted from the first two weeks.

They have given themselves a chance to win every game, and that's all they can ask.

Even as he catalogs all the little areas where his team needs work, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour can take a step back and feel good about the big picture.

"Really good," Brind'Amour said. "We're giving up chances, but we're going to anyway. The effort's been there."

It's too early to overreact to the other stuff, good or bad.

The power play should be fixable, by redistributing the talent among units and decreasing the outsized role Justin Faulk has had so far. (He's much more effective as a designated shooter at the right point than he is flying solo at the blue line in the four-forward power play that all the hip coaches insist upon these days.) There's too much raw offensive talent, with Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton and the net-front presence of Micheal Ferland, for

there not to be at least one combination that clicks. It's just a question of finding it and being patient with the puck.

This team was going to have issues at center whether Necas was ready or not, and they have been camouflaged somewhat by Jordan Staal's outstanding two-way play and Sebastian Aho's prodigious production even as he continues to adjust to the position. Perhaps Clark Bishop, swapped from Charlotte (AHL) for Necas, will be able to bring a little energy and discipline to the position, even if he lacks Necas' skill level.

And while the Hurricanes were victimized for the umpteenth time by backup goaltenders in Winnipeg and Tampa, and their goaltending has yet to steal them a game like that, they haven't been let down in net yet either – and they still haven't gotten a real look at the slimmer Scott Darling.

More important is the free-flowing, aggressive style of play that Brind'Amour has championed. With the exception of Tuesday night in Tampa, when the Hurricanes looked tired as a team in their third game in four days on the road, they have outthustled all of their opponents. They have certainly outchanced them.

The results have been good. The process has been better: Only San Jose is generating more high-danger scoring chances at even strength

Of course, there's more to this than five-on-five play. Being outscored 9-2 on special teams through seven games is no way to go through life.

But the Hurricanes have avoided the fabled bad start, have put what may be their most difficult road trip of the year behind them and can feel pretty good about not only the way they have played but their ability to keep playing that way.

As starts go, for a new coach and what in many ways is a new team, that's even better than nine points from seven games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018



Hurricanes practice diary

By Adam Gold

In a season of change the Carolina Hurricanes decided not to rest on a 4-2-1 start and shuffled the deck a bit. Martin Necas and Haydn Fleury, each first round draft picks (2013 and 2017, respectively) were sent to the American Hockey League on Wednesday as the team brought up Clark Bishop from the Charlotte Checkers.

That Necas had scored his first NHL goal less than 24 hours prior didn't change the opinion of the decision-makers within the organization. Necas logged a team-low 6:43 of ice time, often against the Steven Stamkos or J.T. Miller lines. As a result, in a tight game, it was difficult to keep the Necas line out there and the ice time reflected the dilemma. It was a similar situation, though not as consistent, Sunday in Winnipeg, as the Jets often countered with their top line when Necas' trio went over the boards.

Playing center in the NHL is difficult for grown men, so you know this has been an adjustment for the 19-year old from the Czech Republic. Necas needs to play more than 10 minutes per night, and he'll now get that chance in the American Hockey League. Same goes for Haydn Fleury, who had a very good training camp, but is blocked from the line up by better players. Sitting in the press box eating Chex mix is okay for me, but not for a still-developing defenseman.

Fleury will log heavy minutes for the Checkers and come back when the team needs him in the line up. Necas will do the same, and it's the hope of Rod Brind'Amour that he'll only be gone a short time before returning to the big club.

* Clark Bishop, a center who was off to a good start for the Checkers, was recalled to replace Necas on the roster. He's scored a goal and dished off a pair of assists in Charlotte's 4-0 start and can play in all situations. He was impressive in training camp, earning a longer stay than most expected.

* Bishop was a 5th round pick in the 2014 draft. He turned pro following his junior career with Cape Breton in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League where he was a solid, two-way center. He's the 5th player from the Canes' 2014 draft class to reach the NHL. He follows Fleury (1), Alex Nedeljkovic (2), Warren Foegele (3) and Lucas Wallmark (4) to the Hurricanes. Nedeljkovic, of course, was really just an emergency call-up, but statistics are statistics.

* Scott Darling, sidelined for three weeks with a lower body injury, has been skating and working out, normally before the team practices. But Thursday, Scott was on the ice with the full group and is apparently close to a return to action. Traffic in front of the net is what all teams strive for, but having that traffic come from having too many goaltenders isn't ideal. When asked if Darling would do a conditioning stint in the minors, head coach Rod Brind'Amour was non-committal. "We still have to figure that out", Brind'Amour said after practice on Thursday. "But, we're going to make sure he's fully healthy before he gets back into game action."

* Petr Mrazek has just one win in four starts for the Hurricanes, and his overall numbers are nothing to send to the Hall of Fame. But, he was very good in his last two starts — albeit both losses — and I'd expect he'll get the nod when the Hurricanes host the Colorado Avalanche Saturday afternoon at 1:00 (99.9 the Fan/Fox Sports Carolinas).

* Phil DiGiuseppe cleared waivers but will stay with the Hurricanes for the time being. The Canes have 30 days of roster flexibility with DiGiuseppe, who's played in just two of Carolina's first seven games. As long as he doesn't play more than 10 games in that span the Canes can send him to Charlotte without having to be put through waivers again. In addition, having already gone through the waiver process, should the Hurricanes include him in a trade, the receiving team would have the option to send Phil to their minor league team.

* Sebastian Aho has at least one point in all seven games this season (4 goals, 8 assists).

* Carolina has just two goals from defensemen, both from Brett Pesce. Justin Faulk leads the group with four assists. Jaccob Slavin and Dougie Hamilton each have three.

* Brock McGinn is without a scoring point through the first seven games.

* Colorado is 4-1-2 on the year, coming off a 5-3 win in New Jersey. Gabriel Landeskog registered a hat trick in the game and now has five goals in the Avs first eight games. Nathan McKinnon leads Colorado with eight goals on the year. Mikko Rantanen leads the team in scoring with 13 points.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018



Notebook: Why the Canes Shuffled the Deck

Necas will improve game, see more ice time in Charlotte
by Michael Smith

Following a scheduled day off on Wednesday, the Carolina Hurricanes got back on the frozen sheet at Raleigh Center Ice on Thursday for a team practice, one that included a new face in Clark Bishop and a good-to-see-again face in Scott Darling.

After playing three road games in a span of four nights (1-2-0), a trip that took the team north and west before back into the States and further south, the Canes are utilizing a three-day gap in between games to recoup energy levels and tinker with the finer portions of their game.

"Of all the games that we played, that one in Tampa was a little off as far as the energy level. I've got to watch that, and that's why we need four lines to play," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Every part of our game we want to get better at. We spent times on special teams, obviously, but there are little details to our game that aren't great, so we're trying to touch up on all of them."

One of the focuses in practice was the power play, which is just 2-for-25 (8 percent) to start the season and surrendered a shorthanded goal in the Canes' 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay on Tuesday.

"We want to get the zone time. Our entries were great last game, the best of the year. We got in every time, but then we started rushing things," Brind'Amour explained. "That's what kind of happens when you talk about how we've got to score on the power play, we start taking 5-on-5 shots. Those aren't effective. We've got to get back to knowing we have some good talent out there and make it work. Relax a little bit. Go through your set and what we're trying to do as opposed to just rushing shots."

Sending Necas and Fleury to Charlotte

Many of you may have been confused when you saw the news drop Wednesday afternoon: Martin Necas and Haydn Fleury assigned to Charlotte? Didn't Necas score his first NHL goal the night prior in Tampa Bay?

He did, but he also logged just 6:43 of ice time, a season low for the 19-year-old Czech rookie. And Fleury had played in just one of the team's first seven games. This roster move will allow both players, still developing as professionals, to log top minutes and play in varied situations in Charlotte.

"We didn't want them, especially with Haydn, sitting anymore," Brind'Amour said. "It didn't feel right taking guys out of the lineup just to put a guy in. That doesn't sit right

with me. If you're playing well, you should be able to stay in. [Fleury] just needs to play."

In addition to seeing nearly 20 minutes of ice time a night in Charlotte, Necas can also acclimate himself more to the North American game; it's a learning experience for a young center.

"He's playing a tough position at center. It's a really hard position. He's an NHL-caliber talent, but we've got to get him better away from the puck. I want him to have confidence when he comes back to us that he's ready to do that. Get him a little more playing time. I don't envision him being down there very long," Brind'Amour said. "He's competitive and wants to learn. The talent is there."

The Checkers' Nick Niedzielski offers additional context for this situation after speaking with Charlotte head coach Mike Vellucci and Necas.

Bishop Takes the Ice

Traveling the opposite direction on I-40 Wednesday afternoon was forward Clark Bishop. He joined the Canes at practice on Thursday and centered the fourth line with Valentin Zykov and Brock McGinn on either side of him.

"Brock is a good, hard-working guy, and Z can put the puck in the net," Bishop said. "I think a bring a lot to the table with my speed and physicality."

Bishop is set to make his NHL debut on Saturday afternoon when the Canes host the Avalanche.

"We want to see what he's done all training camp and in all his games down in Charlotte. That energy, that competitiveness. That's what he brings," Brind'Amour said. "It'd be nice if he chipped in here or there, but that's not what we're expecting. We're expecting good, hard, honest effort."

Darling Back at Practice

After traveling with the team on the most recent road trip, goaltender Scott Darling rejoined the Canes at practice on Thursday, rotating reps with Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney.

"He's going to tell me he's ready to go, for sure, but I think we've got to be careful," Brind'Amour said. "You don't want to push it too, too soon. They'll keep working with him. I know he's getting real close."

Prior to starting his first regular-season game, an AHL conditioning stint could still be under consideration, but Brind'Amour said a final decision has yet to be made.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

And, as for carrying three goaltenders once Darling is healthy, Brind'Amour said this: "I don't think there'd be a long-term way to do that, necessarily."

Di Giuseppe Clears Waivers

Forward remains on Canes' roster

by Michael Smith

Forward Phil Di Giuseppe has cleared waivers and remains on the Carolina Hurricanes' roster.

The Hurricanes can now assign Di Giuseppe to Charlotte without sending him through waivers for the next 30 days,

Canes Continue Climb in Power Rankings

Hurricanes still ranking high after 4-2-1 start

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes have dropped two straight games in regulation, but they still sit atop the Metropolitan Division with nine points (4-2-1) through their first seven games.

Because of their early-season success, the Canes continue to climb or at the very least remain steady in the latest collection of power rankings from around the internet.

NHL.com

Hurricanes rank: 9

Previous rank: 10

"The Hurricanes are averaging 42.0 shots on goal per game, most in the NHL. They're giving up 25.3 shots on goal per game, third fewest in the NHL."

Worth noting with NHL.com's power ranking system: They compile top-16 lists from 13 staff writers in order to amalgamate a ranking consensus. Among these lists, the Hurricanes ranked as high as 4 (Adam Kimelman), as low as not being ranked in the top 16 (Nick Cotsonika) and many places in between (6, 7, 8, 9, 9, 10, 11, 11, 12, 12, 13).

ESPN

Hurricanes rank: 7

Previous rank: 9 (preseason: 22)

"The fresh-faced Canes are all about embracing the fun. But this is a dangerous team that has scored a league-high 20 even-strength goals and is firing a league-high 42 shots per game. Even with a new coach, some things never change:

given that he doesn't play in 10 games in that time. As noted on Wednesday, it's a move that gives the Canes roster flexibility in the coming weeks.

The Hurricanes made an additional roster move on Wednesday afternoon, recalled forward Clark Bishop from Charlotte and assigning forward Martin Necas and defenseman Haydn Fleury to the Checkers.

Carolina is dominating in possession metrics (it currently ranks first in the NHL in Corsi for percentage)."

Sportsnet

Hurricanes rank: 6

Previous rank: 6

"Tough to see much to pick at in Carolina. We would say it's unfortunate that \$16.6-million goalie Scott Darling is starting the season on the sidelines, but Curtis McElhinney has been solid as his fill in."

TSN

Hurricanes rank: 4

Previous rank: 8

"Coach Rod Brind'Amour is off to an impressive start earning at least a point in the first five games before finally losing in Winnipeg. Forward Sebastian Aho is fourth in NHL scoring with 11 points."

CBS Sports

Hurricanes rank: 4

Previous rank: 11

"They're aggressive, and they don't plan on changing."

Yahoo! Sports

Hurricanes rank: 7

Previous rank: 7

"'Okay, but now imagine if this team had competent goaltending' is the name of the book I'm writing about almost every Hurricanes season since the lockout."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018



Giordano and Hamilton: Separate and Thriving

By Kyle Gipe

When the Calgary Flames and Carolina Hurricanes agreed to a trade on June 23, 2018 that sent defenseman Dougie Hamilton to Carolina, it had the potential to be monumental. It meant breaking up a defense pair of Mark Giordano and Hamilton that had been the Flames' best and one of the league's best pairs the past two seasons. It was a move that could have had serious repercussions on both players as well as both teams. However, as it's played out in the early portions of the season, Giordano and Hamilton have been fine apart from each other.

Hamilton's Arrival in Calgary

As most fans are aware of, Hamilton wasn't a lifelong Calgary Flame. Rather, they acquired him from the Boston Bruins in June 2015, nearly three years to the day before his trade to the Hurricanes. As a Bruin, he played in 178 games with 22 goals and 83 points across three seasons from age 19 through 21. He primarily played on a pair with Zdeno Chara and had success, including his final season when he averaged over 20 minutes a game, netted double-digit goals, and totaled 40-plus points for the first times in his career.

When the Flames acquired him, Hamilton had just played the final year of his rookie contract and didn't have a new deal in place. They quickly inked him to a six-year deal and he played the majority of the 2015-16 season, his first in Calgary, with Kris Russell as his partner. In over 500 minutes of five-on-five ice time together, the pair didn't have strong metrics with sub-50 percent control of shots, scoring chances, and goals.

That same season, Giordano generally played on a pair with T.J. Brodie and the duo controlled just over 50 percent of the same categories. In 2016-17, new Flames head coach Glen Gulutzan put Giordano and Hamilton together for the first time and the best defense pair in the league was established.

Putting Giordano and Hamilton Together

During the 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons, the Giordano/Hamilton pair was Calgary's most used with over 900 shared five-on-five minutes in 2016-17 and over 1,200 minutes last season. In 2017-18, Giordano played over 88 percent of his five-on-five minutes with Hamilton as his partner.

First Season as Partners

In their inaugural season as a pair, Giordano and Hamilton played nearly 300 more five-on-five minutes than any other Flames pair. They excelled from the start with 66.2 percent control of goals and 58.3 percent control of shots and the

team attempted 34.1 shots per-60 at five-on-five with them on the ice. Among Flames pairs with at least 200 shared minutes, they were tops in all three. Conversely, Calgary allowed 24.4 five-on-five shots per-60 with them on the ice, second-best on the team.

Further Gelling in 2017-18

Giordano and Hamilton played together even more last season with 1,258 shared five-on-five minutes, nearly 200 more than Calgary's second-most deployed pair of Travis Hamonic and Brodie. Giordano and Hamilton were again the team's best pair and led in control of goals and shots and the team generated its most shots and allowed its fewest shots per-60 with them deployed.

Relative to the League

In their two seasons as a pair, Giordano and Hamilton rated well compared to the league. Among pairs with at least 1,000 shared five-on-five minutes, they ranked first in shot control and in attempted shots with 36.0 shots per-60. Additionally, they were top-five in goals for percentage and shots against per-60 and tied for sixth in goals allowed per-60.

Five-on-five metrics for the Mark Giordano/Dougie Hamilton pair in 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Impact on Each Other

What was impressive about Giordano and Hamilton as a pair was that while neither are considered top-five at their position, both managed to have a positive impact on the other, which allowed the pair to become so dynamic. In 2016-17, they had great metrics together and controlled over 55 percent of shots, goals, scoring chances, and high danger scoring chances when together.

When Hamilton had a different partner, the team's control of goals and high danger scoring chances dropped to below 50 percent while shots and scoring chances were just above 50 percent. When Giordano was with a partner other than Hamilton, his metrics dropped below 50 percent across the board. Furthermore, when the Flames deployed pairs that featured neither Giordano nor Hamilton, the team controlled less than 49 percent in all four areas.

The same was true last season, again with over 52 percent control in every area when together. Without Giordano, Hamilton's metrics dropped to almost exactly 50 percent across the board. Meanwhile, Giordano's control of goals dropped below 50 percent while his other metrics were just above that threshold. When neither were on the ice, the team's metrics fell considerably.

Hamilton Goes to Raleigh



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

When the Flames traded Hamilton to the Hurricanes, they knew they were giving up one of their best players and were going to struggle to recoup enough value to make the trade equal. There was speculation as to why he was traded, most of which was rooted in rumors that he wasn't bothered by the culture of losing that persisted in Calgary. Regardless of the validity of those rumors, adding a top pair blueliner to the already-capable defense in Carolina has allowed for a relatively smooth transition.

Since the start of the season, Hamilton has mostly paired with 24-year-old Jaccob Slavin, both at five-on-five and on the power play. Slavin has been a productive player in his career with 15 goals and 84 points in 227 games. He also averaged at least 20 minutes per game in all three full seasons entering this season. He spent the majority of last season on a pair with Brett Pesce and the duo had strong metrics with Slavin possessing the stronger numbers.

Finding a New Defense Partner

So far in 2018-19, Hamilton and Slavin have picked up where each left off last season. In 99 shared five-on-five minutes, they have controlled at least 60 percent of goals and shots, ranking second in both among Carolina defense pairs. They also lead the team's pairs in five-on-five minutes and in shot attempts with 44.1 per-60. They have accomplished this while starting in the offensive zone 30.8 percent of the time, lowest among the Hurricanes defense pairs with at least 50 shared minutes.

Relative to other pairs in the league with at least 50 minutes together, Hamilton and Slavin rank sixth in five-on-five minutes and are in the top-five in shots generated per-60. They are also tied for 19th in goal control and have the 31st-highest offensive zone starting percentage.

Where Dougie Hamilton and Jaccob Slavin rank as a pair in 2018-19. Uses a 50-minute minimum for both the Carolina Hurricanes and the league.

Metrics Bode Well for Both Players

When deployed, the Hamilton/Slavin pair has controlled play by a considerable margin. So far they have controlled over 55 percent of shots, goals, scoring chances, and high danger chances at five-on-five. This includes 60.8 percent of shots, which as I indicated above, ranks ninth in the league. Both players have also done well to make the other better.

When separate, which has been less than 30 five-on-five minutes on the season, Hamilton has a higher control of scoring chances than when they are together. Meanwhile, when he is partnered with someone other than Hamilton, all of Slavin's metrics except shot control drop relative to when he's with Hamilton. Yet Slavin's goal and shot control are higher than those of Hamilton's when they are apart.

When the Hurricanes deploy a pair that doesn't include Hamilton or Slavin, their metrics are still strong, with at least 52 percent control in all areas. They are actually higher in control of goals and high danger chances without the pair on the ice. Understandable, as this was a team that finished top-five in the league in control of shots and scoring chances last season.

Shows how Dougie Hamilton and Jaccob Slavin have performed when together and when separate. Also shows how the Hurricanes have controlled play when neither player is on the ice.

Giordano Back with Brodie

With Hamilton's departure, Giordano was put back on a pair with Brodie, his most common partner in 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16. They were the fourth-most deployed pair at five-on-five in the league during that span. Yet when Giordano was paired with Hamilton and Brodie was partnered with different defensemen, Brodie struggled the past two seasons. Paired mostly with Dennis Wideman and Hamonic, Brodie's rate stats dropped in all situations each of the past two years.

T.J. Brodie's scoring rate trends from 2014-15 through 2017-18. He last played with Mark Giordano in 2015-16 and was forced to play with different partners in 2016-17 and 2017-18. Notice the sizable dropoff in production from 2015-16 to 2016-17.

Second Stint as Calgary's Most Used Pair

Since being put back together, Giordano and Brodie have been very good in 84 five-on-five minutes, the most on the team as no other Flames pair has played together more than 46 minutes. With them on the ice, the Flames have controlled 87.5 percent of goals and 56.3 percent of shots, both second on the team. The team has also attempted 34.8 shots and allowed 27.0 shots per-60 with them on the ice, second and third-highest on the team, respectively.

Relative to the league, the Giordano/Brodie pair ranks well, but not as well as Hamilton and Slavin. Giordano and Brodie are in the top-25 in all categories listed above, including second in control of goals. That's among defense pairs with at least 50 shared five-on-five minutes.

Where Mark Giordano and T.J. Brodie rank as a pair this season. For their rank on the Calgary Flames, it's among pairs with at least 30 shared five-on-five minutes, while a 50-minute minimum is used for NHL pairs.

Giordano Picking up the Slack Again

During their first tenure as primary defense partners, Giordano was tasked with picking up Brodie and had to be the stronger of the two. In over 2,700 five-on-five minutes between 2013-14 and 2015-16, the pair had positive metrics in control of shots, goals, and scoring chances but fell just short of 50 percent in high danger scoring chances. Separately, Giordano had the higher metrics in control of shots, scoring chances, and high danger chances while Brodie outpaced him in goal control. It's a similar story this season.

As a pair, the duo has dominated the metrics with at least 52 percent control in all four areas. Yet when either plays with different partner, their metrics suffer in general, although Giordano's control of high danger chances with someone other than Brodie as his partner actually increased. When both defensemen are separate from each other, Giordano has the higher metrics in all but goal control, where both are at zero percent. It's evident that Giordano anchors that pair.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Mark Giordano and T.J. Brodie's with or without you metrics from this season. When together, the pair has nearly dominated play. However, when separate, Giordano has been the stronger player.

Both Players Will Continue to Be Fine

If there's anything to learn from the trade that sent Hamilton to Carolina, it's that both he and Giordano are exceptional defensemen in their own rights. They may have been one of the best pairs in the league the past two seasons, but each is still great apart from the other and should continue to be moving forward.

Hamilton has established a strong dynamic with Slavin and has added to what was already a solid crop of young defensemen in Carolina. He helped round out a top-four that already included Justin Faulk, Pesce, and Slavin, all 26 or younger. In Calgary, Giordano has found himself in familiar territory with Brodie as his partner and should help Brodie rebound.

Both Giordano and Hamilton should continue to have positive impacts on their teams. Both have proven that they are strong individual defensemen and their abilities to adapt could make the monumental trade that send Hamilton to Carolina a rare win-win for both the Flames and Hurricanes.



Sebastian Aho's Hot Start Answers Many Questions

The third-year Finn is off to the best start of his NHL career, and he's doing it at the center position.

By Andrew Ahr

One of the biggest question marks for the Carolina Hurricanes after Victor Rask's injury ruled him out for an extended period of time was the depth down the middle - or, more specifically, the lack of depth - in this Hurricanes lineup. Coming of camp Jordan Staal was really the only tried-and-true NHL center on the active roster, and it's been evident for years that overslotting Staal in a top line scoring role is counterproductive for both his offensive numbers and his (criminally underrated) defensive game.

The development or acquisition of a future top line center in Raleigh has long been comparable to Captain Ahab's endless search for his white whale. Some thought that the sneaky second rounder Victor Rask would eventually grow into that coveted role. Many thought the Canes had addressed the future by selecting Elias Lindholm fifth overall in the 2013 NHL Draft. Neither of those picks grew into a player that can be considered a top line centerman. But Sebastian Aho's meteoric rise may indicate that the Canes' search is finally over.

With a helper in the loss to Tampa Bay on Tuesday, Aho extended the point streak that he started on opening night to seven games. His hot start has been welcomed but unsurprising for those who have watched his development over the past few years in the NHL. But something that many of us didn't expect was his seamless transition from the wing

to the center position after struggling there in preseason play.

Just how good has Aho been? Well, his 12 points (4g, 8a) has him sitting in fourth place in the scoring race, just four points behind the prolific Auston Matthews. I'd say that's a pretty good start to the season for a 21-year-old who has historically needed time to heat up in October.

Furthermore, he's elevated his linemates, Micheal Ferland and Teuvo Teravainen, to point-per-game status, and Ferland is off to the biggest start of his NHL career. This is something that doesn't get talked about enough when assessing a scoring centerman. Aho has been able to use his presence and speed on the ice to open up opportunities for Teravainen and Ferland.

But the most impressive thing about Aho's hot start is his ability to garner the Triangle area some national media attention. The league is finally taking notice of the young Finn. A seven game sample size is much too small to uncover anything too meaningful from his underlying metrics, but his hot 12-point start has him on pace to shatter his 65-point career high last season. Sustained scoring at or close to his current pace would certainly have him in the conversation as an elite center in the NHL today.

At Hurricanes media day in September, Justin Williams was asked about Aho and where he felt like the exciting youngster's ceiling was as a player. Visibly agitated, he said, "I hate talking about ceilings for people," and went on to say that Aho really has no ceiling as a player. It's beginning to look like the captain was right.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Metropolitan Division Weekly Roundup: Carolina Hurricanes are Still in First!

Despite two regular season losses this week the Canes still stay in first, but teams are prowling.

By Zeke Lukow

1. Carolina Hurricanes: 9 Points (4-2-1)

Carolina faced a very tough road trip this week and came out with a 1-2-0 record with a lone win against the Minnesota Wild. The Canes earned their first two regular season losses against the Winnipeg Jets and Tampa Bay Lightning. While this doesn't look good on paper, they did not give up in any of these games, putting up a fight until the absolute last second. The Canes have not lost a game by multiple goals in which they did not pull the goalie.

While they looked good in these three games, there is one major point that is separating them from being one of the top tier teams in the league, and that is their power play. Against any team, you need to take advantage of the man advantage to extend your lead. The Canes tried changing things up by including Valentin Zykov on the power play on Tuesday and also switched up the defensemen between Justin Faulk, Jaccob Slavin, and Dougie Hamilton, but neither seemed to work.

Heading into multiple days of rest, the Canes are likely to put all their work into the special teams. The Canes are playing dominant hockey five on five. Between the game against the Wild and the game against the Jets they generated 100 shots. Against the Jets they hit three posts. The puck luck is likely to turn around on the five-on-five, but things must change when they have the man power advantage.

2. New Jersey Devils: 8 Points (4-0-0)

Out of all the teams to have a hot start, the New Jersey Devils pose the biggest threat to the Hurricanes. The Devils are another borderline team with the talent that was likely to fall off this season after outperforming last season. The Canes and Devils are teams that are likely to compete for the same postseason spot, so to see this team opening their season 4-0-0 is particularly hard to swallow.

A huge part of their success is winger Kyle Palmieri, who has scored seven of the Devils' 17 goals. The reigning Hart Trophy winner, Taylor Hall, is still goalless and has four assists on the season. The problem is that Hall was the main reason this team won games last season. When he is on he is unstoppable, and when this team can cover for when he is slumping, they set themselves up for good things to come.

3. Washington Capitals: 7 Points (3-2-1)

The big news around Washington, D.C. is that the Capitals seem to be unable to win a faceoff. The defending champs went into their game against the Rangers last night with the second worst faceoff percentage in the league at 48.3%, down from 50.4% last season. Teams are generally able to overcome these struggles with speed and strong forechecking to get to loose pucks off the draw or force a mistake on the first pass. It will be interesting to see if this is a blip in the radar or a real weakness for the Caps.

One thing that is not a weakness is their power play. The Caps continue to be strong with the man advantage because of Alex Ovechkin, who scored two more goals from his office last night. Everyone just says to stick a man on Ovi to limit his ability to score these goals, but doing that will leave either Evgeny Kuznetsov open on the wall or T.J. Oshie open in the slot. Combine those shooters with Nicklas Backstrom distributing the puck and John Carlson playing point, and it becomes a game of pick your poison with the top unit.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets: 6 Points (3-2-0)

The Blue Jackets had been off to quite a hot start until they ran into the Lightning on Saturday. While the Canes were able to keep it close against the Stanley Cup contenders, the Blue Jackets were...not. They lost the game 8-2 in Tampa, with all eight goals coming against starting goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky.

What makes this situation so strange is that Columbus was not coming off a back-to-back, nor were they preparing for one. John Tortorella could have switched to his backup goaltender at any time, but decided to leave Bobrovsky in net while he was getting shelled. The goaltender let up three goals in the first but stayed in. Even worse he did not get help when he let up four in the third.

Leaving a goalie in too long can strain the relationship between player and coach; ask Patrick Roy. The question is, will this be a motivating moment, or will Bobrovsky felt pushed away a la Roy and the Canadiens in 1995.

5. Pittsburgh Penguins: 6 Points (2-1-2)

The Pittsburgh Penguins received more bad news on the injury front this week. Defender Justin Schultz will be out four months with a lower leg fracture. While Schultz was originally traded from the Oilers to the Penguins in the 2015-2016 season, he has become a regular with the Penguins averaging over 17 minutes per game playing on the Pens' second pairing in the 2017-18 season.

The Pens have also seen another shakeup in their defense with Olli Maatta falling somewhat out of favor. The 24-year-old has been a mainstay on the Pittsburgh roster for the past six years. Maatta came into the league with a high ceiling but has struggled to reach his full potential. This year he was a rare healthy scratch against the Vegas Golden Knights last Thursday. Now, after the injury to Schultz, both Maatta and his potential replacement Juuso Riihola, a free agent signing from Sweden, will have to step up to play full time in Schultz's absence.

6. Philadelphia Flyers: 6 points (3-3-0)

The Flyers are third to last in goals allowed per game at 4.17. Only the Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Blackhawks have been worse over the start of the season. Goaltending and a young defense has been the issue for the Flyers over the past three seasons.

Another large part of the Flyers' struggles has been discipline. The Flyers have 35 penalties, tied for the most in the league with the Detroit Red Wings, and they have only been able to kill penalties at a 72% rate, the seventh worst



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

rate in the league. The Flyers have to turn it around and help their goaltending out if they expect to be able to contend for a playoff spot this season. Just two weeks in and it seems that they may be too sloppy to make a serious push in the Metropolitan Division.

7. New York Rangers: 5 Points (2-4-1)

There might be a new head coach in New York, but David Quinn is facing a familiar issue: "How do you motivate Pavel Buchnevich?" The young Russian winger shows a ton of promise and potential, but the prevailing thought is that he doesn't give a ton of effort. For a team looking to rebuild, the 23 year old, skilled winger looks to factor into the team for the foreseeable future. However, Quinn healthy scratched Buchnevich before the game against the Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday, a game which ended up being a shootout win for the Rangers.

One player that has never been accused of quitting, Henrik Lundqvist, is still keeping the Rangers in games, probably more so than they would like. He made a few incredible saves against both the Avs and Caps which ended up giving the Rangers three points in two nights. This team is looking to tank, but the King is keeping them from fully actualizing that goal. It will be interesting to see how the Rangers handle

both of their goalies going forward to still ensure they can get the best odds in the lottery they can get.

8. New York Islanders: 4 Points (2-3-0)

The main issue that the Islanders are facing is a lack of offense. They have the seventh worst goals for per game, 2.40 and seventh worst shots for per game with 27.2. This was one of the biggest concerns coming into the season with the loss of John Tavares, and the new acquisitions have not been able to fill the hole left by his departure. The Isles brought in five new skaters over the offseason, who have combined for just six points and three goals. Tavares alone has six goals and 11 total points.

The Islanders' new goaltending tandem of Thomas Greiss and Robin Lehner has been much improved over last year's duo. The pair have only let up 2.80 goals per game which is 10th best in the league, up from the league worst 3.57 goals against per game last season. With so many new players on one team and with a new coach, it may take until mid-November for these guys to gel and develop chemistry. If the goaltending can still perform above league average, the Islanders may have a chance to make up ground in the division.

THE ATHLETIC

Could a big fall trade improve the fortunes of your NHL team?

By Jonathan Willis

The rumour mill may run every month of the year, but it's a different story for the NHL's actual trade market. The fall is one of those times where speculation greatly exceeds action, which is why no general manager should want to find himself leaning on the trade market for a solution to a major problem in the first half of the season.

Thirty-five players were dealt between Oct. 5 and Dec. 31 last season, which doesn't sound so bad, really. But 23 of them played fewer than 25 games after being moved, and for 13 of them the number was zero. Some of those deals looked like the one Anaheim and Tampa Bay agreed to Thursday:

With one-third of the players being full-time minor-leaguers, and another third not playing enough (with the arguable exception of a couple of backup goalies) to really help their teams, that means right from the get-go only one in three of the players dealt even stood a chance of moving the needle with his new club.

Most of them didn't do much. Nic Dowd had three points in 40 games for Vancouver. Aged wingers Jussi Jokinen and Mike Cammalleri were dealt for each other and scored at similar rates after being moved; neither did enough to earn a contract for this season. Torrey Mitchell, in much the same boat as those two, has also since fallen out of the league. Scott Wilson was traded twice, having gone scoreless in 17 games for the Red Wings after arriving in Detroit on Oct. 21.

Eliminate the waiver-wire-calibre trades from this last group and there are only four deals left over: one massive blockbuster that badly damaged the team that got the best player in the deal; one nice need-for-need swap that helped both clubs; and two little something-for-nothing trades that both benefited Jim Rutherford's Pittsburgh Penguins.

Depending on who is doing the counting, that means three or maybe four of the league's 31 teams were able to substantially improve their immediate fortunes through a fall trade in 2017-18. What did those look like? Can we learn something from them?

Something for Nothing

To the Penguins: Riley Sheahan, 2018 fifth-round pick

To the Red Wings: Scott Wilson, 2018 third-round pick
and

To the Penguins: Jamie Oleksiak

To the Stars: 2019 fourth-round pick

These are the dream fall trades. The Penguins were able to bring in two players who ended up helping them quite a bit in exchange for a spare part and some relatively inconsequential movement at the draft. Because this sort of trade is uncommon, it's worth taking the time to see how Rutherford picked his spots.

The first item that jumps out to me is who his trade partners were. "Why would anyone trade for [x], he can't even help



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

[terrible team]?" is a common objection after a trade between a good club and a bottom-feeder is announced, but clearly it is not one to which Rutherford subscribes. Sheahan was coming off a whopping two-goal season with a bad Detroit squad and was pointless through eight games when the Pens flipped a 25-year-old spare part and nearly meaningless draft sweetener to the Red Wings for his rights. Oleksiak played for a better Dallas team but was struggling to hold his place on the blueline for a club that would ultimately miss the playoffs.

Each addition was a combination of low risk, solid fundamentals and circumstance.

Sheahan was a depressed asset after a bad year, but fundamentally he was still sound. He'd been quite productive for three seasons from the age of 22 to 24, and while his age-25 season was poor and his age-26 season was off to a miserable start, he'd also been buried in a defensive role on a terrible team after failing to produce early on. It's not easy to break a slump while being welded to Luke Glendening on a defensive zone speciality unit.

Pittsburgh took on minimal risk: there was only one year to go on Sheahan's deal, he was young enough that his declines were plausibly reversible, and even if the offence didn't come around he could kill penalties and work in the defensive zone. The upside, which was realized when Sheahan put up 32 points for the Pens, was a guy who might be able to help out offensively too.

Oleksiak's problem was a crowded Dallas defensive group, and I'd guess also some element of prospect fatigue. Oleksiak and Patrik Nemeth had been with the Stars for more than a half-decade. With a bunch of established veterans in front of them and the next wave of young blueliners (notably Esa Lindell and Julius Honka last year) coming fast, it's hard to justify hanging on to maybes of the same vintage as John Klingberg and Stephen Johns, but with far less distinction.

Whatever the rationale, Nemeth was No. 9 on the rotation and was quickly snapped off waivers by Colorado, who used him almost 20 minutes per night (19:51). Oleksiak had some success playing with Johns but had by far the worst shot and goal metrics on the Dallas blueline and quickly fell to the No. 7/8 position. It's hard to blame the Stars for snapping up a fourth-rounder rather than potentially losing Oleksiak on waivers in the not-too-distant future.

Again, for Pittsburgh the risk was minimal: there was only one year to go on Oleksiak's deal, he was young enough that there might be untapped potential there, and even if he didn't work out in a major way he was a needed stopgap because the Pens blueline was so banged up. And the upside was something we've seen in Pittsburgh previously: lots of undistinguished defencemen have joined the Pens and suddenly found their legs.

So it proved with Oleksiak, who would play 17:26 his first night with the team and finish the year averaging 17:24. A cynic might chalk that up to circumstance – Oleksiak, after all, posted a 57 per cent Corsi in three hours with Crosby and just a 49 per cent total in his eight-ish hours away from the superstar – but whatever the case, the Pens landed a

young guy who could play meaningful minutes in exchange for a negligible asset.

Nobody else in the NHL was able to do what Rutherford did in the fall of 2017. Nobody else was able to add even one significant player in a trade without paying a much steeper price. His formula, in hindsight, looks simple: taking on young players on expiring contracts whose value had been depressed both by their play but also by circumstances beyond their control. It's a lot easier to say that, though, than it is to execute it.

Need for need

To the Devils: Sami Vatanen, conditional 2019 third-round pick

To the Ducks: Adam Henrique, Joseph Blandisi, 2018 third-round pick

The salary cap has made the so-called real hockey trade something of an endangered species. They're even harder to pull off in the fall, because for the most part teams assemble their rosters in the summer and try to patch all their obvious holes at that time. Making this kind of deal means overcoming all of the usual salary cap problems, plus finding a partner with compatible issues who has either already given up on his summer solutions to those problems or who had unanticipated issues arise.

That brings us to Anaheim and New Jersey and a trade that was nearly one-for-one (and can in some respects be seen from a Devils perspective as the second half of the Taylor Hall-for-Adam Larsson deal). The Devils got a little more security because of the extra year on Vatanen's deal, so the condition on their extra pick was that Henrique re-sign in Anaheim, which he since has. Blandisi, well on his way to becoming a journeyman 'tweener, was a slight sweetener but not an excessive one.

The Devils had needed Hall's scoring punch up front, but the loss of Larsson left their defence patchwork in nature, with Andy Greene and Steven Santini in a matchup pair that played miserable minutes even by matchup pair standards – and got destroyed in them. Vatanen stepped in and immediately became the team's No. 1 defenceman.

Meanwhile, the Ducks were desperately thin down the middle in the short term. Henrique led the forward corps with more than 18 minutes played in his first game—a game both Ryan Getzlaf and Ryan Kessel missed. He'd scored 20 goals in 57 games for the Ducks, and even once Getzlaf and Kessel returned he kept getting significant minutes, diversifying the Anaheim attack.

It was a trade that worked exactly the way it was supposed to, with each team moving from a position of strength to address a position of immediate weakness. It's debatable whether either team would have made the postseason without the move. The Devils finished one point up on Florida for the final playoff spot in the East, going 7-1-1 to close out the year while the Ducks went 10-1-1 over their last 12 games for a comfortable seven-point cushion in the West on ninth-place St. Louis.

Maybe it's the memory of that trade which has kept Carolina in the rumour mill for so long. Like the Ducks of last season,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

this year's Hurricanes are loaded with right-shot defenders. And while Justin Faulk isn't a dead ringer for Sami Vatanen he's close enough that it's possible to imagine him having a major impact for a club in need of defensive talent. At the same time, Carolina is off to an excellent start and if that continues they won't have the same incentive to cash in their chip that a 13th-in-the-West Ducks team did last November.

The blockbuster

To the Senators: Matt Duchene

To the Predators: Kyle Turris

To the Avalanche: Vladislav Kamenev, Samuel Girard, Shane Bowers, Andrew Hammond, 2018 first-round pick (OTT, top-10 protected), 2018 second-round pick (NSH), 2019 third-round pick (OTT)

It hasn't even been a calendar year since the Ottawa Senators pushed their chips to the centre of the table, going all-in on an upgrade from Kyle Turris to Matt Duchene. It was an incredible move both at the time and now in hindsight, though the long-term perception of the deal is going to depend on how Ottawa fares this season and Duchene's willingness to re-sign with the team rather than become an unrestricted free agent in July.

But we should start with the lone team of these three that proved itself to be a true contender over the course of 2017-18: Nashville.

The Predators took the middle road here, getting the second-best player in the deal in exchange for a collection of futures. Turris went from playing 19-plus minutes per game in a feature role with the Sens to playing 16-and-change for the Preds as a member of the supporting cast. But he produced nicely, helping Nashville to an NHL-best 117 points in the regular season.

In exchange for this quality middle-six forward, the Predators coughed up a blue-chip defence prospect: Samuel Girard, drafted in 2016's second round and already a contender for NHL minutes. They added another good but less impressive prospect in 2014 second-rounder Vladislav Kamenev, a 21-year-old forward on the recall bubble. Finally, they gave up an actual second-round pick.

The Predators quickly extended Turris and thereby gave their forward corps multi-vector assault mode capability for years to come. Selling off the future in the name of the present is the kind of thing a legitimate contender sometimes has to do to improve its chances of a championship. Nevertheless, Girard alone was a big piece to give up and Kamenev and the second-rounder were significant, too.

If the trade had ended there, we'd pause reflectively on the thought that sometimes, maybe, a rebuilding team can get more for its assets if it's willing to wait – into the season if necessary – for the right deal. Except that last November the Senators weren't a rebuilding team, and so the trade didn't end there.

Ottawa needed those assets for its larger trade, with Colorado for Duchene. From the Senators' perspective, it's probably best to think of the deal as Turris-plus for Duchene rather than Girard-plus-plus. To further simplify it, let's

pretend the third-round pick Ottawa sent in the deal effectively cancels out Andrew Hammond's \$1.5 million salary; it's an inexact match but it's a useful one in terms of making the trade digestible.

With those modifications, the trade essentially boils down to Turris and two first-round picks (2017, Shane Bowers; 2018, but top-10 protected and so now 2019) for Duchene. It was a mammoth price for Ottawa to pay to upgrade from a player who is essentially a really good second-line centre to one who is a really good first-line centre, but it fits the traditional NHL cost of such moves: roster player, high-end prospect, high-end draft choice.

The Senators swung for the fences, and it cost them, but mostly it hurt because of a fundamental miscalculation that was only indirectly related to the actual trade. Ottawa's error was about the quality of all the players it didn't ship off to land Duchene. The Senators had made the mistake of allowing one great playoff run to fool themselves into thinking they were a contending team, rather than a bubble team that had one great playoff run.

Had Ottawa been Nashville, the price paid would have been more reasonable. Bowers was barely a first-rounder, and the Preds' 2018 pick (which was flipped to Chicago at the deadline) was also barely a first-rounder; that's a lot, but for a contender to go from Turris to Duchene it's defensible. What tipped it from reasonable to disastrous was Ottawa going 22-40-6 after it made the trade, thereby simultaneously a) undercutting the justification for a win-now deal and b) inflating the value of the surrendered draft pick.

In other words: When you're sitting at .500 early in the year, you can swing for the fences, but you'd better be sure that your team is better than its first month showed. That was true in Nashville, which at the time had a 7-5-2 record and minus-4 goal differential. It was untrue in Ottawa, where the record was 6-3-5 and the goal differential plus-4.

For rebuilding teams, the fall is a wonderful time to be sitting on a quality asset, as Colorado's experience shows. Duchene had been a fixture in trade rumours for months, but the Avs were unhurried. Their patience and Ottawa's misfortune paid off in a spectacular return. Depending on where the Senators finish and how the lottery balls roll this year, that 2019 first-rounder stands a decent chance all by itself of delivering more value to Colorado than Duchene would have.

Subtract that 2019 first-rounder and it's still not a bad return: Girard and Bowers are really valuable, and Kamenev, the second- and the third-rounder are also legitimate assets. The fact Girard was ready to play 17:42 per game immediately was icing on the cake, and a substantial part of the reason the Avs ended up in the playoffs.

Most of this piece has focused on the teams that need help, and how difficult it is to get it in the fall. For teams willing to trade that help for futures, it's an entirely different story. They know that supply is limited, and demand is extreme, and that knowledge puts them in a splendid position to demand maximum return for whatever it is they're selling.

There are good reasons teams hold off until the trade deadline to make moves – most notably that a lot of sellers



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

don't know they're sellers yet – but if a seller can swing it there are advantages to selling earlier in the year, and not just in terms of supply and demand. The seller can also pitch the benefits of getting 60-odd games out of a player, both in terms of regular season impact and also in terms of

adjustment time, given how many deadline rentals struggle to adapt to new teams.

For buyers, it's just a tough time to get help on the market. Unless your name is Jim Rutherford.

Inside the transaction: Why the Hurricanes sent Martin Necas and Haydn Fleury to Charlotte

By Sara Civian

It's not every Wednesday afternoon the Hurricanes send two relatively big names down to the AHL. It's not every season a blue line is so stacked that a defenseman who could be playing is instead racking up the press box minutes. It's not every late-month stretch where the Charlotte Checkers have five games including two back-to-backs while the Carolina Hurricanes have three and none.

"We didn't want them — especially Haydn — sitting anymore," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said Thursday. "I didn't feel right about taking guys out of the lineup just to put a guy in, either. If you're playing well you should be able to stay in there. He just needs to play, because if someone does go down (injury) or some other reason we need a guy at his best and you have to play to get that way."

Plan A was more of a rotation of Haydn Fleury and Trevor van Riemsdyk on the third pairing, but we're learning "I'm not gonna do something just to do it" is a core pillar of Brind'Amourism, and van Riemsdyk kept earning his stay. He's averaged 16:13 TOI with an assist, six blocks, five hits, seven shots on goal, and a plus-one rating through his six games. He has spent a total of 9:03 on the penalty kill, a work in progress Brind'Amour is trying to build on.

Obviously this was not a good moment for a tired group of Canes, but in terms of van Riemsdyk, it immediately came to mind as the kind of awareness Brind'Amour might want to keep around to help fix special teams:

Enter Plan B: Keeping Fleury in a sweater in Charlotte instead of a suit in Raleigh.

OK, so what about Martin Necas? It seemed he was slowly building confidence, scoring his first NHL goal in the loss to the Lightning.

"I don't envision him being down there for long," Brind'Amour said. "He's playing a tough position at center, it's just a really hard position. He's an NHL-caliber talent, we just need to get him a little better away from the puck and I want him to have confidence when he comes back to us. Give him a little more playing time."

Necas (1 goal, 1 assist) was only averaging 10:01 TOI (less than seven minutes against Tampa), and play away from the

puck is understandably something a 19-year-old rookie needs to work on. Considering he was centering a third line, and considering his linemates were Brock McGinn and a rotation of Phil Di Giuseppe and Valentin Zykov, his job description revolved around exactly that. The need to kick up two-way play a notch is a fact of life for most NHLers, but bottom-six center is a different beast.

Are we still saying trust the process? Trust it. On all accounts, Necas will be back soon.

Fine, you say. But why bring Clark Bishop to Raleigh?

You might've seen Checkers center Nicolas Roy's six-point (4G, 2A) week. As hot of a start as he's had, a lot of it (including two goals) seems to be the result of a power play that's really clicking. He's not about to skedaddle into Raleigh and hop onto a power play Brind'Amour is already avoiding "changing just to change."

If you focus on bottom-six duties, the belief is Bishop (1G, 2A) had just as strong a start. This is also his third season in the Hurricanes' system, so he's played with linemates-to-be Zykov and McGinn.

"It's easier for him to feel comfortable around some guys he knows and not have to get used to people," Brind'Amour said. "It helps that he's been in the organization."

Comfort and confidence are exactly what Necas is hoping to find in this AHL stint, so it makes sense the Hurricanes would call up a player well-versed in the guys next to him.

"We just want to see what he's done all training camp and what he's done in Charlotte, his energy, his competitiveness that's what he brings," Brind'Amour said. "Obviously it'd be nice if he chipped in (offensively) here and there, but that's not what we're expecting. We're just expecting a good, hard, honest effort."

Scott Darling (lower-body) practiced with the team today.

"We gotta be careful," Brind'Amour said, "we're at the point where he's almost ready. You don't want to push it too soon. They'll keep working with him. I know he's getting really close, I'm sure it's right around the corner."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018



NHL Power Rankings: The driving force for all 31 teams

With 10 goals in his first seven games, Auston Matthews is the offensive engine driving the Maple Leafs to impressive heights thus far this season.

By: Emily Kaplan

The 2018-19 season has begun to take shape and teams are beginning to form identities. For this week's ESPN NHL Power Rankings -- voted on as always by ESPN's panel of experts -- we identified the one thing carrying each of the 31 teams early in the season.

1. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 1 ↔

The entire offense looks terrific (4.71 goals per game), but let's be honest: It has been the Auston Matthews show in the Six. With 10 goals in his first seven games, it's a true coming-out party for the young American. He's on pace for 117 goals this season. He won't hit that but should improve on his career-best 40 from 2016-17.

2. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 2 ↔

The Preds have won three straight but even better is the feeling that skilled top-line winger Filip Forsberg is just starting to heat up. He has three goals in his past two games and four on the season. He might just be the first 40-goal scorer in franchise history.

3. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 4 ▲

The Lightning still have a small sample size (only four games played), but the penalty kill has been absolutely lethal. Tampa Bay has yet to give up a power-play goal in 18 opportunities. Oh, and they've scored two shorties, too.

4. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 6 ▲

The top line on this team is oh so dangerous. In a four-game winning streak prior to Wednesday's loss, Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak had combined for 30 points (13 goals, 17 assists). No other Bruins forward has more than five points on the season.

5. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 15 ▲

The how-are-they-still-undefeated young Devils are getting their biggest boost from vet Kyle Palmieri's seven goals. The

man strikes early. Palmieri is now the first player in NHL history to score his team's opening goal in four consecutive games to begin a season.

6. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 7 ▲

The early, early, early Vezina Trophy front-runner? That's American John Gibson. He has been sensational -- facing a whopping 213 shots, he's boasting a .948 save percentage and a 1.89 goals-against average.

7. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 9 ▲

The fresh-faced Canes are all about embracing the fun. But this is a dangerous team that has scored a league-high 20 even-strength goals and is firing a league-high 42 shots per game. Even with a new coach, some things never change: Carolina is dominating in possession metrics (it currently ranks first in the NHL in Corsi for percentage).

8. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 5 ▼

Mark Scheifele might not have the production we expect from him just yet, but the No. 1 center is shouldering the workload. He's averaging 17:44 of even-strength ice time per game, which trails only Connor McDavid and Patrick Kane among all forwards.

9. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 3 ▼

Even without Tom Wilson, the top line is shining. A lot of that has to do with Evgeny Kuznetsov, who has four goals and six assists in his first six games. His four power-play goals pace the team, which has been dynamite with a 39.1 power-play percentage.

10. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 16 ▲

Brandon Saad was brought back to be Jonathan Toews' sidekick. Instead, it has been youngster Alex DeBrincat shining alongside the captain. DeBrincat, Patrick Kane and Toews have combined for 26 points as Chicago is off to a better-than-expected start -- and now welcomes back Corey Crawford.

11. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 14 ▲



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

It was supposed to be a season where he surrendered the No. 1 goalie job to Philipp Grubauer. Instead, Semyon Varlamov hasn't let up his grip. In five starts, Varlamov has not let in more than two goals in regulation; he has posted at least a .927 save percentage in every game in which he has played.

12. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 10 ▼

Remember last season when it was the Artemi Panarin show, with a very limited supporting offensive cast? Panarin still rules, but through five games there have been nine Blue Jackets forwards to score, a welcome development.

13. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 8 ▼

The Penguins might acquire defensive help after Justin Schultz's long-term injury, but the re-emergence of Kris Letang as a legit No. 1 makes the situation less dire. Letang is averaging 21:03 in even-strength ice time while tallying six points (three goals, three assists) in five games.

14. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 21 ▲

The Flames look leaky on defense, giving up at least four goals in half of their games. But they've found results from their dynamic offense. The Flames have a league-high 11 goals in the third period.

15. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 17 ▲

Bad news: the Flyers have given up the first goal in each of their first six games. They lead the league by giving up nine first-period goals this season. Good news: Philadelphia has found a way to win half of those games.

16. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 27 ▲

He's out right now because of a concussion, but rookie sensation Elias Pettersson has carried the load in terms of giving this franchise hope. Pettersson aside, the Canucks have won three straight games and are off to a surprising 4-2 start. It helps when Brock Boeser and Bo Horvat are starting to score, too.

17. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 13 ▼

Home cooking is what's propelling the Stars. Dallas won three of its four home games, then dropped two straight on the road -- unfortunately, a troublesome holdover trend. The Stars are 28-44-10 on the road over the past two seasons (and 48-25-9 in their own barn).

18. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 19 ▲

The Wild rank second in the league by surrendering a whopping 38.2 shots per game, meaning they're super reliant on their goaltenders. Devan Dubnyk, however, has

been quite good in five starts, posting a 2.32 goals-against average and .940 save percentage.

19. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 25 ▲

Tomas Tatar had a rough 2017-18 -- being traded away from the Red Wings only to be a healthy scratch in Las Vegas. His career might be revived in Montreal after leading the team with three goals and four assists in his first five games.

20. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 11 ▼

The much-hyped Sharks don't have the results we expected early -- and we're still waiting for the power play to click. But San Jose has controlled possession and offensive-zone time -- surely in no small part to import Erik Karlsson -- which signals it's not time to fret just yet.

21. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 20 ▼

The Golden Knights have been banged up, but their 5-on-5 numbers are OK, their top line is still intact (and producing) and they've played five of their six games on the road. So don't be so quick to say that other teams have found the cure to the Vegas Flu.

22. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 18 ▼

The Blues are off to a sluggish start, but here's welcome news. Their power play -- which was at times dreadful last season, with the second-to-worst percentage in the league -- looks all right. St. Louis already has nine power-play goals in 28 opportunities, good for a 32.1 percentage that is fifth in the league.

23. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 24 ▲

Last season, the Sabres didn't get a goal by a defenseman until Dec. 5. Offensive production from defensemen should no longer be a worry. Rasmus Dahlin already has his first NHL goal, and fellow blueliners Marco Scandella and Nathan Beaulieu have already found the back of the net, too.

24. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 28 ▲

The surprising start for the Senators has been thanks to some sparkling youngsters. Now that Brady Tkachuk (three goals, three assists in his first four games) is sidelined a month, all eyes are on 22-year-old D-man Thomas Chabot, who looks to be the real deal.

25. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 22 ▼

Sentences we thought we'd never write: The Islanders have been stingy in the goal-suppression department, giving up only 2.8 per game, the 10th-best mark in the league. The platoon of Thomas Greiss and Robin Lehner is going better than expected, and certainly better than last year's tandem.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

26. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 12▼

A star is born in Los Angeles! No Jonathan Quick, no problem, as Jack Campbell plowed through five starts with a .922 save percentage -- despite entering the season with only five NHL starts. If only the power play was as impressive (it's currently 0-for-16).

27. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 31▲

Does a player have to be on a playoff team to win MVP? Let's cue up the debate again, as Connor McDavid broke an NHL record for scoring or assisting on each of his team's first nine goals to start the season. "I'm not overly proud of it," McDavid told reporters. "I don't think it's a stat we should be proud of either."

28. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 30▲

This is the state of affairs with the Rangers these days. On a team not generating much offense -- 2.43 goals per game -- the King reigns. Henrik Lundqvist's even-strength save percentage is at .957, which is third highest among goalies with at least three games played.

29. Arizona Coyotes

Previous ranking: 26▼

It's definitely not the offense giving Arizona an early push; the Yotes rank dead last in the league, averaging 0.60 goals per game. The one thing stabilizing the team is the belief that things have to be better than this. Also, Alex Galchenyuk was recently cleared for contact.

30. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 23▼

It has been a winless month for the Panthers (at 0-2-2, it matches the worst start in franchise history), but success will come as long as the top two centers perform. Aleksander Barkov has three goals in his first four games, as both he and Vincent Trocheck are averaging more than 22 minutes.

31. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 29▼

There are troubling signs in Detroit, which has lost six straight games to begin a season for the first time in its 92-season franchise history. One thing keeping the Red Wings afloat? A decent power play: five goals in 17 opportunities.



Martin Necas Ready To Learn From AHL Stint

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Hurricanes made their first big roster moves of the season Wednesday, part of which included sending rookie forward Martin Necas to Charlotte.

While the assignment of 2017's 12th overall pick left some fans scratching their heads, the thought process is pretty straightforward -- the kid needs to play.

"He wasn't getting a lot of ice time up top so Carolina wants him to come down and get more ice time here," said Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci. "Instead of five or six minutes he'll play close to 18 or 20 minutes to get used to the North American game."

Necas has appeared in all seven of the Canes' games thus far this season, notching a goal and an assist along the way, but his usage has fluctuated. That can complicate things for a 19-year-old attempting to make the jump to the pro game.

"I can play more minutes and build more confidence here,"

said Necas. "It's kind of hard to sit on the bench and then go in for six minutes. You feel tired and kind of not in your skin. But we have five games in nine days here which is good for me."

From a hockey perspective, the already rolling Checkers add a lethal scoring threat to their group of forwards while Necas gets to flex some of those attributes that made him a first-round pick.

"We're going to use him a lot," said Vellucci. "His skill is high, he's got a lot of speed. We're going to use that and his offensive ability to create more opportunities. We'll put him on that line with [Andrew] Poturalski and [Janne] Kuokkanen. He's had a lot of chemistry with Kuokks over the last couple years. We'll see how that line does."

"I knew most of the guys before I came here so that helps me," said Necas. "I'm going to try to play my game and score some goals and help the team win."

Sending a highly-touted prospect down early on in his career



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

brings its own set of challenges on the mental side of the game, something that the coaching staff is cognizant of.

"You just tell him the truth, that's all anybody every wants is the truth," said Vellucci. "It's the best move for him. We'll go through every shift with him after games and make sure he knows all the good things he's done and the things he can improve on and we'll build from there."

Moving to the AHL isn't the walk in the park that some assume, especially for a teenager.

"This is a tough league here," said Vellucci. "It'll be very competitive for him. He came down with a good attitude and he's trying to get better."

But Necas seems both ready for the challenge and aware that his play in Charlotte can be a springboard to future success.

"This is going to help me reach my goal of going back to Raleigh and playing the season there," he said.



Foegele emerging as big surprise for Hurricanes

Work ethic, tenacity has helped rookie forward earn place in NHL

by Tim Campbell

Warren Foegele wasn't expected to be one of the top rookies for the Carolina Hurricanes this season.

Andrei Svechnikov, the No. 2 pick of the 2018 NHL Draft, and Martin Necas, the No. 12 pick of the 2017 NHL Draft, were, and have been.

Svechnikov has four points (two goals, two assists) in seven games and is expected to be a contender for the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year. Necas has two points (one goal, one assist).

But the leading rookie scorer for the Hurricanes, and perhaps their biggest surprise, is Foegele, 22, who has five points (three goals, two assists).

"He's has been really, really good," said Jordan Staal, the center on Foegele's line with captain Justin Williams. "He's a big body [6-foot-2, 190] that can move. He's got some sneaky good hands and good vision and a good shot. So he's got that whole package and he's driven to work, too, so that makes it fun.

"That's my style of play as well and I really enjoy playing with him. He brings it to the net hard and lots and creates a lot of havoc and stuff like that. He's been good for us and he's made me a lot better this year."

The Hurricanes, who missed the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the ninth consecutive season in 2017-18, have been better, too. They are 4-2-1 heading into their game against the Colorado Avalanche at PNC Arena on Saturday (1 p.m. ET; FS-E, ALT, NHL.TV).

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour, an assistant under Bill Peters last season, said Foegele wasn't in Carolina's plans before the season started, but the third-round selection (No. 67) in the 2014 NHL Draft earned a spot in camp because of his competitiveness and work ethic.

"We didn't have him penciled in or anything," Brind'Amour said. "But he went out and made us keep him. He's been a real pleasant surprise."

Foegele came to training camp this season with his confidence on the upswing. He was recalled from Charlotte of the American Hockey League for two games last season and had a goal and an assist in his NHL debut against the Ottawa Senators on March 26.

He scored the next night against the New Jersey Devils.

"Last year was pretty exciting, then scoring my first NHL goal in my first game on my first shot, that's something I never imagined," Foegele said. "So going into the summer I knew that with the (Jeff) Skinner trade (to Buffalo, for forward Cliff Pu and three draft picks Aug. 2), there would definitely be a spot open. I had the mindset that I needed to come in here and take that spot. For confidence, that was huge. Last year I was so nervous and this year I knew what to expect and how I could perform."

He admitted that playing with Staal and Williams has him doing the odd double-take.

"It's been a privilege to play with those guys," he said. "There have been a couple of times I've had to pinch myself and it would be like, 'Wow, there's three Stanley Cups for (Williams) and one for Staal.' That's pretty crazy but they've been great to me and as a line, I think we've built some chemistry."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Staal said it was clear to him that Foegele had gone another step up from last season.

"He came up last year and played really well but he came in this year even better," Staal said. "He seemed to obviously work hard this summer but came in with some jam and really played well right from the start."

While Foegele was trying to establish himself with Charlotte last season, he found a simple strategy that paid off in a big way.

"We had a really good team in Charlotte and I was in the lower part of the lineup, so I had to find a way to contribute in some way and I thought scoring goals would definitely be one way," he said.

Foegele's 28 goals last season were second on the Checkers behind Valentin Zykov (33) and he had an AHL-leading nine game-winners.

Charlotte coach Mike Vellucci said Foegele might have sold himself a bit short last season in the AHL.

"Kids sometimes get confused by what lines they're on," Vellucci said. "He played mostly with Clark Bishop and Patrick Brown and to me, that was our most reliable, go-to line. I could play them any time against anybody and at the

end of games. He may have thought he was in the bottom group, but not necessarily."

Vellucci said Foegele incorporated work ethic and tenacity with his skill to continue to surprise him throughout the season.

"He does everything he's asked to do and more, because he's not a big talker or a show boater or a self-promoter," Vellucci said. "He's constantly motoring. He just wants to be in the NHL and nothing's going to stop him."

Vellucci remembers calling Foegele during the 2017 Ontario Hockey League playoffs when he was playing for Erie. Foegele had 26 points (13 goals, 13 assists) in 22 games and won the Wayne Gretzky 99 Award as playoff MVP.

"I told him I knew he wasn't on the top power-play unit but that I noticed he wasn't pouting about it and just playing his game," Vellucci said. "I told him I was proud of him for that, that he was putting the team first and wanted to the team to do well.

"He said to me, 'You noticed that? I'm sure happy somebody (knew) that.' But that's the kind of kid he is.

"He's such a good person; that's one of the things you notice. Selfless, not selfish, that's the best way I can explain it."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

SportScan

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

1110756 Carolina Hurricanes

In the big picture, the Carolina Hurricanes are doing what it takes to win

BY LUKE DECOCK

RALEIGH-It's easy to get caught up worrying about the malfunctioning special teams or Martin Necas' unfortunate failure to make a quick adjustment to the NHL or any of the other flaws in the Carolina Hurricanes highlighted over the past four days.

It was just as easy to overlook all of that over the first 10 days of the season when everything else was going right and the Hurricanes had yet to lose in regulation, when the goals came in bunches and 81-0-1 seemed so tantalizingly within reach.

There's only one real takeaway from the Hurricanes' 4-2-1 start and the losses in Winnipeg and Tampa to close it out: Amid all the noise and static, the Hurricanes have played, in all seven games, the way they want to play. The way that should, eventually, bring them whatever degree of success they're going to have. In the big picture, at even strength at least, it's just about everything they could have wanted from the first two weeks.

They have given themselves a chance to win every game, and that's all they can ask.

Even as he catalogs all the little areas where his team needs work, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour can take a step back and feel good about the big picture.

"Really good," Brind'Amour said. "We're giving up chances, but we're going to anyway. The effort's been there."

It's too early to overreact to the other stuff, good or bad.

The power play should be fixable, by redistributing the talent among units and decreasing the outsized role Justin Faulk has had so far. (He's much more effective as a designated shooter at the right point than he is flying solo at the blue line in the four-forward power play that all the hip coaches insist upon these days.) There's too much raw offensive talent, with Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton and the net-front presence of Micheal Ferland, for there not to be at least one combination that clicks. It's just a question of finding it and being patient with the puck.

This team was going to have issues at center whether Necas was ready or not, and they have been camouflaged somewhat by Jordan Staal's outstanding two-way play and Sebastian Aho's prodigious production even as he continues to adjust to the position. Perhaps Clark Bishop, swapped from Charlotte (AHL) for Necas, will be able to bring a little energy and discipline to the position, even if he lacks Necas' skill level.

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And while the Hurricanes were victimized for the umpteenth time by backup goaltenders in Winnipeg and Tampa, and their goaltending has yet to steal them a game like that, they haven't been let down in net yet either – and they still haven't gotten a real look at the slimmer Scott Darling.

More important is the free-flowing, aggressive style of play that Brind'Amour has championed. With the exception of Tuesday night in Tampa, when the Hurricanes looked tired as a team in their third game in four days on the road, they have outstayed all of their opponents. They have certainly outchanced them.

The results have been good. The process has been better: Only San Jose is generating more high-danger scoring chances at even strength

Of course, there's more to this than five-on-five play. Being outscored 9-2 on special teams through seven games is no way to go through life.

But the Hurricanes have avoided the fabled bad start, have put what may be their most difficult road trip of the year behind them and can feel pretty good about not only the way they have played but their ability to keep playing that way.

As starts go, for a new coach and what in many ways is a new team, that's even better than nine points from seven games.

News Observer LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110757 Carolina Hurricanes

Inside the transaction: Why the Hurricanes sent Martin Necas and Haydn Fleury to Charlotte

By Sara Civian Oct 18, 2018

It's not every Wednesday afternoon the Hurricanes send two relatively big names down to the AHL. It's not every season a blue line is so stacked that a defenseman who could be playing is instead racking up the press box minutes. It's not every late-month stretch where the Charlotte Checkers have five games including two back-to-backs while the Carolina Hurricanes have three and none.

"We didn't want them — especially Haydn — sitting anymore," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said Thursday. "I didn't feel right about taking guys out of the lineup just to put a guy in, either. If you're playing well you should be able to stay in there. He just needs to play, because if someone does go down (injury) or some other reason we need a guy at his best and you have to play to get that way."

Plan A was more of a rotation of Haydn Fleury and Trevor van Riemsdyk on the third pairing, but we're learning "I'm not gonna do something just to do it" is a core pillar of Brind'Amourism, and van



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Riemsdyk kept earning his stay. He's averaged 16:13 TOI with an assist, six blocks, five hits, seven shots on goal, and a plus-one rating through his six games. He has spent a total of 9:03 on the penalty kill, a work in progress Brind'Amour is trying to build on.

Obviously this was not a good moment for a tired group of Canes, but in terms of van Riemsdyk, it immediately came to mind as the kind of awareness Brind'Amour might want to keep around to help fix special teams:

Enter Plan B: Keeping Fleury in a sweater in Charlotte instead of a suit in Raleigh.

OK, so what about Martin Necas? It seemed he was slowly building confidence, scoring his first NHL goal in the loss to the Lightning.

"I don't envision him being down there for long," Brind'Amour said. "He's playing a tough position at center, it's just a really hard position. He's an NHL-caliber talent, we just need to get him a little better away from the puck and I want him to have confidence when he comes back to us. Give him a little more playing time."

Necas (1 goal, 1 assist) was only averaging 10:01 TOI (less than seven minutes against Tampa), and play away from the puck is understandably something a 19-year-old rookie needs to work on. Considering he was centering a third line, and considering his linemates were Brock McGinn and a rotation of Phil Di Giuseppe and Valentin Zykov, his job description revolved around exactly that. The need to kick up two-way play a notch is a fact of life for most NHLers, but bottom-six center is a different beast.

Are we still saying trust the process? Trust it. On all accounts, Necas will be back soon.

Fine, you say. But why bring Clark Bishop to Raleigh?

You might've seen Checkers center Nicolas Roy's six-point (4G, 2A) week. As hot of a start as he's had, a lot of it (including two goals) seems to be the result of a power play that's really clicking. He's not about to skedaddle into Raleigh and hop onto a power play Brind'Amour is already avoiding "changing just to change."

If you focus on bottom-six duties, the belief is Bishop (1G, 2A) had just as strong a start. This is also his third season in the Hurricanes' system, so he's played with linemates-to-be Zykov and McGinn.

"It's easier for him to feel comfortable around some guys he knows and not have to get used to people," Brind'Amour said. "It helps that he's been in the organization."

Comfort and confidence are exactly what Necas is hoping to find in this AHL stint, so it makes sense the Hurricanes would call up a player well-versed in the guys next to him.

"We just want to see what he's done all training camp and what he's done in Charlotte, his energy, his competitiveness that's what he brings," Brind'Amour said. "Obviously it'd be nice if he chipped in (offensively) here and there, but that's not what we're expecting. We're just expecting a good, hard, honest effort."

• Scott Darling (lower-body) practiced with the team today.

"We gotta be careful," Brind'Amour said, "we're at the point where he's almost ready. You don't want to push it too soon. They'll keep working with him. I know he's getting really close, I'm sure it's right around the corner."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110769 Colorado Avalanche

Gabe Landeskog's hat trick powers Colorado Avalanche past Devils

By NATHAN BROWN | Special to The Denver Post

Coming off Nathan MacKinnon's record-breaking game Tuesday at the Rangers, the Avalanche had grown used to the Hart Trophy finalist's goal production through the first six contests of the season. But with fellow forward Gabe Landeskog taking charge of Colorado's offensive production Thursday at the NHL's lone remaining undefeated team, MacKinnon's first goalless game of the year nearly went unnoticed.

Headlining a 5-3 road victory over the Devils, Landeskog notched his first hat trick of the season, capping his explosive night with a go-ahead strike to break a 3-3 tie with 3:22 remaining, one-timing Mikko Rantanen's pass from behind the net.

"He's such a huge part of our win tonight," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said. "You fall behind in the third period, and he manages to grind out two goals, coming to the net, doing everything right and playing to his identity. I loved his game tonight, right from the get-go."

Rantanen registered three assists — all coming off Landeskog's hat trick — to give him a league-leading 11 on the year. He also added his second goal of the season (with one hand, no less) against an empty net with 12 seconds left in the game, handing the Devils (4-1-0) their first loss of the year.

Coming off a 3-2 shootout loss to the Rangers on Tuesday, Bednar challenged his squad to come out of the gates hot against New Jersey, and the team's captain, Landeskog, took the directive to heart.

"I think he had our team focused tonight, and I thought we were the aggressors to start the game," Bednar said. "It was a good, back-and-forth hockey game with some ups and downs. But our team stuck with it, and it has a lot to do with his leadership, and we found a way to win."

Despite their hard skating early, Colorado (4-1-2) found itself in a 1-0 hole entering the second period after Devils forward Nico Hischier scored his first of the season off a late power play. But the Avs' speed and grit eventually paid off in a penalty-heavy second period.

Sven Andrighetto, making his season debut, notched the equalizer just 1:16 into the frame, sneaking one past New Jersey goalie Keith Kinkaid just inside the right edge. Alexander Kerfoot and Ian Cole were credited with the assists.

Less than six minutes later in Colorado's second power play opportunity of the evening, Landeskog kicked off his big night with a slap shot inside the upper left corner to give the Avalanche a 2-1 advantage. MacKinnon and Rantanen assisted the forward with his second power play score of the year.

New Jersey gave Colorado three more power-play opportunities before the second intermission, but the Avalanche couldn't build upon their lead before losing it via Taylor Hall's first goal of the year with 4:18 left in the second.

The Devils started to steal the game's momentum as they neutralized an early Avalanche power play before Brian Boyle deflected a shot past Philip Grubauer from Kyle Palmieri with 13:38 remaining.

But less than two minutes later, Landeskog positioned himself for a deflection goal of his own, coming off a shot from Rantanen. The NHL's assist leader found the Colorado captain one last time to keep the squad out of extra time for the third consecutive game.

"We started skating really well, making things physical and tough on them with a great attack mentality, sending pucks and bodies to the net," Bednar said. "They're a high-pressure defensive team, so sometimes you have to roll up your sleeves and get dirty, and I thought our team brought that tonight."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

With the win, the Avalanche held Palmieri without a goal for the first time this season after he recorded seven in the Devils' first four games. He entered Thursday night tied with MacKinnon, who recorded a pair of assists, for second in the league in goals scored.

Denver Post: LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110770 Colorado Avalanche

By moving to the wing, Alexander Kerfoot is creating for others and himself

By Ryan S. Clark Oct 18, 2018

NEWARK, N.J. — From the outside, it appeared there was going to be a battle to determine who would become the Avalanche's second-line center.

In reality, Jared Bednar knew he was going with Tyson Jost. He held a meeting with Jost and Alexander Kerfoot to let them know what he was thinking. That allowed Kerfoot, who played center his whole life, to get an entire training camp plus several preseason games' worth of ice time to adjust to left wing.

"No disappointment at all. He said at the beginning of camp he was going to play Josty at center and it was just an adjustment for me to move onto the wing," Kerfoot said about the switch. "When you play with guys like him and (Colin Wilson), it's easy to play with them no matter where you're at. I'm not upset about it at all."

Kerfoot's transition has placed in him a favorable position through six games. He has provided the Avalanche with secondary scoring, which is one of the biggest concerns facing the team this season.

He has scored five points in six games, tied for third with captain Gabriel Landeskog and Carl Soderberg. Kerfoot, while early, is on pace to score 68 points. A year ago, he finished with 43 points in his first NHL season after spending four years at Harvard.

Paired with Jost and Wilson, the second line has shown signs of promise. Jost, only 20, is still finding his footing but has two points in his last three games. As for Wilson, he has scored three goals and is already halfway to matching last year's total from an injury-riddled season that saw him play 56 times.

"I think he's been really good. Really committed defensively," Bednar said of Kerfoot. "I think he's moving every time he's touching the puck right now, so that's a big thing. He worked on the pace of his play. We know how well he sees the ice and (when) he gets his feet moving, he can be dangerous. He wanted to be more of a dangerous threat to shoot the puck and get into scoring areas and not just rely on his passing.

"So I think we've seen some improvements there too as well, which has opened some options for him passing if he keeps putting pucks to the net."

Moving from center to wing sounds simple enough.

Turns out, it's not.

"Primarily, a lot of people struggle with moving from wing to center," Kerfoot said. "That's a little bit more of an adjustment and I think that sometimes moving from center to wing, it can get overlooked. I would say it is probably easier to play wing but there's definitely an adjustment. For me, in the (defensive zone), there's different roles and responsibilities in terms of where you are and at times, I feel a little bit stagnant but I know to be patient."

If anyone on the Avalanche's roster can understand Kerfoot's transition, it would be Wilson.

He was a center with the United States National Team Development Program and during his two-year stint at college hockey powerhouse Boston University.

Wilson, a first-round pick of the Predators in 2008, made the switch from center to wing the minute he signed an entry-level contract with Nashville.

"It is that not feeling involved," Wilson said. "You go from being everywhere on the ice to suddenly, you're in the d-zone and you're standing at the wing waiting for the D to get it to you, as opposed to as a centerman, you can go in there and get the puck. It's just learning to stay involved."

One of the ways Wilson, as an opposite winger, has helped Kerfoot is by providing support in different spots of the ice as much as he can. They constantly communicate in the defensive zone and that allows them to make the correct switches when the time comes.

Wilson said a winger's job on the defensive side is removing the defensemen out of the play while also trying to eliminate activity from happening in the slot. They also have to worry about getting the puck out of the zone while getting open.

Jost, who played wing last year, said there has not been too drastic of a change when it comes to each person's defensive responsibilities.

"F-1 takes low while F-2 and F-3 fill in spots on the d-zone," Jost said. "You're not really playing center or wing the whole game out there. It's just whoever is first forward back. In a sense, you're taking faceoffs and everything else kind of sorts itself out. It's been awesome having him as a linemate and he's off to a good start and it's great to see."

There's another nuance Wilson also mentioned about going from center to wing. He said because wingers are not working down low and grinding in the defensive zone, it allows them to have more energy once they get into the offensive zone.

A slightly more energetic Kerfoot could pose a dangerous threat. Either as a center or a winger, he's a playmaker who has a survey-first mentality with the primary goal of creating for others.

If Wilson is cutting across, he would expect for most wingers he's playing alongside to chip the puck out of the zone on the rush.

Kerfoot, however, can make a tape-to-tape pass, which allows for more puck possession.

"That's what good hockey players do. They can adjust and play different positions and Kerf's a great player," Jost said. "It's obviously a little bit different when you play center your whole life and you go to wing but good players adjust well and he's done a great job of that."

Growing up in Vancouver, there would be times when Kerfoot would be asked to play wing but he primarily lined up down the middle.

Ted Donato, who coached Kerfoot at Harvard, told The Athletic in September that his former captain only played one collegiate game on the wing.

Whether he stayed at center or moved to winger, a goal Bednar set for Kerfoot was to take more shots this season.

Launching a high volume of shots is typically not a trademark for a playmaker like Kerfoot. He took 40 shots as a freshman and 59 as a sophomore. He record 54 attempts as a junior before breaking out for 99 in his final year. Altogether, he came away with 252 shots while pursuing an economics degree.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Nathan MacKinnon, by comparison, fired off 241 shots as a rookie and a career-high 284 shots last year. He's on pace for 311 this season.

Bednar is not asking Kerfoot to become a sniper. But he does want to see him get more shots on net compared to a year ago.

"I think it's pretty instinctual. I've been trying to make an effort to shoot more but there's times still when I make the wrong play and the wrong decision," Kerfoot said. "It's all about reading the play. Knowing when is the right time to shoot and maybe when is the right time is to take a chance and try and make a play."

Kerfoot said he'll always have a pass-first mentality but he is realizing that passing the puck does not necessarily lead to a better scoring chance.

He's trying to find a common ground that allows him to take quality opportunities while still having the wherewithal to find a backdoor lane if one comes available.

That said, Kerfoot is making progress. He only took 81 shots last year but scored 19 times. Although he has one goal this year, he's on pace to get off 191 attempts on net.

"What he's doing for me this year is he's getting to the interior of the ice without the puck a little bit more and thinking like a scorer," Bednar said. "We see that on the power play. He's getting inside the dots and finding some quiet ice. He's making quick decisions. Sometimes that's pass; sometimes that's shoot. But I do believe that it starts with his positioning away from the puck and getting into that ice. And I like the decisions he's making there right now, especially on the power play.

"We see it in practice more often. We're starting to see it in games. ... And once he starts shooting the puck a little bit and starts scoring some goals, then he's going to want to continue to do that and I'd like to see him have some success here."

The Athletic LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110771 Colorado Avalanche

Landeskog leads Avalanche to victory with three-goal night

By Evan Rawal -October 18, 2018

Coming off multiple disappointing overtime losses, the Colorado Avalanche (4-1-2) were looking for a bounce-back performance on the road against the undefeated New Jersey Devils (4-1) Thursday night. Colorado got what it was looking for as the Avs went into New Jersey and stole a 5-3 victory.

Gabriel Landeskog led the way, notching his third career hat trick, including the game winner late in the third period. Mikko Rantanen, in a contract season, also managed to pick up a goal and three assists, as he now leads the NHL in assists.

The Devils used special teams to claw its way back into the game multiple times, scoring two power play goals and another on a delayed Avalanche penalty. In the end though, the Avalanche were clearly the better team at even strength, controlling 57 percent of the shot attempts in the contest.

What can we takeaway from this game?

The Avs got the best performance of the year from defenseman Nikita Zadorov, as he played a vital role in getting the team going Thursday night. 'Big Z' threw three massive hits in the first period, and ended up dominating Pavel Zacha in a fight. Even beyond that,

he attempted six shots on net and the Avs controlled 73 percent of the shot attempts with him on the ice. More games like Thursday night from Zadorov will likely lead to more victories down the line.

Sven Andrighetto returned to the lineup from injury and wasted no time scoring his first goal. The Swiss forward will be needed to help with secondary scoring when he is healthy. Health has been an issue with Andrighetto since coming to Colorado, so they'll need him to stay on the ice, because his shoot-first mentality is rare on this team.

Philipp Grubauer picked up his first win in an Avs uniform with 27 saves. The only shots that were able to beat him were when the Devils had the man advantage, and he didn't have much of a chance on any of them. With Grubauer and the way Semyon Varlamov has played, the Avalanche have no worries with their goaltending.

Vladislav Kamenev took yet another step in cementing his spot in the lineup. His playing time went up four full minutes from last game, and he spent important time on both the power play and penalty kill. He also managed to win four of the six face-offs he took, and on a team that struggles mightily in that area, he may be able to carve out a huge role for Jared Bednar.

Ultimately, this game came down to the Captain. Landeskog, like he did several times last year, stepped up when the team needed him most, and scored three very different goals, showcasing his skillset. While MacKinnon and Rantanen are the flash on that line, Landeskog does a lot of the dirty work in the corners and in the defensive zone, and the line would not be the same without him.

The Avalanche continue their road trip in Carolina on Saturday afternoon. The game starts at 11 AM MST.

milehighsports.com LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110772 Colorado Avalanche

Avs-Devils Grades: Successful exorcism

AJ Haefele

The Colorado Avalanche topped the New Jersey Devils tonight in an impressive 5-3 road win. Below are player grades!

Sven Andrighetto (B+) – Don't love his usage on the PK and him being unable to tie up a stick in front on New Jersey's first goal is exactly why but the rest of Andrighetto's night was aces. He scored a goal and generated three SOG in just 10 minutes. A good start for Sven10.

Tyson Barrie (C+) – Defensively, Barrie was just okay tonight and the power play wasn't able to generate much with him running the show, continuing what has been a slow start for him personally. That said, I saw a lot of little things from Barrie that I really liked tonight. His ability to kickstart transition is easily forgotten about when the team fails to score goals but he did a good job of revving up the offense's engine from the defensive zone.

Gabriel Bourque (C+) – Stop me if you've heard this before but I felt Bourque played a little too much tonight. That said, I really only noticed him when his forecheck at the end of the game created a really good scoring chance for Matt Nieto. Nieto wasn't able to cash in (more on that below) but the process was sound. Bourque was only on the ice for two shot attempts against at 5v5 and that is a very solid night.

Matt Calvert (B) – The scoring still hasn't started for Calvert in a Colorado uniform but he's been able to contribute in other areas.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Tonight was definitely was another of those nights as his shot metrics at 5v5 were excellent (13 for, five against). Calvert's natural fit with the Avalanche has been a quiet strength of this team so far.

Ian Cole (B+) – People love to hate on defensive defensemen who don't lay huge hits and don't rack up points to make up for their shortcomings. Cole dropped two assists on the world tonight and both were really good plays. His shot metrics took a dip right at the end of the game when he was on the ice for New Jersey's final push but his offense (!?!?) made up for all.

Samuel Girard (B) – It's funny to think I didn't really notice a lot of Sammy G tonight but when I did it was almost all positive. He had one turnover early that became a scoring chance for the Devils but beyond that, he continued to hum along creating scoring chances left and right. It's still probably too early to go there but I wonder if there's a temptation to swap Girard and Barrie on the power play units.

Philipp Grubauer (B+) – I didn't get the sense Grubi was tracking the puck very well early on but by the end of the game he was definitely locked in. He made some huge saves down the stretch to preserve the victory, his first in Colorado. Congrats!

Erik Johnson (B+) – There were some hiccups tonight and that's why I'm not giving him an A but overall I liked what he did, especially offensively. He was aggressive in keeping pucks playable for his teammates and he found himself part of some dangerous offense throughout the game. His assist was just gravy on top of a solid night.

Tyson Jost (C+) – The process is there with this kid right now but the results are struggling to keep up. He finished with no shots on goals but his aggression on the forecheck was effective throughout the game. It's not all about offense and that's especially true with Jost right now.

Vladislav Kamenev (B) – The eye test said he was good, the shot metrics agree, and the coaching staff added PP time to his responsibilities tonight. Kamenev and Soderberg were the only two Avs forwards with more than one minute of ice time on both the PP and PK. He was 67% on faceoffs and continues to prove he belongs at the pivot. He's going to force some tough decisions when Compher returns.

Alexander Kerfoot (B) – His assist to Andrighetto was classic Tanguay 2.0. A great look that he knew was available the instant he got the puck, Kerfoot's assist was already his fifth of the season. He's on pace to be very productive for the Avalanche this year.

Gabriel Landeskog (A+) – Was there ever any doubt? I don't care what the shot metrics say, this line dominated the game. His deflection goal was flat-out incredible.

Nathan MacKinnon (A) – MacKinnon's numbers were slightly inflated because one assist came on an empty-net goal and another came when he accidentally started to steal the puck from Rantanen and let him have it. He was still exceptional tonight but I'm dinging him the + tonight because he got a little second assist magic.

Patrik Nemeth (A) – I thought Nemeth was downright great tonight. I loved his decision-making and the shot metrics back up what my eyes told me – This guy had a very good game.

Matt Nieto (B-) – I can already see the comments about Nieto blowing the scoring chances he got. Fair enough, and I dropped his grade a bit because of it, but he was part of a line that dominated 5v5 play and Nieto absolutely gets credit for that as well. I thought he was great defensively. The only major complaint I had was, well, not cashing in on the scoring chances, of course.

Mikko Rantanen (A+) – In my eyes, he's overshadowing Landy's greatness ever so slightly because he was awesome tonight. He made great play after great play and drove plenty of the success of this line. If anybody still believes he's a creation of MacKinnon's

breakout, you're dead wrong. This guy was the man tonight and his manhandling of Butcher for the ENG at the end was just an extra scoop of delight on an otherwise satisfying evening.

Carl Soderberg (B+) – He was all over the place tonight. His shot metrics were excellent and his attitude and leadership have taken a huge step forward this season. It's very easy to get behind the man they call 'Carl' when he's playing his tail off like tonight.

Colin Wilson (B) – Another guy whose process seemed to outshine his results, Wilson had a strong evening and I liked his all-around game. I thought the penalty on him was nonsense (I also thought the majority of the penalties tonight were bad calls).

Nikita Zadorov (A) – When Z is skating around smoking fools and getting randos to jump him because they feel the need to defend the honor of their logo, you know the big man is locked in. He was great from the hop tonight as he delivered devastating hits throughout and produced excellent shot metrics. Two shots on goal, five hits, and ZERO giveaways? That's the kind of night the Avalanche are very hard to beat because Z is patrolling the blue line with such thunderous fervor.

BSN DENVER LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110773 Colorado Avalanche

Go ahead and say it: the Avs have the best line in hockey Adrian Dater

Adrian Dater Posted on October 18, 2018

NEWARK, N.J. – There is the speed demon, the franchise player, at center. There is the captain with both moxie and skill at left wing and there is the hybrid of those two at right wing. They still lack a good nickname, so let's just call them for what they were in Thursday night's game, and for most of the season so far:

A monster.

For my money, right now, Gabe Landeskog, Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen constitute the best line in the NHL. Let the debate rage, from Toronto and Pittsburgh and Washington and Winnipeg. I'll stick with the Avs' trio just the same, thank you.

The New Jersey Devils thought they had their fifth victim in as many games this year on Thursday night here at the Prudential Center. The Devils had a 3-2 lead in the third period, after a lucky Brian Boyle goal. That's when the Avs' terrific trio went to work, led first by the captain, Landeskog, and finished off by the Finnish Phenom, Rantanen.

All told, they combined for 10 points in a win that upped the Avs' record to 4-1-2. Seven of those points came in the final 12 minutes of the game. So much for that undefeated record, Devils.

I asked Landeskog after the game just what it's like to play with his two linemates. All he could do at first was smile.

"They're two good players, no doubt," Landeskog told BSN Denver. "It feels pretty good when we get rolling like that."

Here's a stat you might be surprised at: Rantanen, with 11, leads the NHL in assists right now.

"Cuz he's got two snipers playing on his line," Landeskog chirped.

But really, this isn't too big of a surprise. Rantanen had 55 assists last season, to go along with 29 goals. While he possesses a lethal shot, he likes to wheel out of corners with the puck and make plays.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

With his sheer size, he's able to fend off checkers while maintaining control in tight spaces. Never was that more evident than Thursday, when he started really dishing some serious sauce late in the game. He finished with four points, a goal and three assists, and he could have had a couple more (he set up Matt Nieto with a brilliant feed late, but his shot went wide).

It's fair to say Rantanen has a decent future with this club. He's still just 21 (he'll turn 22 on Oct. 29) and his contract is up after this season. I talked with his agent, Mike Liut, recently and the plan is to wait until after the season to negotiate his next deal. With the way the numbers are adding up, the big Finn is likely to become the best-paid player on the team come next fall.

Rantanen says he doesn't think about his contract, but management probably is. Good thing the team already has nearly \$10 million of cap space, and likely will have more this summer.

About his fast start, particularly with the assists, Rantanen said this after the game: "I just try to have patience with the puck. It's not always easy, but I'm fortunate to play with two great players. But all four lines played a really good game."

Said Jared Bednar of Rantanen: "When Mikko is moving his feet, he's a lot to handle. He has the talent and ability to throw guys off and create separation and find the open man. When you're doing the right things and talking to him a little bit, he'll find ya. We saw what he can do last year, and for me it all starts when he's moving his feet."

MacKinnon failed for the first time this season to score a goal, but he certainly had himself a good night overall. He had three assists, upping his point total on the year to 11.

The thing about these three guys is: they're still so young. They're having an awful lot of fun out there right now. And we're all going to see a lot more fun times ahead.

BSN DENVER LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110774 Colorado Avalanche

Landeskog does the trick in Avs' comeback win Adrian Dater

Adrian Dater Posted on October 18, 2018

NEWARK, N.J. — There were times they looked dominant. Other times, they looked dormant. Thursday night's Avalanche performance here at the Prudential Center against the New Jersey Devils were certainly their season so far in a microcosm.

One player was dominant throughout, though: the captain.

Gabe Landeskog scored a hat trick in leading the Avalanche to a 5-3 win over the previously unbeaten New Jersey Devils at the Rock, upping the team's record to 4-1-2 on the young season.

Landeskog scored his final goal with 3:22 left in the game to snap a tie game, a one-timer off a feed from Nathan MacKinnon. The Avs overcame a 3-2 deficit in the third for the win, which was the first of his Avs career for goalie Philipp Grubauer.

The Devils took a short-lived 3-2 lead in the third period, when veteran Brian Boyle deflected in a shot off his skate. It came on the power play, after Colin Wilson took a tripping minor at the end of an Avs PP.

Gabe Landeskog scored his second goal of the game and third in two contests to even it back up at 8:08, tipping an Ian Cole shot from the point. It was a beauty of a tip, where he reached way across his

body to redirect a harmless looking shot. Landeskog was actually on his knees when he tipped the puck too.

"It's a desperation play, really," Landeskog said of the tipped goal. "You just see the puck and hope your stick is long enough to get something on it."

Playing his first game of the season, Sven Andrighetto scored the Avs' first goal of the game at 1:17 of the second, after fellow Swiss native Nico Hischier scored an easy tap-in power-play goal in the first. Andrighetto muffed his first shot attempt alone in the right crease, following Alexander Kerfoot's setup pass.

He got a second chance, however, and his shot was judged to be just over the goal line upon video review — after it was gloved by Devils goalie Keith Kinkaid.

Landeskog gave the Avs a brief 2-1 lead at 7:08, bursting over the blue line with speed to beat Kincaid top shelf far post.

"I thought we stuck with our game plan tonight. I think it was a game we can look back on and learn from, to stay patient, just keep working," Landeskog said. "We expected a pretty tight-checking game, and it was. There were a lot of calls tonight. We can't be on the PK six or seven times a night. It's going to catch up to us if we do, but (Grubauer) was great and gave us a chance to come back. It was a bit of an emotional roller-coaster, as far as the game goes."

The lead was squandered near the end of the second, though, on a bad sequence that started with a backpass by Kerfoot in the offensive zone that was stolen. Down the Devils came and, on a delayed penalty, reigning Hart Trophy winner Taylor Hall beat Grubauer off a one-timer at 15:42.

Grubauer finished with 27 saves.

"I thought the guys made it easy for me," Grubauer said. "I thought it was our best overall game, defensively. We didn't give them much. We need to fix a couple things, because when we did give them something they were pretty good scoring chances. But that will happen. It just feels good to get the win."

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1110784 Detroit Red Wings

Detroit Red Wings show poise despite 3-1 loss to Tampa Bay Lightning

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 10:29 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018 | Updated 10:31 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. — When their opponent scored, the Detroit Red Wings responded with poise. Instead of getting run over in the second period, they surged and attacked.

The Wings dropped to 0-5-2 after losing 3-1 Thursday at Amalie Arena, stretching their losing streak to the Tampa Bay Lightning to 12 straight games. But the way the Wings played should boost their confidence.

Their performance against one of the best teams in the NHL stood in stark contrast to the previous two games, which saw the Wings routed 7-3 at Montreal and 8-2 at Boston. They denied the Lightning momentum with two early penalty kills, and hard work down low paid off with a goal in the second period. Jimmy Howard made several highlight-reel saves, and helped the penalty killers go 4-for-4. Anthony Mantha had his best game since Los Angeles,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Frans Nielsen was robbed on a golden chance, and Luke Witkowski looked good in his season debut.

Keeping calm

The Lightning's power play was at 31.3 percent headed into the game. The Wings faced their first kill at 5:19, when Niklas Kronwall was called for interference. Christoffer Ehn and Justin Abdelkader created a 2-on-0 scoring chance, with Ehn forcing a save from Andrei Vasilevskiy. Brayden Point scored 14 seconds after the penalty expired, on a wrist shot right by the net. In an improvement from the last two games, the Wings did not sag. Dylan Larkin sent a wrist shot on net the next shift. They made it hard on themselves with another penalty at 9:36, this time it was Luke Glendening for hooking. Ehn, Abdelkader, Nick Jensen and Trevor Daley were out for about 90 seconds of the kill, and Jimmy Howard made a couple big saves to keep the score 1-0.

Solid second

The Wings had good jump to start the second period and while they didn't convert on the 50 seconds of a power play that spilled over from the first period, they were rewarded with a tying goal at 5:20. A scramble in front of Tampa's net led to Luke Glendening's first goal of the season. Vasilevskiy robbed Frans Nielsen on a slap shot with a big glove save as the Wings ran up an 11-3 advantage in shots. A power play, Detroit's third, saw the Lightning take possession of the puck and test Howard. After two periods, the Wings had a 24-19 edge in shots, but the Lightning led 2-1 on a go-ahead goal from Steven Stamkos

Howard huge

The Lightning stormed out in the third period, but Howard kept them at bay. Stamkos had a grade-A chance to build on his team's lead early in the third period when the Lightning went on a power play, but Howard stretched to make the save. That was the ninth man-advantage shot the Lightning got on net and part of a 6-0 shot run by the Lightning in the third period.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110785 Detroit Red Wings

Detroit Red Wings' Mike Green 'pushed to limits' by viral infection

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 3:01 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018 | Updated 7:14 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. — Mike Green stayed on the ice a good 20 minutes after his teammates had gone off, eager to see how long he could skate.

This is his first trip of the season with the Detroit Red Wings, the first time he's felt well enough to go on the road after being diagnosed with a viral infection that was attacking his liver. For a while, all he could do was stay home and rest. That seems, at last, to be changing.

"We've been doing tests every week," Green said Thursday. "I think I'm at the tail end of it. I'm feeling a lot better every time I skate, but because I haven't skated all that much the last while, now it's about getting back in shape and playing form."

Green isn't expected back before November at the earliest. His recovery is still day-to-day. He's skated on his own here and there,

but has yet to join in full practices. Thursday, he took part in an optional morning skate at Amalie Arena.

"It's just one of those things that takes time and you have to make sure you're resting and taking care of yourself," Green said. "The better you do that, the quicker you will be back."

Green is the Wings' best offensive defenseman — he led the Wings' back end last season with 33 points in 66 games, including 13 points on the power play. His absence has stood all the more as four other veteran defenseman have missed time this season.

"He's an upper-tier NHL defenseman in my opinion," coach Jeff Blashill said. "He moves the puck out of the zone really well. You don't spend as much time playing defense and he puts the other team on their heels a little bit with his attack mentality, and so we haven't had that. When he comes back, it will be good news, whenever that happens.

"It's good to see him, good to have him around. He's a guy lots of guys care about and a real good leader."

Injuries on the back end have forced as many as four rookie defensemen into the lineup, which has meant pairing two inexperienced players.

"The one thing that our young D have had to do is survive on their own a little bit," Blashill said. "You'd love to be able to get them in, see them paired with a guy like Mike Green and see his approach and the impact he has. When those guys have a veteran around them, it helps them, so the more veterans around, it will help them excel."

One rookie defenseman in particular will benefit when he can see Green in action: Dennis Cholowski, who is in the same mold as Green — smooth and poised.

"He's one of the best skaters I've ever seen," Cholowski said. "And just his calmness, his ability to break the puck out as calmly as possible and join the rush and be able to create offense — he just looks so smooth and calm out there and I just try to emulate that any way I can."

Green, 33, said the virus is "a common one," and that he doesn't know how he contracted it. It was after a scrimmage in Traverse City last month that he alerted team medical personnel.

"Camp really sort of pushed me to the limits and that's when we knew something was wrong," Green said. "It hit me hard and unfortunately I had to take some time to rest and recover."

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1110786 Detroit Red Wings

Detroit Red Wings lose to Tampa Bay Lightning, 3-1

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 8:30 a.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018 | Updated 10:21 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018

Detroit Red Wings (0-4-2, two points) vs. Tampa Bay Lightning (3-1-0, six points)

Against all odds: The Wings have lost 11 straight games at Tampa Bay, and there's only one good way to look at that. "If anything, you use it as motivation," Dylan Larkin said. "You're aware of it. This is



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

my fourth year with the Red Wings. You know it's going to be a hard game. You know you have to battle. They have the best start of anyone at home, I think, in the NHL. It's a loud building so you have to eliminate that somehow."

Sizing up the Lightning: Tyler Johnson, who has a knack for scoring against the Wings, has a team-leading five points. Nikita Kucherov, a 40-goal scorer, has one goal in four games. Elite defenseman Victor Hedman has one point and is minus-2 in four games. The Lightning's power play (31.3 percent) ranks sixth in the NHL and its penalty kill (100 percent) ranks first (and has contributed two short-handed goals).

Up front, rookie Michael Rasmussen returns after spending Monday's game watching from the press box, potentially on a line with Luke Glendening and Justin Abdelkader. Larkin centered Gustav Nyquist and Darren Helm; Frans Nielsen centered Tyler Bertuzzi and Andreas Athanasiou (that was one line that finished Monday's game in the plus category) and Christoffer Ehn drew Anthony Mantha and Thomas Vanek.

The challenge: This is a tough one for a team that's just lost 7-3 at Montreal and 8-2 at Boston. The Wings haven't earned a point at Tampa Bay since Dec. 2013, and the talent level between the teams is disparate. The Wings need to play with calm, not take stupid penalties, manage the puck. Don't get flustered if the puck goes in their own net. They need big games from veteran forwards, and they need to trust one another.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110787 Detroit Red Wings

Lightning edge Red Wings, losing streak reaches seven games

Staff Report

Published 10:32 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018 | Updated 5:18 a.m. ET Oct. 19, 2018

Tampa, Fla. — This was significantly better. It was competitive and a type of game the Red Wings want to play.

Now, they'd like to win, which they didn't do Thursday against the powerful Tampa Bay Lightning in a 3-1 loss at Amalie Arena.

The game wasn't decided until Tampa's Alex Killorn scored an empty net goal at 18 minutes, 53 seconds of the third period, giving Tampa a two-goal lead and providing the necessary cushion.

But this encouraging, a step far away from the ugly losses recently.

"Certainly it was much better than what we talked about the last two days," said coach Jeff Blashill, referring to the defeats in Boston and Montreal by a combined score of 15-5.

"We got away from playing the right way for too long the last two games. Tonight was much better, much more the way we need to play and the way we were playing earlier in the season."

The Wings have now opened the season with seven consecutive losses (0-5-2, two points). The franchise record is 10 and the NHL record is 11, so they are closing in on those marks.

"It's obviously not easy," said forward Luke Glendening, who scored the Wings' lone goal and continued a fine all-around start to this season. "But we have to stick together. This is the time when

character shows through. We played better, but we didn't get the result.

"We have to keep working."

Brayden Point and Steven Stamkos also scored for the Lightning (4-1-0, eight points).

Both goalies had outstanding moments, but Tampa's Andrei Vasilevskiy (29 saves) was just a bit better than Jimmy Howard (28 saves).

Getting a victory for the Wings these days is hard to come by, but getting a win in Tampa has been particularly difficult.

The Wings have now lost 12 consecutive games to the Lightning — and have also lost 12 in a row in Tampa.

The last time the Wings have beaten Tampa? It was a 2-1 victory on Nov. 3, 2015 at Joe Louis Arena.

The last time the Wings left Tampa with a victory? All the way back to Feb. 17, 2011, in a 6-2 victory.

"That's a good team and we've had some real good games against those guys," forward Justin Abdelkader said. "We have to find a way to get an extra one against them and beat them."

The Wings received a lift by the addition of defenseman Trevor Daley (neck) in the lineup after missing the last four games.

Daley added needed veteran presence and savvy to a position group that had been playing four rookies but was down to two in this game.

Daley played a team high 23 minutes, 2 seconds, assisted on Glendening's goal, and had three shots and two blocked shots.

"One guy matters, especially guys who are real good players in the league like Daley," Blashill said. "Less weird stuff happens when you have veterans who don't force things when there's nothing there. Certainly having Daley back helped."

Stamkos broke a 1-1 tie, converting his first goal of the season on a one-timer in the slot from Nikita Kucherov.

The Wings killed two consecutive Tampa power plays early in the third period, then had a glorious scoring chance with Darren Helm in alone on Vasilevskiy, only to be turned aside.

Other observations from Thursday's game:

► The Wings aren't shooting the puck enough when there are scoring opportunities. It's been a season-long issue and Blashill was quick to hit upon it again afterward.

"We're still passing up chances to shoot the puck," Blashill said. "We have to figure that out. Shoot the puck and let's score on the rebounds."

Andreas Athanasiou, Anthony Mantha and Helm all had quality chances — Athanasiou and Mantha on the power play, and passed the puck.

► Speaking of Mantha, he's struggling. He did get four shots on net in only 13:13 of ice time, but was largely a non-factor again. He only has one goal on the season, and the lack of consistent passion in his game is again an issue.

► Howard hasn't had much help in front of him in the early going, but there was more structure in front of him in this game and he did his part with a fine evening.

Howard stopped Stamkos on a 3-on-1 rush in the third period, keeping the game at 2-1.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

► The Wings weren't good on the power play — going 0-for-5 — but were perfect on the penalty kill, keeping Tampa off the scoreboard on all four of its power play attempts.

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1110788 Detroit Red Wings

Mike Green of Detroit Red Wings skating, regaining strength after virus

Staff Report

Published 2:30 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018 | Updated 2:32 p.m. ET Oct. 18, 2018

Detroit — At his worst, Mike Green wasn't healthy enough to play hockey and didn't even have the energy to do much of anything.

The veteran defenseman, who is on this Red Wings' trip through Tampa Bay and Florida, is recovering from a troublesome virus that has kept him from the lineup the entire season to this point.

Slowly, Green is feeling normal again.

"It's a combination of everything," said Green, of how he felt early on when the virus hit. "You just don't feel right, basically, especially when you do any sort of activity where you're pushing yourself. Then, you really feel it.

"You can't really do anything but rest."

Green has begun to skate, but said there's no timeline for a return to a Wings lineup that could use his puck-moving skills and veteran presence.

"There's a fine balance of staying on the ice and not doing too much," said Green of the rehabilitation. "We've done a good job of monitoring and slowly increasing each time (on the ice) without pushing too hard.

"It's unfortunate it takes time. I wish there were a time frame or an answer with these sort of things. You really have to listen how you're feeling. We've been doing tests every week. We're doing everything we can."

The virus, which at one point was attacking Green's liver, hit hard right after training camp in Traverse City, although Green was beginning to feel sluggish heading into camp.

"A little bit before, and camp really sort of pushed me to the limits. That's when we sort of knew something was wrong," he said.

Rest has been Green's best defense.

"It's just one of those things that takes time," Green said. "You have to make sure you're resting and taking care of yourself. The better and more you do, the quicker you get back."

Seeing Green on the ice, and participating in drills with teammates, and back in the locker room, were good signs for coach Jeff Blashill.

"First, it's good to see him, I haven't seen him much, it's good to have him around," Blashill said. "He's a great leader, and just being around us is a positive thing. A lot of guys care about him and he's a real good leader."

With injuries having decimated the Wings' defense, they've been using four inexperienced, young defensemen who've struggled at times.

A player with Green's NHL pedigree certainly has been missed.

"He's an upper-tier NHL defenseman," Blashill said. "He moves the puck out of the zone real well, he's get you out of your zone and you don't spend as much time on defense. He can put teams on their heels with his attack mentality. We haven't had that.

"Certainly, it'll be a good boost when he does return."

The fact Green is feeling well enough to travel, and do some light practicing, is an encouraging sign.

"Absolutely; that hasn't been the case for the last little bit," said Green. "It's a positive. Everything is moving forward and I'll just continue to hope for the best.

"I'm kind of at the tail end of it (the virus). Now I'm back on the ice and feeling a lot better every time I skate. I haven't skated all that much, so it's about getting back into shape and getting into playing form.

"That's the next step."

Detroit News LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110789 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings winless in seven after falling to Lightning

Staff Report

Updated October 18, 2018 at 11:09 PM; Posted October 18, 2018 at 11:08 PM

TAMPA, Fla. -- Steven Stamkos scored his first goal of the season, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 29 saves and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Detroit Red Wings 3-1 on Thursday night.

Stamkos ended a 16-game regular-season goal drought dating to last season from the slot with 4:41 left in the second. The goal gave the Lightning a 2-1 lead.

Vasilevskiy, 7-0-0 against Detroit, stopped Christoffer Ehn's shot during a 2-on-none short-handed break in the first and made a post-to-post glove save on Frans Nielsen during a second period 2-on-1.

Brayden Point and Alex Killorn also scored for the Lightning, who went 4-1-0 on a season-opening homestand. Tampa Bay has won 12 in a row against the Red Wings.

Detroit, winless at 0-5-2, got a goal from Luke Glendening, and Jimmy Howard stopped 28 shots. It's the Red Wings' worst season-opening stretch since opening the 1985-86 season with eight losses and a tie.

Howard made a strong save on Stamkos during a 3-on-1 in the third.

Killorn made it 3-1 on a late empty-netter.

Point opened the scoring 7:33 into the game when Yanni Gourde's pass went off his skate and pass Howard. Glendening tied it on a rebound at 6:30 of the second.

Tampa Bay remains the lone NHL team not allowing a power-play goal, running its season-opening streak to 23 after Detroit went 0 for 5.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Tampa Bay right wing Ryan Callahan played for the first time since offseason right shoulder surgery.

The Red Wings injury-depleted defensive corps got the return of Trevor Daley, who had an assist after missing four games with a neck injury. Mike Green (virus) and Jonathan Ericsson (upper body) both practiced with the team. Danny DeKeyser (hand) is also out.

NOTES: Stamkos has an eight-game point streak against Detroit (six goals, 11 points). ... Tampa Bay acquired F Mitch Hults from Anaheim in return for future considerations and assigned him to Syracuse of the AHL. C Cory Conacher was reassigned and F Danick Martel sent for a conditional stint to Syracuse.

Michigan Live LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110790 Detroit Red Wings

Seats from Joe Louis Arena going for as low as \$50 for limited time

Posted October 18, 2018 at 10:50 AM

By Benjamin Raven braven@mlive.com

As the Red Wings start its second season at Little Caesars Arena and the seats turn to black, there is still time to snag one of the iconic red seats from the team's former home of Joe Louis Arena.

Standard seats from The Joe are going for \$50 on the website TheJoeSeats.com, and there are a number of options between seat backs and cushions available. For example, red seat backs and cushions are going for \$25 while the full seat goes for \$50.

Seats range in price to \$100 and more in some instances, but there are a number of options from floor and suite seats still available. There are hundreds of seats left, which includes several specific company seats from their former suites.

The sale will only last for the next two weeks, and other memorabilia from the arena will be sold in a one-day auction on Oct. 23. That auction will reportedly include items such as entrance signs, railings, billboards, lighting and equipment from the locker room.

The NHL's Detroit Red Wings played at Joe Louis Arena from 1979 to 2017, winning four Stanley Cup championships in the process in making Detroit "Hockeytown."

Joe Louis Arena, a big, gray windowless structure situated along the Detroit River, held nearly 20,000 fans and hosted the Detroit Red Wings during their 25-year playoff run from 1991-2016.

Michigan Live LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110791 Detroit Red Wings

Steve Yzerman's uncertain future looms as Red Wings visit the juggernaut he built

By Max Bultman

Oct 18, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. — As Steven Stamkos took off his equipment in the Lightning locker room Wednesday, the Tampa Bay captain was approached with a question he likely won't soon be done answering: What had it been like working with former Lightning general manager Steve Yzerman?

"I'm still working with him," Stamkos answered, before chuckling.

Which is true — when Yzerman stepped down as Tampa Bay's GM last month, he moved into an advisory capacity, not a full-on departure from the organization. Players say he is still around here and there, albeit not as much, with Julien BriseBois having assumed his prior mantle.

But as Yzerman's old team rolls into town Thursday, for the first of four games the teams will play against each other this season, the past tense is already proliferating. A tidy assumption is taking root in the minds of Red Wings fans that Yzerman, who has one year left on his contract, is destined to return to the franchise where he made his name.

Last week, when the Red Wings called a short-notice news conference to announce they would retire Red Kelly's old No. 4, owner Christopher Ilitch was asked about his approach when Yzerman becomes available. Ilitch demurred, citing NHL rules and a team policy to not discuss personnel currently employed by other organizations, and on that day the answer was sufficient. His hands were, nominally, tied.

Elsewhere, though, the speculation rages on. Do a quick search for "Yzerman" on Twitter and you'll find fewer results on the powerhouse he's constructed in Tampa Bay and more about the reunion that could be.

But for as much as nostalgia plays into those fantasies, the fervor behind them is just as buoyed by the scope of Yzerman's accomplishments with the group of players surrounding Stamkos in the locker room here. It shines through in the reverence with which they talk about their now-former GM.

"Obviously a guy that was so respected around the league as a player, and then to see what he was able to do with our team — just build the culture here, and the winning attitude and bringing in the guys that he did," Stamkos told The Athletic. "The vision that he shared with our ownership group and (owner Jeffrey) Vinik, I mean, he brought a lot of stability to this organization. Really laid down the model which we'll continue to follow."

As the team's captain, Stamkos said he probably talked to Yzerman more than the average player over the years. In general, he said Yzerman was an executive who stayed out of the way and let coaches coach. But on occasion, of course, they would chat. He remembered some advice from Yzerman about not changing how he went about his business, even in the face of the added attention that would come with the captaincy in the dressing room.

He also has a particularly interesting perspective on Yzerman the Executive because he's been through a high-profile contract negotiation with him. In the summer of 2016, Stamkos, one of the world's best players, signed a contract that paid an average annual value of \$8.5 million over 8 years. That contract, after fending off suitors hopeful to whisk Stamkos away, is arguably as impactful as anything Yzerman did in his time with the Lightning.

"Part of the culture that we have here in Tampa is kind of that team-first mentality, and if you want to keep a good team together, guys are going to have to make little sacrifices along the way," Stamkos said Wednesday. "Whether that's in terms of money or term or ice time or role on the team.

"That was something that — it's kind of non-negotiable on this team, in terms of doing whatever it takes to help us keep the core together and keep being a productive team. That message was pretty loud



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

and clear early when Steve got here and established himself as a GM, and continued to be that way.”

For the same reasons Ilitch declined to comment last week, it would have been pointless to ask the Lightning players about Yzerman's future, especially as it pertains to Detroit. But in their words, you could hear the imprint he has made on them — and the exact reasons why he would be such an appealing option to take on some form of managerial role with the Red Wings.

That last bit from Stamkos is part of it — at a time when one high-profile NHL team is publicly grappling with how to manage young stars reaching their potential at once, fostering a “keep the core together” culture is a valuable skill.

But for as much as maintenance matters, assembly carries huge weight, too. You have to have stars before you can manage them, and around the Lightning dressing room, the stars are abundant. On one side of the room sit Anton Stralman, Victor Hedman and Mikhail Sergachev, all part of one of the league's best bluelines. A forward group that last year featured a two-time scoring champ, a 100-point winger and three other 50-plus-point guys is scattered throughout.

“He built this team,” said Yanni Gourde, a formerly undrafted forward who put up 64 points last year after signing with the organization out of the AHL in 2014.

“He's given us a chance to win,” Gourde continued. “(Before) the last three years I wasn't there obviously, but he brought up all these guys and (works) to improve this team every single year. For us, as a player, like he's not giving up on us. He wants us to win, he wants to give us the right tools to make it happen. I think it's comforting. It's really nice of him to do that. Obviously as a player you want to win every single year. It's not going to happen every year, but at least you have the tools to do it and you have the locker room, the players to make it happen.”

Gourde talked about the benefits of having Yzerman around in the hallways, being able to ask him for tips — and even just the boost of getting a “good game” from him. Hedman was even more effusive.

“He's been unbelievable to me — believed in my development and my progress as a player,” Hedman said. “I've got a lot of thanks to give to him for believing in me and trusting my development. He's a great guy, sets a high standard for us, and so does Mr. Vinik, but obviously Steve for eight-plus years has been kind of the guy pulling the strings on the hockey side. ... You always want to put your best foot forward and play well for him.”

You don't often get these kind of swan songs, when reflection comes so naturally about a man whose contract might otherwise be deemed “lame duck.” But nothing about this year is going to be normal when it comes to Yzerman — not with the kinds of ties he has to Detroit, or with the reputation he has built here in Tampa.

At this point, the great “what-if” has taken on a life of its own. Technically, Detroit already has a general manager under contract for this season and the next — one Toronto coach Mike Babcock recently praised as one of the best in the league. But when a puzzle seems to fit together so romantically, it's only natural to jump ahead and start arranging it.

Just imagine the reaction Thursday if Yzerman is so much as spotted having a conversation with Red Wings management. It would be at his team's home arena, and could be the most innocent conversation imaginable among former teammates, or colleagues, or peers — something that could happen with any number of executives, at any time, without much of a flinch. It wouldn't matter. It'd be everywhere.

Or, maybe, he won't be there at all.

But even in that case, Yzerman would cast a shadow — one that will be present every time these teams meet this year, regardless of whether the man himself is there with them.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110866 San Jose Sharks

Takeaways: the fuss over the Sharks power play was overblown

By PAUL GACKLE

SAN JOSE — Pete DeBoer made a simple case for how the Sharks could turn things around after a 2-2-1 road trip: win the special teams battle, finish around the net and solidify the goal crease.

They followed the formula to near perfection against the Buffalo Sabres at SAP Center Thursday.

The power play finally broke through, going 3 for 7. The penalty kill went 5 for 5. The Sharks scored five times and Martin Jones put together his best game of the season, making 24 saves on 25 shots.

Oh yeah, and Logan Couture recorded his third career hat trick with an empty netter at 18:13 of the third.

Here's what we learned as the Sharks (3-3-1) picked up a 5-1 win over Evander Kane's former-team.

1. The fuss over the power play was overblown.

The three most common words that a hockey writer uses in October: small sample size.

Yes, the power play entered Thursday's action with a dismal 9.5 percent conversion rate, and yes, it was surprising considering the A-level talent on the ice.

But the panic regarding the power play didn't fit with reality: the dam was going to break eventually.

The water came flooding into the Tank Thursday night.

Less than five minutes into a game that featured 13 minor penalties, the Sharks broke through with the man advantage, scoring twice on a double-minor penalty to Kyle Okposo. Joonas Donskoi got the first one after an Erik Karlsson shot trickled in off his leg. Then, Couture scored 27 seconds later, firing the puck through traffic into the top-right corner.

Joe Pavelski capped off the power play parade at 11:49 of the third, cleaning up the garbage of a Brent Burns shot.

tHe PoWeR pLaY cAnT sCoRe pic.twitter.com/IsHuaaDpkb

— San Jose Sharks (@SanJoseSharks) October 19, 2018

With the red light spinning, Sharks territory felt a surge of relief that the power play finally met expectations. How about the guys in the room?

“I don't think it's a relief,” Kane said. “That was our seventh game this season with some new looks, some different positions. Eventually, we were going to break through and get it going.”

But the emphasis on the power play in practice and video clearly paid off. Both units moved the puck around faster. They took a more direct approach, firing 12 shots on goal. The Sharks also got bodies to the net, a factor in all three goals.

DeBoer also made a personnel tweak, skating Karlsson largely on the second unit while Brent Burns quarterbacked the top group. As a result, each chef had command over his own kitchen. Both units scored goals.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

"They both like being the quarterback and play in the same spot," Donskoi said. "They can make a lot of things happen up there."

But DeBoer downplayed the impact of the Karlsson-Burns split, a move he started in New Jersey Sunday.

"That's not why the power play worked tonight," the Sharks coach said. "We executed tonight and we finished our chances."

2. Martin Jones puts together a building block game.

DeBoer sent a clear message to Jones after the Sharks third period collapse in New Jersey Sunday: good goaltending isn't going to cut it, we need great.

The Sharks coach noted that while Jones made several spectacular saves, Keith Kinkaid was even better that day. In a league filled with talented goalies, the Sharks won't be going anywhere if they're losing the battle in the crease on a nightly basis.

On Thursday, Jones was the best goalie.

After following up a preseason in which he surrendered 13 goals on 80 shots by posting an .880 save percentage in four games, Jones made several big saves against the Sabres.

With less than two minutes left in the first, he stopped Vladimir Sobotka's open look from the slot with his pad. In the middle of the third, he denied Jeff Skinner with a save that went blocker to stick to crossbar. Later in the frame, he added Okposo to his victim's list with a left-toe save.

"Jonesy was great," DeBoer said. "And hey, it helps Jonesy when we score a few goals, too. It takes some pressure off of him. That third goal was huge."

3. Regaining that third period identity.

Sharks fans witnessed a DeBoer-era rarity at the end of the team's trip to New York: the team coughed up third period leads in back-to-back games.

Last year, the Sharks went 30-1-2 when leading after two periods. They were 28-0-2 in those situations when they went to the Stanley Cup Final in 2015-16.

They came out buzzing in the third Thursday, attacking the Sabres in waves by producing six of the period's first seven shots before Couture broke through with his second goal.

Nothin' but net. @Logancouture pic.twitter.com/sHeIgf37T

— San Jose Sharks (@SanJoseSharks) October 19, 2018

Then, Pavelski scored and Couture brought the hats down from the rafters with his third of the night.

DeBoer drew a strong line between the East Coast meltdowns and the Sharks third period blitz Thursday night.

"I heard Pav and Burnzie both talking between the second and third — let's make sure we play this the right way," DeBoer said. "It's been uncharacteristic of us to have poor third periods with a lead.

"We wanted to nip that in the bud and the guys did tonight. The third was excellent."

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1110867 San Jose Sharks

Couture's hat trick, power play charge Sharks win over Sabres

By PAUL GACKLE

SAN JOSE — The power play finally broke through. Martin Jones did, as well.

The Sharks (3-3-1) picked up a 5-1 win at SAP Center Thursday by coming out on the right side of a special teams game with the Buffalo Sabres. Logan Couture helped out, as well, with his third-career hat trick.

The Sharks went 3 for 7 with the man advantage after converting just twice in 21 tries in their first six games. The penalty kill did its job, as well, going 5 for 5 on the night, allowing the Sharks to earn a win in their first game home from a five-game road trip.

The power play broke the dam right away, scoring twice off a double-minor penalty less than five minutes into the game. Joonas Donskoi scored his second of the year when an Erik Karlsson shot bounced in off his leg. Logan Couture scored the Sharks second power play goal just 27 seconds later, beating Carter Hutton to the far corner with traffic in front. Brent Burns earned an assist on the play.

Joe Pavelski finished off the power play parade by cleaning up the garbage of a Brent Burns shot at 11:49 of the third. Kevin Labanc also earned a point on the goal.

Couture added a second goal at 4:54 of the third, punching home a through-the-slot feed from Evander Kane on the doorstep. Justin Braun picked up the secondary assist. He completed the hat trick at 18:13 by scoring into an empty net.

As the power play provided the offense, Jones put together a quality start in the goal crease. After posting an .880 save percentage in his first four starts, Jones played a stabilizing role in Thursday's win, holding down the fort by making 24 saves on 25 shots.

His lone blemish came at 1:35 of the second on a shot he never saw. Jake McCabe used Karlsson as a screen to put the puck under the crossbar on a shot from the left circle.

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1110868 San Jose Sharks

Things to know: the heir to Sharks' Erik Karlsson is eager to face his idol

By PAUL GACKLE

SAN JOSE — In cities across the NHL, puckheads are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to finally catch a glimpse of Rasmus Dahlin in person.

Erik Karlsson is among them.

Karlsson will get a front-row seat to watch the budding phenom who grew up idolizing him in Sweden when the Sharks faceoff against the Buffalo Sabres at SAP Center Thursday.

"I haven't seen him either," Karlsson said. "It's going to be exciting. Obviously, I've seen lots of clips and highlights from all over the world. It's going to be nice to play against him tonight."

Dahlin, the first-overall pick in last summer's NHL Draft, is being labeled as the "heir to Erik Karlsson" because of his smooth skating, Swedish upbringing and preternatural creativity with the puck. That might seem like an unfair comparison to lob at an 18-year-old with just six games of NHL experience under his belt. But according to some NHL scouts, setting the bar at Karlsson is actually too low for



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

the first Swedish player to be drafted No. 1 since Mats Sundin in 1989.

Last year, Anders Forsberg, a former-Ottawa Senators scout who drafted Karlsson, told the National Post in Canada that Dahlin will be "better" than the two-time Norris Trophy winner and Victor Hedman of the Tampa Bay Lightning. He also said that Oliver Ekman-Larsson of the Arizona Coyotes was "not even close" to playing at Dahlin's level as an 18-year-old.

Karlsson, who made his NHL debut at 19, is also convinced that Dahlin is ahead of the curve compared to where he was at as a teenager.

"I wasn't very good when I was 18. A lot smaller. It took me a little longer to find my stride," he said. "For him, it feels like he's ready to play (in the NHL) right now. He's obviously doing a great job.

"Comparing the two of us from where he is right now — he's miles, miles ahead of me."

Listed at 6-foot-2, 185 pounds, Dahlin is bigger than Karlsson and already playing with a physical edge. He's used to playing against men, as well, skating 20 minutes a night with Frolunda HC of the Swedish Hockey League as a 17-year-old last winter. He also became the youngest player in 34 years to compete in the men's hockey tournament at the Winter Olympics when he suited up for Sweden in Pyeongchang, South Korea in February.

Dahlin said it's "so cool" to hear that his childhood idol is speaking about him with such high praise. At the same time, he's aware that he can't let those statements get to his head.

"It's a long way until my career ends, so I can't be comfortable," he said.

Karlsson is flattered that hockey's latest phenom grew up trying to copy his game, especially in view of the criticism he often takes for his risk-reward style of play. The Sharks blue liner appreciates Dahlin's willingness to hold onto the puck, experiment and use his creativity at a time when defensemen are being urged to play chip and chase, flipping pucks out of the defensive zone and letting their speedy forwards hunt them down.

"It either means that you're old or you're doing something right," the 28-year-old said. "To have a guy like that look up to a guy like me is questionable sometimes, I don't know why. I'm looking forward to playing against him and, hopefully, one day play with him on the Swedish National team."

2. Speaking of elite Sharks defensemen, Marc-Edouard Vlasic will swim into uncharted waters Thursday when he becomes the franchise's first blue liner to suit up for 900 NHL games.

The milestone is just the latest achievement for Vlasic, who's quietly carving his face into the Mount Rushmore of Sharks hockey with the stability he's consistently brought to the back end during his 13-year NHL career.

Still, Vlasic isn't convinced that he'll be remembered along with the likes of Joe Thornton, Patrick Marleau and Brent Burns in Sharks lore after his career is wrapped up.

"Do I have a place in Sharks hockey? I don't know," Vlasic said. "There's a lot of individuals ahead of me in that department."

Head coach Pete DeBoer disagrees with Vlasic's take.

"For me, he would be right near the top of the list," the Sharks coach said. "Talk about a guy who quietly, efficiently — every night for the last 10 to 12 years — has come in and played tough minutes against the best players in the world.

"I'm not sure there's a more valuable defenseman for a 10-year period maybe in the league than he's been to this franchise."

3. Controversy followed the Sabres to Silicon Valley this week as head coach Phil Housley's wife, Karin Housley, attempts to win a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Earlier this week, the Huffington Post reported that the Republican candidate in the Minnesota senate race made a Facebook post in 2009 that mocked Michelle Obama in racial terms.

After Obama met with Queen Elizabeth II, Housley referenced the Ronald Reagan movie "Bedtime for Bonzo", which featured a chimpanzee. Housley wrote: "I do miss Nancy Reagan. Ronald even more. I think even that chimp stood up straighter than Michelle. Uh-oh, someone is going to make a comment."

Housley also made a Facebook post that year calling Hillary Clinton a "porker in a blue pantsuit."

The Sabres coach stood by his wife of 35 years in a recent interview with the Buffalo News.

"She's doing great. She keeps pushing forward," Housley told columnist Mike Harrington. "She will continue to fight. She wants to be elected and these are things that happen in politics that you have no control over."

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110869 San Jose Sharks

Jack Eichel defends Evander Kane's tenure with Sabres

By PAUL GACKLE

SAN JOSE — Evander Kane is fast, physical and just entering the prime of his career.

Pete DeBoer raves about him, he produces almost every night and the Sharks see him as a cornerstone piece for years to come. With so much to like, it's hard to understand why Kane, 27, will be suiting up for the Sharks at SAP Center Thursday instead of the Buffalo Sabres? Why isn't he a centerpiece in the team's rebuild?

The easy narrative is that the Sabres unloaded Kane because he's a problem child and who could soil their young core. During his three-year stint in Buffalo, Kane faced accusations of sexual assault, a teammate called him selfish and he got suspended for one game after missing practice following a party at the NBA All-Star Game.

But the real story isn't that juicy. In fact, it's pretty boring. The factors that led to Kane's departure in Buffalo are the same variables at the center of almost every sports trade: money, winning and a general manager's vision for the future.

"It was just making a decision on who you want to go with," Kane explained.

The Sabres acquired Kane in a seven-piece trade with the Winnipeg Jets in February 2015 after teammate Dustin Byfuglien reportedly threw his tracksuit in the tub for violating a team dress code. Controversy quickly followed Kane to Buffalo.

In December 2015, he faced accusations of sexual assault for an alleged incident in a hotel. About six months later, two female patrons in a bar accused him of harassment and disorderly conduct for reportedly grabbing them and pulling their hair just one night before Buffalo hosted the NHL Draft. The incident upset Sabres owners Terry and Kim Pegula.

But the sexual assault accusation failed to produce charges after a district attorney determined that an examination of the facts, which



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

included forensic and toxicological tests, produced no evidence of wrongdoing. Kane also got his harassment and disorderly conduct charges dismissed after he entered into a plea agreement.

Earlier that year, the Sabres suspended Kane for missing practice after he'd partied at the NBA All-Star Game in Toronto the night before. Last year, Kane's character got called into question yet again when teammate Justin Falk called him "selfish" during a fight at practice.

To those watching from a distance, these incidents only confirmed the bad boy reputation that Kane developed in Winnipeg. But former-teammates and reporters in Buffalo say the story is mischaracterization of Kane's character.

"I've always had good experiences with Evander," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said. "Since I came into the NHL, he was always nice to me. He took care of me, always brought me out to dinner with him, invited me to things. I can't say anything bad about Evander because I go off of my relationship and experiences.

"He's his own person, and maybe at times, he could be misunderstood."

Take the practice fight, for instance. When the word "selfish" got tossed around with Kane, it sounds like a rerun of the tracksuit incident in Winnipeg. But in the immediate aftermath of the fight, even Falk walked it back, calling it "spur of the moment" because "emotions are running high."

At the time, the Sabres had the second-fewest points in the NHL, sitting 17 points out of a playoff spot midway through the season.

"We weren't having a great year," Eichel explained. "It's easy to let your emotions get the best of you. It's a battle. Sometimes that can happen. You're battling with somebody and you get (ticked) off.

"It would happen with anybody, but I think things get blown out (of proportion) when it happens with Evander."

What fans and reporters outside Buffalo failed to grasp was the work that Kane put into building ties within the community. He showed sympathy for children, popping up at schools and hospitals and taking kids to games. He did a lot of this work in the shadows, hiding it from the local media.

"I didn't care about the attention," Kane said. "I just wanted to give back to the community. I really enjoyed my time in Buffalo. I never felt slighted."

The knock against Kane is that his ego hungers for cities with bright lights and big marquees, so teams, such as Buffalo and Winnipeg, never had a chance of keeping him.

But Buffalo News columnist Mike Harrington disputes the accuracy of this narrative.

"When he says he loves Buffalo, he isn't blowing smoke. He honestly embraced the city and tried to be part of it," Harrington said.

"The reputation that he's been stuck with isn't what I've experienced."

The reality of Kane's trade to the Sharks is that he was a pending-unrestricted free agent last year and due for a big payday in the summer. Keep in mind, the Sabres are paying Eichel \$10 million a year through 2025-26, Kyle Okposo \$6 million a year through 2022-23 and, at the time, Ryan O'Reilly, who was traded to St. Louis in the offseason, was owed \$7.5 million per year through 2022-23.

The Sabres will also owe big contracts to budding superstars, such as Sam Reinhart, Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Dahlin, in the future. Something needed to give and Kane was the odd man out. General manager Jason Botterill favored his guys and dumped Kane and O'Reilly, who joined the team during the Tim Murray era. This is common in pro sports.

Head coach Phil Housley declined to comment on the trade Wednesday, suggesting that questions about Kane are better suited for Botterill.

Regardless, the trade is clearly working out for Kane and the Sharks.

Kane carried the Sharks into the playoffs last season, recording 14 points in 17 games. Then, he signed a seven-year, \$49 million extension in the offseason. Now, he's picking up where he left off, collecting five points in his first six games.

He won't be holding any hard feelings toward the Sabres when he squares off against them at the Tank Thursday. Right now, his focus is centered on his new team.

"The whole personality thing is more media based," Kane said. "You look around the room (in San Jose), we have 23 different personalities, very different. It works.

"That's the beauty of this team."

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110870 San Jose Sharks

Logan Couture's hat trick helps Sharks top Sabres

By Ross McKeon Updated 11:28 pm PDT, Thursday, October 18, 2018

The Sharks knew it was only a matter of time before their power play clicked. Thursday night at SAP Center, it did.

With the power play producing three goals and Logan Couture collecting a hat trick, the Sharks — in their first game after a five-game trip — beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-1.

Couture and Joonas Donskoi scored power-play goals in the first period and Joe Pavelski added one with the man-advantage in the third as the Sharks improved to 3-3-1.

"We needed that win bad coming off a long road trip when we blew a couple third-period leads," said Evander Kane, who with two assists leads the Sharks with seven points.

Martin Jones stopped 24 shots for the Sharks, who were also 5-for-5 on the penalty kill.

"You need good special teams to win in this league," Jones said. "It was important to get a couple power-play goals. And the penalty kill was really good, too."

Pavelski scored his fourth goal at 11:49 of the third period — just seven seconds into a Marco Scandella tripping penalty — as the Sharks put a close game away in the final period.

Couture scored at 4:54 of the final period by tapping a weak-side shot past Buffalo goalie Carter Hutton.

"You can't sit back in this league," Pavelski said. "To get that first one in the third proved we were ready to come out and play hard."

And Couture capped his third career three-goal game and the scoring for the game with his fourth of the season into an empty net at 18:13. Couture needed more than 400 career games to notch his first hat trick. Thursday's was the first of his career at home.

"It took me a long time to get the first one," Couture said. "That's two in two years. I'll take 'em if they keep coming."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

The Sharks snapped out of their early-season power play drought early on to jump out to a 2-0 lead.

Without a power-play goal in five of its first six games, and ranked 21st in the league at 16.7 percent coming in, San Jose connected twice to make Buffalo's Kyle Okposo pay for his double-minor high stick of Sharks rookie forward Rourke Chartier 1:45 into the first period.

First it was Donskoi potting his second goal of the season at 3:35 for a 1-0 lead when he poked a loose puck past Hutton. And after taking 1:50 to convert on the front end, the Sharks needed only 27 seconds to make it 2-for-2.

Couture stick-handled to the top of the left circle before wristing a shot through a Pavelski screen and past Hutton at 4:02 for a 2-0 lead.

"When you're coming back from a road trip and you get a chance to score a couple early you want to take advantage of that," Pavelski said.

Special teams continued to dominate the opening 20 minutes as the Sharks went on the power play two more times. The Sabres also had three power play in the first period, with the third extending into the second period.

San Jose killed the rest of the power play early in the second, but surrendered a goal while at even strength moments later.

Defenseman Jake McCabe's bad-angle sweeping wrist shot from the far edge of the left circle eluded Jones, who didn't react to the rebound shot. Karlsson appeared to screen the San Jose goalie at 1:35 as the visitors cut their deficit to 2-1.

San Francisco Chronicle LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110871 San Jose Sharks

Sharks debuting new 3D helmet decal on Stealth Night

By NBC Sports Bay Area staff October 18, 2018

The San Jose Sharks will be rocking a new look on Thursday night, and it features more than just the yet-to-be-worn Stealth jerseys.

In addition to the black sweaters San Jose will sport against the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night, there will also be a special three-dimensional "SJ" decal on the sides of the players' helmets.

.@SanJoseSharks debuting new 3D-printed helmet decals with their Stealth jerseys tonight □□□#SJSharks pic.twitter.com/j2OzrX8dVc

— Sharks on NBCS (@NBCSSharks) October 18, 2018

This isn't the first time an NHL team has added 3D flair to a specialty game day look. The decals started popping up on helmets earlier this year, with teams like the LA Kings adding to their headgear. The Sharks Thursday night opponent, the Sabres, added the decals to the helmets they wore in the 2018 NHL Winter Classic against the New York Rangers.

The newly-stickered headwear completes the look the Sharks plan to sport on Stealth Nights, which will take place on Thursday and Friday home games, plus the Sharks Saturday night tilt against the Philadelphia Flyers on November 3.

Newly-acquired defenseman Erik Karlsson debuted the new Stealth jersey for the first time during the Sharks preseason, but the sweaters have not seen any game action yet. According to San

Jose's schedule, the team should be wearing the specialty look thirteen times during the 2018-19 regular season.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110872 San Jose Sharks

Sharks vs. Sabres lineups: Projected lines, pairings in San Jose

By Chelena Goldman October 18, 2018

After starting the bulk of the early season on the road, the San Jose Sharks will finally play their second home game of the season. They start a two-game stint at the Tank hosting the Buffalo Sabres Thursday evening.

San Jose was without Tomas Hertl at Morning Skate Thursday morning. However, coach Peter DeBoer told the media the 24-year-old winger will be ready to play Thursday night against the Sabres. Dylan Gambrell filed into Hertl's spot on Logan Couture's wing during the session.

This is the first contest of a two-game season series between San Jose and Buffalo. The last time they met, the Sharks defeated the Sabres 3-2 in Buffalo. The Sabres are 7-7-5 on the road against the Sharks all time.

The Sabres are at the start of a swing through the west coast, coming off a rough 4-1 loss to the Las Vegas Golden Knights on Tuesday evening.

Sharks projected lines and pairs

Evander Kane -- Joe Pavelski -- Kevin Labanc

Tomas Hertl-- Logan Couture -- Timo Meier

Joonas Donskoi -- Antti Suomela -- Marcus Sorensen

Barclay Goodrow -- Rourke Chartier -- Melker Karlsson

Marc-Edouard Vlasic --Erik Karlsson

Joakim Ryan -- Brent Burns

Brenden Dillon -- Justin Braun

Martin Jones -- projected starter

Aaron Dell

Sabres projected lines and pairs

Conor Sheary -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart

Jeff Skinner -- Casey Mittelstadt -- Kyle Okposo

Remi Eli -- Vladimir Sobotka --Tage Thompson

Zemgus Girgensons --Evan Rodrigues --Jason Pominville

Marco Scandella --Rasmus Ristolainen

Jake McCabe -- Rasmus Dahlin

Zach Bogosian -- Nathan Beaulieu

Carter Hutton -- projected starter

Linus Ullmark

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

1110873 San Jose Sharks

Sharks set to face new-look Sabres who made plenty of roster changes

By Chelena Goldman October 18, 2018

When it comes to playing teams in the Pacific Division, the San Jose Sharks of course know their opposition very well. When it comes to those teams over the on eastern seaboard, however, there's a little less familiarity.

Such is the case for their tilt Thursday night, as they take on the Sabres of the Atlantic Division. And given Buffalo has gone through a few changes since last season -- including the addition of No. 1 overall draft pick Rasmus Dahlin -- this team will be even more different than the one the Sharks last played during the 2017 season.

"I probably only know half the team," Evander Kane, who played in Buffalo before being acquired by San Jose last season, told the media Thursday morning. "There's been a lot of turnover, through and since I was in Buffalo."

The Sharks newest arrival, Erik Karlsson, had something very similar to say. Although the defenseman played against the Sabres plenty of times while with the Ottawa Senators, this isn't the same team he faced in season's past.

"They're going through a little bit of a transition period," Karlsson said. "Played them a lot over the course of the years. But it's a totally different team now. Not what it used to be."

Rookie defenseman Dahlin, who scored his first NHL goal against the Arizona Coyotes last week, isn't the only new addition to the evolving Sabres squad. Forward Conor Sheary was acquired from the Pittsburgh Penguins during the off-season. He's currently ranked second on the team with four points in six games -- behind captain Jack Eichel's five points -- and currently leads the team with three goals on the power play.

Even with the changes to the roster, Kane told the media he expects the Sabres to come in and play a fast-paced game.

The Sharks and Sabres face off at 7:30 p.m. with pregame coverage beginning at 7 on NBC Sports California.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110874 San Jose Sharks

Sharks notes: Logan Couture, Tomas Hertl practice ahead of Sabres game

By Chelena Goldman October 18, 2018

Logan Couture returned to Sharks' practice Wednesday as Team Teal gears up to host the Buffalo Sabres Thursday at SAP Center. The 29-year-old center collided with teammate Rourke Chartier in practice on Tuesday, but didn't look any worse for wear as he participated in full practice Wednesday.

But he wasn't the only Shark to return to action at morning skate. Here are a few tidbits from practice.

-Couture's linemate Tomas Hertl, who was reportedly absent from Tuesday's skate taking a maintenance day, returned to practice. He left after half an hour, but coach Peter DeBoer told the media afterwards he expects the 24-year-old forward to be ready to go for Thursday's game.

Kevin Labanc, who also took a maintenance day Tuesday, was not present at the following practice. DeBoer told the media the winger is fighting off a virus, and that he expects Labanc to be in th lineup against Buffalo as well.

-Team Teal spent a fair amount of time working on their power play during Wednesday's skate, no doubt looking to turn things around after going 2-for-21 on the man advantage in their first six games. But they aren't the only team at the Tank on Thursday evening who've experienced a power outage.

The Sabres experienced their own woes on the man advantage in their Tuesday evening 4-1 loss to the Las Vegas Golden Knights. In that bout, Buffalo went 0-for-6 on the power play and gave up a short-handed goal to Cody Eakin in the second stanza. This could potentially be good news for the Sharks, who have been more successful on the penalty kill through the six games they've played so far this season.

It will be imperative for the Sharks to not get into penalty trouble like they did against the New Jersey Devils and go to the box eight times. Conor Sheary and Jack Eichel make Buffalo's top power play unit primed to find the back of the net.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110875 San Jose Sharks

Sharks finally find power-play success by splitting up Erik Karlsson, Brent Burns

By Kevin Kurz

At some point this season, the Sharks coaching staff will likely try to figure out again how to utilize both Erik Karlsson and Brent Burns on the same power play unit. Considering the talent and the playmaking ability of the two former Norris Trophy winners, there's surely got to be a way they can co-exist on the ice surface while their team is up a man.

But after the first six games, something was off. The Sharks had just two power play goals in 21 opportunities, and on many advantages, they simply looked out of sync. The two dynamic, offensive-minded defensemen just weren't working well together.

So out came that proverbial blender.

For Thursday night's home game against the Buffalo Sabres, Burns and Karlsson did not start a single power play together on the same unit. There were moments when both were on the ice toward the end of two of the Sharks' seven power-play chances, but for most of the night, when one of them was out there as the power-play quarterback, the other was looking on from the bench.

The move worked. The Sharks struck for three power-play goals by Joonas Donskoi, Logan Couture and Joe Pavelski in a 5-1 drubbing of the rebuilding Sabres. Both of Burns' assists came on the power play, as did Karlsson's helper on Donskoi's marker, when his shot from the top of the circle ricocheted in off the Finnish forward's leg.

"I think changing that up and having both of those guys on different units to get the middle of the ice where they're both comfortable -- it felt better as a participant on the power play, and I'm sure it looked



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

better from up top," said Couture, who posted his third career hat trick as the Sharks evened their record at 3-3-1. "Both those guys are comfortable in that spot. They both wanted to be there. I think that gives us two strong units now."

Donskoi said: "I think they both are used to playing kind of as a quarterback on the blue lines. Splitting them up, I feel like they both can play in the spot that they love to play. They make things happen up there. I feel like it was a good call, and both power-play units got one goal tonight. It was good."

For some of the advantages, Karlsson came out first, with Couture, Pavelski, Kevin Labanc and Tomas Hertl. In the third period, though, Burns replaced Karlsson. The second unit consisted of one of the two star defensemen along with fellow blueliner Vlasic, Donskoi, Evander Kane and Timo Meier.

The Sharks had nearly 10 1/2 minutes of power-play time. Burns led the team with 6:25 of ice time on the power play, while Karlsson had a tad less than that, at 5:37.

Twelve of the Sharks' 39 shots came while they were up a man. Even when they weren't scoring, they were usually entering the zone cleanly and moving it around much more effectively than they had been through the first two weeks of the season.

"We talked about just getting back to certain things that make us successful on it," said Pavelski, whose third-period goal gave the Sharks a 4-1 lead. "We played pretty fast on it, pretty direct at times, won some faceoffs and some goals came off it. So that's a good formula for us, it's always been. We got pucks back tonight, and just the intensity seemed a lot better."

Coach Pete DeBoer downplayed the significance of splitting up Burns and Karlsson.

"They weren't out there together, but that's not why the power play worked tonight and it hasn't been working," he said. "We're moving pieces around. I think there was a time they were out there together for a little bit. I think for us it's just we executed tonight and we finished our chances. It's that simple. We didn't go in and make wholesale changes after the road trip. We've talked about this before, that we created enough offense on the road trip to score goals. We didn't score, we had to stick with it, and we did tonight. We got rewarded, and hopefully we can carry that over."

The Sharks needed to have a better third period against the Sabres than they did in the final two games of their road trip. Against the Rangers last Thursday, they saw a 2-1 lead after two periods turn into a 3-2 overtime loss. They blew the same advantage to the Devils on Sunday, losing 3-2 in regulation in Newark.

They again found themselves with a 2-1 edge after 40 minutes against the Sabres, despite an abundance of opportunities to increase that lead in the final few minutes of the middle frame. This time, though, they came out with authority to start the third period, determined not to lose a third straight game by blowing a lead in the final frame.

Prior to Couture's goal just about five minutes into the third made it 3-1, the Sharks had registered six of the first seven shots on goal, and dominated territorially. By the time the third period was over, the Sharks had three goals and outshot the Sabres 20-9.

"I heard Pav and Burnie both talking between the second and third, like, let's make sure we play this the right way," DeBoer said. "It's been uncharacteristic of us to have poor third periods with the lead in my time here, and early in the year here we've had a couple of them. We wanted to nip that in the bud, and I thought the guys did tonight. I thought the third was excellent."

Kane, who posted a pair of assists and five shots on goal in his first game against his former team, said: "We had two third-period leads go a couple of games ago. We wanted to make sure we aren't going to be a team that lets third-period leads slip away. We came out and

spent a lot of time in their end and put some pucks in the net. I thought the third goal was really big."

That third goal, coming from Couture on a nice pass through the slot by Kane, was the Sharks' only even-strength marker into a manned net. After special teams cost them in some of their early-season losses, it won them a game fairly handily on Thursday night, including a penalty kill that went 5-for-5.

Burns and Karlsson each had a hand in that success, even if they didn't get to partake in a celebratory group hug at the same time. While the power play will surely continue to evolve throughout the course of the next few months, the Sharks finally found something that worked on Thursday, even if it's not how they drew it up in training camp.

"Obviously it's something that we haven't had, and when you get it, it makes a big difference," DeBoer said.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110916 Websites

The Athletic / NHL Confidential: The biggest "tells" in hockey

By Katie Strang

Oct 18, 2018

An interesting revelation surfaced not long after the playoff series between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees ended. Following the final game of that series, there was chatter of Yankees pitcher Luis Severino tipping his pitches, essentially telegraphing to Red Sox batters what he was going to throw.

After an extensive video analysis, The Athletic's Ben Harris was able to deduce that, in Severino's delivery, he'd look off to third base before throwing home in some scenarios and not others, signaling when he was going to throw a fastball, and when he was going to throw an off-speed pitch. Ultimately, that served as his "tell."

A "tell" is a poker term, meant to describe a detectable change in a player's normal behavior that provides an opposing player a clue to what sort of hand he has, and what he might do.

In that vein, we asked people in and around the NHL, in all facets of the game, to give us some of the tried-and-true "tells" in hockey. This is what we've found:

NHL scout on how he can tell if an amateur player is going to fill out physically — "As an amateur scout, you're always looking at potential, how much a player is going to physically grow — get taller, get stronger, is he a mature kid already or is he a late bloomer? We look at facial hair. Facial hair says maturity, facial hair says puberty. If a guy is 5-foot-8, 150 pounds and he has facial hair, he might not [be] growing much. We also look at parents, bloodlines — did the parents grow late? Did the brother grow late? So parents, facial hair and foot size. Does a 5-foot-11 guy have size 12 or 13 feet? That's another indicator of whether they are gonna grow and fill out."

Former NHLer on when a bubble player is in or out of the lineup — "I could always tell when a player was going to be out of the lineup or in the lineup. There was this time when we had a top-six forward injured and we had a kid that was a consistent healthy scratch. Once that (top-six) player was injured, the coach was really pumping him (the bubble player) up; you'd think the kid was his best friend. And sure enough, the kid was in the next game. Then seven, eight, nine games would go by and there was a practice where he couldn't do anything right and the coach was all over him. He sat next to me and when he came into the locker room, he said, 'I don't understand. Why is he so hard on me?' I told him, 'You're gonna be out of the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

lineup. That player is healthy and so he's trying to make himself feel better about taking you out.' Ironically, as I said that, the coach walked by. He wasn't too happy I was telling him this."

NHL goaltending coach on when he thinks an opposing goaltender is vulnerable — "There's been times in the national anthem, where you notice something. You know how certain goalies have certain movements they do during that? Some guys, you can tell, whether it's because they're nervous or amped up, their movement comes a lot harder and consistent. They're a little too amped up or maybe it's a certain game where they're putting a touch too much pressure on themselves to be perfect. That's when they start over-pushing, which causes more rebounds, they're doing a little too much earlier on. You get to a TV timeout, and all the sudden they settle in, so if I see a guy like this, out of his norm, I tell guys to get on him early."

Former AHL coach/player on how to spot a player with a hangover — There are a few morning staples in a professional hockey dressing room: One is coffee. Gotta have coffee for the boys in the morning. Two is gum. There might be some fancy Excel mint or bubblegum flavored 'real gum,' but every room has Double Bubble. I have no idea why. Not those thin ones with the comics, I mean the fat-but-delicious, hyper-fragrant locker room variety that's so good for nine seconds until it's awful. It's a fun gum for kids, but nobody really enjoys it for any prolonged period of time, so nobody really chews it all that much. But it's always there. So, if you come across a guy in his stall in the morning with a large coffee, chewing a mountain of Double Bubble, he might just be hungover. Teammates don't care, but coaches do, so the Double Bubble/coffee is always a red flag.

Former NHL enforcer on when he knew a fight was coming — "Sometimes I knew by pregame warmups. You see a guy from the other team and wink at him, and you kinda know it's on. You don't say anything else, but you kinda know it's gonna happen when you get out there together, something's gonna give. Or, a guy runs around [antagonizing] and you look at the other bench and say 'Hey, can't do that. Next time out there, you better be ready. I've seen what you did and you better straighten it out.' And sometimes all it is is a shake of the head to say, 'It's not gonna happen.' People (on your own bench) look at you like you're crazy, but then it happens and they get it."

Former NHL player, who is now a broadcaster, on when he can tell a team has quit on their coach — "It happens more in practices. In a game, everyone wants to be playing in a game, and you're trying to give everything you've got, you're playing for a contract, you're playing for the season ahead. But when guys get to practice just a couple minutes before it starts, and the intensity isn't there and the passes are off, and as soon as practice is over, guys only stay around for a couple of minutes. ... You see the body language of players, especially in practice when that happens. When the game comes, there's still a sense of pride, but if you're not liking the situation or you're not enjoying your coach, you don't want to practice. Practice is the last thing you wanna do. You hate being there."

NHL agent on when a client is going to switch agencies — "When I can tell a client is going to fire us is when they stop responding to us or they start asking unusual questions. Or not necessarily unusual, but they'll be wondering why other teammates have certain things [and they don't] even if the information they have is the wrong information. It's those little things, when they're picking at what your services are and what is provided. That's an area (where it becomes clear.)"

NHL father on when he can tell his son is gonna have a good game — "You can tell in warmup when they come out with a certain bounce in their step. You watch for how they're going to (head into) warmup. You'll see certain guys who always run out onto the ice from the tunnel, but when you see him (his son) come out a certain way, it looks it'll be a big one for him."

Former NHL goaltender on when an opponent was in for a big night — "It's dependent on the players, but [in my time] if you saw [former NHLer, now TV broadcaster] Jeremy Roenick and he was dancing during the commercial break, you knew, because that was him being a showman. Some guys are like that. A guy like Mario Lemieux, he was really just about the game, so if he skated by you and tried to say hi to him and he skated right past you, then you knew Mario was really focused and that you were in trouble."

NHL PR man on when he feels it's time to shut down a press conference with a player — "I watch the eyes [of a player] and how he reacts to the questions coming at them. When a guy starts struggling with an answer, I can usually tell if he's going to [continue] to struggle and I would rather have you pissed at me, than you pissed at the player for him blowing you off. If I can see a player getting to the point where he's getting frustrated, I usually give it one more question, then I'm getting him out of there. I've had it where reporters are annoyed I cut it off, but it's my job to protect the player, the coach, management, and if a player explodes on you as a reporter, it's only going to be more of a gong show."

A former NHL coach on how he knew he was getting fired — "So we go out and play that night, and the next day I get back and I'm driving back from the airport, and it's probably about 6 o'clock at night, and I know we need a defenseman for practice tomorrow because one of (our) defenseman couldn't play (the night prior). I call the GM and he says, 'Yeah, OK.' I say, 'Do you want me to give the [AHL coach] a call? He says, 'No, no, that's alright.' And that was the first time he called [the AHL coach about] a call-up. I'm in the car and I call my wife and I said, 'I'm getting fired tomorrow. Sure enough, the next morning I walked into the rink and [it happened].'

AHL assistant coach and former NHL assistant on how a team game plans from faceoff formations — "So let's say there is a faceoff in the right dot of the offensive zone and the opposing team is lined up defenseman, center, winger, winger, and then the other defenseman right behind winger. You're reading that defenseman's hands; so much of that is dedicated on handedness of who you're going against. If the defenseman on the defensive side is a lefty, they're probably going up strong side. If it's a righty, he'll probably try to come up the weak side of the ice — either by a rim, wheeling the net or a D-D bump. Obviously teams run reverses to break pressure but almost always if a defenseman has his forehand facing the wall, they're going to go up the strong side of the ice. That's the biggest tell in the NHL, the handedness of an opposing defenseman when your team is on an O-zone faceoff."

Former NHL front office executive on how he could tell the opposing side was coming to the table for a deal — "I always found a tell for me, especially when you talk about negotiating a contract, it was a subtle change in voice, tone or intonation. You could tell the way they were presenting their case changed from a demand to an ask, even if very subtly. Then there were the few instances when you had a backchannel to the player through a third party or a teammate and you hear that they really want to get this done. I always found that was a great opportunity to learn something about the agent. Especially if it's someone you do multiple deals with, it's helpful to know an agent's 'tells.' You can find insight on that when you knew the player's position."

NHL security guard on knowing when he knew it was time to put up a metal fence to separate two teams' locker rooms: "There was one game against where I was [stationed] on the lounge door. Next to me was the metal gate used to separate the home and visiting locker rooms, all in the same hallway. The game got very chippy from the start. After the first fight both players were sent to their locker rooms. Continued to yell at each other door the hallway. Another fight breaks out, two more players sent to locker rooms. This continued several more times. I could hear inside the player lounge and every time a player was thrown out of the game, the player and eventually players would be hooting and screaming. It was like if you were sent to detention in school and your best friend gets sent in after you."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

High fives, laughing, etc. Well after it got worse my supervisor came down and ordered me to close the metal gate to keep the players separated. One of the equipment guys, who I will not name, looks at me and says "why don't you fucking grow up"! I respond with "I should grow up? If my boss tells me to close the gate it's CLOSED! If you have a problem, tell them." Needless to say, the gate remained closed and they made the opposing team's bus pull around to the Valet parking circle and the team exited up the staircase. So funny, they were all bitching and moaning.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110917 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs-Penguins matchup doesn't live up to offensive potential

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

October 18, 2018, 9:46 PM

TORONTO – Sidney Crosby didn't concern himself with whether the Toronto Maple Leafs were throwing Auston Matthews or John Tavares over the boards against him. The Pittsburgh Penguins captain brought the same strategy to each of his shifts on Thursday night.

"We just wanted to hold on to the puck a little bit more," said Crosby. "It's a lot more fun playing that way and I think you can wear teams down playing that way, too. That plays to our strengths. I think our focus was just holding on to the puck and defending by playing in the offensive zone."

He didn't even have to register a primary point to do damage against the Leafs.

Matthews was plugged in his own zone while sharing the ice with No. 87, prompting Leafs coach Mike Babcock to adjust out of that matchup partway through a night where Pittsburgh enjoyed an 8-4 edge in shot attempts during the seven-plus minutes they battled 5-on-5.

That was a key man to neutralize. Matthews opened the year with at least two points in each of Toronto's seven games and didn't sniff a "Grade A" chance in the eighth – a 3-0 loss to Pittsburgh that was dull, by the Penguins design.

"If we play smart and we play right, we'll beat any team in the league," said Pittsburgh centre Evgeni Malkin. "We have a great experienced team, we know how to play tough games, we know how to play against skill teams. We showed tonight. We stopped Matthews. Finally he did not score, you know?"

"We deserved to win."

The differences were subtle, but important.

Crosby also did well in his 3:36 against Tavares, with Pittsburgh enjoying a 7-1 edge in attempts, but that was an aberration. Toronto's big free-agent splash had two or three dangerous looks against Penguins goalie Matt Murray and seemed to have some traction with linemates Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman.

They just couldn't quite break through.

Malkin struck on one of Pittsburgh's two power plays, surprising Frederik Andersen with a low-angle shot after Crosby won an offensive zone faceoff back to Kris Letang in the first period. Toronto

only received one abbreviated opportunity with the man advantage and was unlucky not to get at least one more, with a Jake Guentzel high-stick that dangerously cut Hyman for eight stitches around the right eye going undetected.

Otherwise, two teams brimming with elite talent ground each other to a halt. There were virtually no odd-man rushes or big gaps to make skilled plays, and the Penguins seemed a little more comfortable playing in the trenches.

"I think it's the best game of the season so far for us," said Malkin. "We played three periods against Matthews, Tavares; like we did a great job in the D-zone, too. We understand they're skilled guys. We played physical, we played smart."

Added Crosby: "They've got a lot of offensive weapons there. I thought we did a great job of limiting their chances – I mean they're going to get them, they're a pretty highly skilled group – but we didn't give them any freebies. We made them work for them."

Pittsburgh showed the Leafs respect at Scotiabank Arena. They've been no defensive marvel over the first two weeks of the season but buckled down with Murray returning from a three-game concussion absence against the NHL's highest-scoring team.

They are a group of scoring champions – Malkin and Crosby have each won the Art Ross Trophy twice – but they are three-time Stanley Cup champions because of their ability to bottle things up when necessary.

"It seems like they were just calm, cool, collected out there," said Matthews. "They didn't run around, they just played smart and didn't force anything and made plays. It seemed like they had us running around quite a bit."

As cliché as it sounds, experience won out over exuberance.

Crosby may have made the turn to the back nine of his playing career, but he's not ceding anything to the young guns rocketing towards the upper echelon of the sport. He got the better of Matthews on a Thursday night in October while Murray made one fewer mistake than Andersen.

"I think all victories you've got to earn. It was right there for us to find another step and get better and find a way to get on the inside a little more and they did a good job," said Babcock. "They kept us from doing that. There's a lesson learned in that. They're a more veteran, polished, playoff team than we are."

"It showed."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110918 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks PK struggles in sombre end to strong road trip

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

October 18, 2018, 10:59 PM

WINNIPEG – The Vancouver Canucks stopped one period before their road trip did.

After winning more games than anyone thought possible and learning a lot about themselves during nearly two weeks on the National Hockey League road, the Canucks ran into a heavy,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

talented, overpowering reality check in the third period on Thursday. This is what a Stanley Cup favourite looks like.

The Winnipeg Jets executed on their power play like they were playing video games and pumped in three third-period goals to beat the Canucks 4-1. At least before Vancouver's six-game trip, the Canucks and Jets were believed to be at opposite ends of the NHL's competitive spectrum.

But for 43 minutes, after consecutive Vancouver wins in Tampa, Florida and Pittsburgh, after 17 periods over 12 nights, the Canucks were right there with the Jets. And then they weren't.

"We cracked, basically," Canucks winger Antoine Roussel said. "That's a pretty good road trip, but it sucks for the end of the game in this one. We could easily be 4-2 to be honest with you. I'm very disappointed with our third period. We gave a lot in the second period. We worked hard, we were on pucks. I thought we had our best second period I've seen maybe the whole season. Then we just let go of the rope."

"We compete against a great team, a team that's a (Stanley Cup) contender. So that's encouraging for us. At the same time, we can't piss away efforts like that when we're so close."

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.

Starting with Bryan Little's power-play backhand at 4:58 of the third period, after the Jets centre sliced through the Canucks zone and turned defenceman Chris Tanev, the Jets scored three times in 10 minutes to win it going away.

The Canucks simply looked overmatched in their own zone when Andrew Copp beat Erik Gudbranson to the front of the net to swat in a loose puck and make it 3-1 at 12:46, and Little found Dustin Byfuglien for a tap-in at 14:43.

"That third period, we had that hunger out there and it didn't stop," Little said. "We kept pushing and that's why we got rewarded with more goals."

Having blown a three-goal lead at home to lose 5-4 in overtime to the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday, the Jets exerted their will on the Canucks in the final period Thursday. They are 4-2-1 through seven games – just one point ahead of 4-3-0 Vancouver.

The Canucks went 3-3 on a road trip in which, honestly, the over/under on them for wins would have been about 1.5. And when Vancouver lost 5-3 two Tuesdays ago in Carolina to start the trip 0-2, it was reasonable to wonder if they'd win any games.

Then they swept Florida State for the first time since 2002 and, after leading scorer Elias Pettersson suffered a concussion on Saturday, went into Pittsburgh and beat the Sidney Crosby-Evgeni Malkin Penguins 3-2 in overtime on Tuesday.

The Canucks gained a lot of confidence on this trip. They came as far figuratively and they did literally.

"I think every game we were ready to go," veteran Brandon Sutter said. "Going into Tampa and Florida and winning both those games, then we went into Pittsburgh and right from the start of the game we were ready and were with them step for step. Those are three really good teams. Even tonight, we were with them for 50 minutes and it kind of got away from us in the last 10."

"I liked our effort all the way through. First long road trip of the year is always a big one. We learned a lot about ourselves. When we're doing the right things, we can play with anyone. We kind of showed that."

Gudbranson said: "Our compete level and our will to win really was not the thing that wavered here. Especially through this road trip, I think a lot of guys learned how committed the guy to the left and

right of him is. It didn't finish the way we (wanted) but I think we should keep our heads held high."

Actually, they better keep their heads down and keep working because they play the Boston Bruins Saturday at Rogers Arena in a game that, travel-wise, is like another roadie, before the Stanley Cup-champion Washington Capitals visit Vancouver on Monday. Then, the Canucks depart again for back-to-back road games against the Vegas Golden Knights and Arizona Coyotes.

Bo Horvat scored the only Canucks' goal Thursday, beating defenceman Jacob Trouba one-on-one and chipping the puck past Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck to tie it 1-1 at 12:54 of the second period. Blake Wheeler sauced a pass through two defenders and one teammate to tee up Patrik Laine's power-play one-timer for Winnipeg at 18:56 of the first period.

Missing Pettersson – the 19-year-old is making encouraging progress in his recovery from Florida defenceman Mike Matheson's illegal body-slam – the Canucks scored fewer than three goals for the first time this season. And goalie Anders Nilsson, beaten four times on 32 shots, lost for the first time in four games since replacing Jacob Markstrom in net.

"Sometimes momentum is hard to explain," Roussel said. "But I felt we could have pushed harder. We've got to learn from it. We can't have too many games where we're so close and ... we let go (of) the rope."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110919 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers gaining confidence after impressive win over Bruins

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

October 19, 2018, 1:19 AM

EDMONTON — When the start didn't come off the way it was drawn up, the goaltender came to the rescue, carrying the Edmonton Oilers out of a scoreless first period.

When a defenceman went down early, four others stepped up, each playing more than 23 minutes. The penalty kill overcame all three shortages it faced, and the power play got one in the third period to break open a tie.

All are routine happenings in the hockey world. Or, at least, routine for good teams.

It has not been routine in Edmonton, for some time. Nor have home-ice wins like this one, a 3-2 overtime win over the Boston Bruins and Edmonton's third straight W. Also sighted Thursday night at Rogers Arena, another rare bird not seen often in these parts of late:

Confidence.

"Last year was so frustrating," began centre Ryan Strome. "Now, we knew we were going to win this game. I knew we were going to win tonight. First game at home, after a win like that (in Winnipeg), there's no way we're going to have a letdown."

The Oilers opened their season with a pair of losses, squeaked out a 2-1 win at Madison Square Garden, and then stunned the Winnipeg Jets 5-4 in overtime after overcoming a 4-1 deficit. They returned to Rogers Place for the latest home opener in team history (barring a



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

lockout), and waiting there for them was a litany of opponents that began with Boston, before visits from Nashville, Pittsburgh and Washington.

No one gets any schedule sympathy — every team will have their ugly stretch this season. But geez, this one was fairly indecent for a team that choked last season and was/is under major pressure to turn this thing around in 2018-19.

After an 0-2 start, this morning the Oilers are 3-2. Crisis averted.

"After that last game, coming back the way we did, we're building a little bit," said goalie Cam Talbot, who so far looks like he's heading towards a bounce-back season. "Tonight, that's a huge win against another good team. That's a team that was at the top of the league last year, so we're building confidence, building momentum in this room. Just trying to keep it going."

Edmonton was 19-18-4 on home ice last season. Only seven teams had less than Edmonton's 32 home-ice points, and on special teams, well, dead last in penalty kill and bottom third in power play does not a playoff team make.

They're still a bit of a one-man team offensively — OK, more than a bit — with Connor McDavid assisting on Leon Draisaitl's OT winner after a slick, bait-and-switch defensive play. McDavid had two more assists for 11 points in five games, but Draisaitl scored a big one, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins buried his second on the power play, and rookie Kailer Yamamoto scored his first NHL goal.

"Felt even better than I thought it would," said Yamamoto, who spun on Charlie McAvoy and burned him to the net, sniping a lovely shot over Jaro Halak's shoulder. His mind went blank when that puck went in, his first big-league goal after a lifetime of dreaming.

"A hundred per cent. When I scored I didn't know what to do," he said. "I was a little nervous, I'm not going to lie. I scored and I was thinking, 'OK, what do I do now?'"

That bit of support scoring was buttressed by one of the best nights this oft-maligned blue line has seen. Matt Benning played just 2:27 before leaving the game with an injury, and 19-year-old Evan Bouchard was playing career game No. 4.

That left the heavy lifting to Darnell Nurse (27:39), Oscar Klefbom (28:04), Adam Larsson (23:17) and a quietly steady Kris Russell (23:11).

"It was a tough night for them but they gave us some pretty brave minutes the five of them," said head coach Todd McLellan. "Once we got going and got skating and supported puck movement we were a lot better, but without Cam's performance in the first period we don't get a chance to come back."

This one ended the way so many do when the Oilers get to OT. McDavid, to Draisaitl, to the goal horn sounding.

McDavid saw Patrice Bergeron heading for a breakaway pass and dropped back to the neutral zone. It looked like he left Bergeron open just enough to entice a pass from Brad Marchand, then easily picked off the pass, turned up ice, walked past Marchand and fed Draisaitl for the winner.

"I tried to throw sauce on that," lamented Marchand, who had a fabulous game, dangerous all night long. "I saw Bergy going. Obviously I should have thrown it a little harder. I saw Bergy, I didn't really know how close McDavid was."

Too close, as it turned out.

As it always seems to turn out, with McDavid.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110920 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Malkin scores 2 as Penguins blank high-flying Maple Leafs

Canadian Press

October 18, 2018, 9:54 PM

TORONTO — Led by the league's top scorer and a potent supporting cast, the high-flying Maple Leafs filled the opposition net almost at will through the first two weeks of the NHL season.

The Pittsburgh Penguins stopped Toronto's juggernaut in its tracks Thursday.

Matt Murray made 38 saves for his first shutout of 2018-19 as the Penguins snapped the Leafs' five-game winning streak with a stifling 3-0 victory.

"We played really solid all the way through and battled hard," said Murray, who returned after missing three games with a concussion. "That's a crazy, dynamic team over there and we were able to hold them off pretty well."

Evgeni Malkin scored midway through the first period for Pittsburgh (3-1-2) before he and Kris Letang added one each into an empty net late in a tightly contested affair.

"It's the best game this season so far for us," said Malkin, who added an assist on Letang's empty netter for a three-point night. "We played three periods against (Auston) Matthews, (John) Tavares. We did a great job."

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby picked up an assist on Pittsburgh's opener to move into a tie with Darryl Sittler for 60th on the NHL's all-time points list with 1,221.

Crosby was also instrumental in keeping Matthews, who leads the league with 16 points (10 goals, six assists), to just one shot attempt through two periods.

"They have a lot of offensive weapons," Crosby said. "We did a great job of limiting their chances. They're going to get them, they're a pretty highly-skilled group, but we didn't give them any freebies."

Frederik Andersen stopped 36 shots for Toronto (6-2-0), which came in averaging an NHL-high 4.71 goals per game.

"All victories, you've got to earn," Leafs head coach Mike Babcock said. "It was right there for us to find another step and get better and find a way to get on the inside a little more, and they did a good job and kept us from doing that. There's a lesson learned in that."

"They're a more veteran, polished playoff team than we are and it showed."

Murray picked up the seventh shutout of his career after suffering a concussion in practice on Oct. 8. Andersen, meanwhile, returned to Toronto's net after sitting out Monday's 4-1 victory over Los Angeles with a minor knee injury.

Matthews was looking to become just the third player in league history to start a season with eight consecutive multi-point games, but was unable to get much of anything going.

"We had a hard time getting on the inside," said Matthews. "There are a lot of things that we can improve on. It seems like they were just calm, cool, collected."

"They didn't run around, they just played smart and didn't force anything."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

With much of the talk in the lead up focusing around which player holds the unofficial title of "best player in the world" — Edmonton captain Connor McDavid, Matthews or Crosby — it was Murray and Andersen who stood out in a matchup between teams that started the night averaging a combined 8.11 goals per game.

Coming off back-to-back shootout and overtime losses to Montreal and Vancouver, respectively, the Penguins took that 1-0 lead at 11:42 of the first period — just six seconds after the Leafs were whistled for too many men on the ice.

Crosby won the draw and the puck found its way down low to Malkin, who fired a low shot that beat Andersen through the pads on Pittsburgh's 15th shot.

Toronto had a couple of chances earlier in the period, including Murray thwarting Tavares after he stepped past Letang down low.

Tavares had another great opportunity off a slick feed from Mitch Marner after Malkin gave the Penguins the lead, but Murray made a nice pad stop.

Leafs winger Zach Hyman, who took a nasty high stick that went uncalled late in the first, had the puck alone in front early in the second, but Murray was there again.

The increasingly frustrated Leafs pushed midway third — Nazem Kadri had the first of a couple great opportunity with eight minutes to go — but Murray stood tall whenever the Penguins' tight setup showed any cracks before Malkin and Letang scored into the empty net.

"I didn't think there was tons of room out there," Babcock said. "They played fast, played with good structure.

"It's not often you see our team get no goals."

Notes: Mario Lemieux (1992-93) holds the NHL record for consecutive multi-point games to start a season with 12, while Kevin Stevens, one of his linemate that year, did it eight times. ... Crosby's junior teammates nicknamed him "Darryl" because they thought he was the only player who could break Sittler's record of 10 points in a single game set in 1976 when the Hall of Famer was with Toronto. ... The Leafs wrap up a three-game homestand Saturday against St. Louis. ... The Penguins don't play again until next Tuesday when they begin a trip through Western Canada that will see them visit Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110921 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / William Nylander practising this week with Austrian hockey team

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

October 18, 2018, 3:22 PM

William Nylander has started practising with Austrian team Dornbirner EC while waiting out his contract impasse with the Toronto Maple Leafs, Sportsnet has learned.

The 22-year-old winger was on the ice with the Erste Bank Eishockey Liga team on Wednesday and Thursday and is expected to be at practice again on Friday. His plans beyond that are unknown to the team, according to head coach Dave MacQueen.

Nylander's connection to Dornbirn came through his sister Jacqueline Nylander Altelius, a WTA player who trains at the tennis centre adjacent to the arena. Nylander did an off-ice workout at that facility before skating with a team that includes 11 North American players, according to MacQueen.

He's been welcomed with open arms by members of the Bulldogs and their veteran coach, who spent 15 seasons in the OHL with Peterborough, Erie and Sarnia and another two years as an assistant with the Tampa Bay Lightning before heading to Austria.

"My GM ran it by me and it took all of about three seconds to say 'absolutely,'" MacQueen wrote in an email to Sportsnet.

Dornbirn is about a 90-minute drive from Zurich, where Nylander and his camp is believed to have sat down with Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas on Wednesday. It's not known if that face-to-face meeting produced any progress in stalled negotiations which have kept the player away from Toronto throughout training camp and the first two weeks of the regular season.

Prior to this week, Nylander had been skating back home in central Stockholm with skills coach Jocke Ahlgren.

Nylander was an eighth overall pick by the Leafs in 2014 and is coming off consecutive 61-point seasons. He had been hoping to land a long-term contract coming out of his entry-level deal but might have to settle for a shorter bridge because of the gap in talks.

The Leafs are 6-1-0 heading into Thursday's game with Pittsburgh and have produced a NHL-best 4.71 goals per game. Nylander has kept in touch with Toronto teammates by text during his absence and continues to skate in his Leafs gear but isn't eager to offer up any hometown discounts.

"In the end I have to take care of myself and do what I and my agent thinks is right," Nylander told Aftonbladet in Swedish on Oct. 4. "Especially if it's about several years to come. I need to think long term. It's my own future it's about."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110922 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' dismantling by Penguins leaves 'sour taste'

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

October 18, 2018, 11:32 PM

TORONTO — Throwback Thursday ushered the type of big-boy, no-nonsense hockey game that the Toronto Maple Leafs — an exhilarating group built on lightning speed and dangles for days — will need to solve once they crash head-on into another contender for seven games straight.

The Pittsburgh Penguins kicked off their four-game, cross-Canada tour by dismantling hockey's hottest offence, snuffing out a handful of streaks in the process.

In an airtight 3-0 affair that saw zero goals at even-strength (and two late into a desperate, empty home net), Toronto's five-game run, Auston Matthews' seven-game multi-point rip, and the Leafs' power-play-scoring streak all got snuffed by the winners of two of the past three Stanley Cups.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

"It's not often you see our team get no goals," coach Mike Babcock said.

Poised and punishing, the Penguins gave the Leafs their first glimpse of what they should expect come April.

No time.

No space.

No second-chance opportunities.

And no blowing leads.

This meat-and-potatoes order of hockey? Pittsburgh gobbled it up and asked for a handful of fries smashed on top.

The Penguins out-hit the Leafs 30-21, outshot them 39-38, and out-shot-blocked them 22-7. They were more disciplined and more structured.

"They were heavy," fearless 209-pound checking winger Zach Hyman said, after the bleeding, literal and otherwise, stopped.

"They were a lot heavier than us. They were stronger than us. They had the puck more than us. They were a better team than us."

Somewhere, Lars Eller enjoyed the quiet smile of vindication.

That Hyman — one of few Leafs built for a grind-it-out affair where victory seems to ride on every puck battle and box-out in the slot — felt overwhelmed is telling. He committed a tripping penalty, he was dumped to the ice by Jack Johnson, he got stoned in the crease by shutout-pitching Matt Murray, and he had his inner right eye socket sliced by a Jake Guentzel high-stick that slipped under his visor and out of the officials' view. (Of course, Hyman returned, missing just a single shift as team doctors applied eight stitches and the equipment staff a longer Darth Helmet-esque super-visor for protection.)

"Really scary. It's right above my eye, so ... lucky," Hyman said of the nasty cut, which went unpenalized. "If they would've saw it, they would've called it. They apologized to me. It's fine. It was away from where the puck was."

The one Leafs streak that did continue is a dubious one.

Nazem Kadri, temporarily lost at C with the new one-two punch of Matthews and John Tavares, has now gone 12 consecutive games without scoring a goal, dating back to his 0-fer in April's playoff series loss to Boston.

It's not for lack of effort. Kadri fired a team-best five shots, was on the ice for a team-high 36 shot attempts for, and his possession numbers were fantastic (76.7 per cent at 5-on-5), but Murray was stellar after spending 12 days recovering from his third career concussion, and kicked a leg out to deny Kadri at the doorstep.

"You just try not to think about it too much," Kadri said of his slump.

"I know it's going to come sooner or later. My game is never going to change. I still have the ability to go out there and play-make and set my teammates up. In return, those pucks are going to come my way."

In a game with little tolerance for mistakes, Toronto's most costly one arrived with a first-period too-many-men penalty that allowed Evgeni Malkin zip a bad-angle shot past Frederik Andersen just six seconds into the man-advantage.

That's all the edge Mike Sullivan's expert group needed to squeeze the clamps. As the minutes ticked away, the contest resembled a child trying in vain to arm-wrestle his father.

"It seemed like they were just calm, cool and collected out there. They didn't run around; they just played smart. Didn't force anything. They just made plays, and it seemed like they had us running around quite a bit," said Matthews, contained for the first time all season.

"We had a hard time getting on the inside."

In wake of this style of loss, Babcock heaped praise on the better side, and you'd have to assume that even a coach so addicted to winning will take some pleasure in using Thursday's defeat as a teaching moment.

"Especially on home ice, we want to take advantage of playing here and make it a tough place to play," Tavares said.

"It leaves a sour taste in your mouth."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110923 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Meet Eamon McAdam, the Maple Leafs' surprise emergency goalie

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

October 18, 2018, 3:01 PM

TORONTO — Eamon McAdam had to pause his FaceTime session with one of his hockey-loving buddies from back home in Perkasio, Pa., when his phone alit with an incoming call from Mike Dixon at 11:30 a.m. Monday morning.

The Toronto Maple Leafs' director of minor league operations needed to let the ECHL goaltender know that his promotion just got a promotion.

McAdam, who was rated sixth on the organization's depth chart, was going from the farm team's farm team to the big time overnight.

With Leafs starter Frederik Andersen tweaking his knee Saturday in Washington and the swelling persisting, backup Garret Sparks was tasked on short notice with a start versus Los Angeles, and McAdam was recalled from St. John's on an emergency basis.

"It was a whirlwind for sure," smiles McAdam, who couldn't wait to flip back to his FaceTime session and relay the giddy news. "I quickly told him, then called my mom and dad. I almost gave them a heart attack.

"It caught me by surprise, but it was really cool. Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed is the perfect phrase. I couldn't get the smile off my face. Just an unbelievable experience all around. The team did really well, and it was a fun game to watch."

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The ravaging of the Maple Leafs' once-rich goaltending well over the past two weeks shows just of how fast things can shift.

NHL-calibre netminders Curtis McElhinny (Carolina) and Calvin Pickard (Philadelphia) were both scooped off the waiver wire when the Leafs made their final roster cuts out of training camp.

"Good for Mac. Good for Pick. Too bad for our depth," coach Mike Babcock summed up at the time.

The situation grew more dire once new Marlies No. 1 Kasimir Kaskisuo fell victim to a serious lower-body injury that will keep him sidelined "longer-term," according to Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe.

Babcock assured that Andersen is healthy enough to start Thursday at Scotiabank Arena versus Pittsburgh (the Penguins' No. 1, Matt



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Murray, is also returning from injury), but Andersen did not speak to reporters Thursday and when he spoke Tuesday, after leaving practice early, the goalie expressed concern about managing swelling and movement.

When he's not holding summits with RFA William Nylander in Switzerland, Leafs GM Kyle Dubas is poking around the market to bolster his goaltending. The belief is that when Philly's Michal Neuvirth and Carolina's Scott Darling come off IR for their respective clubs, Pickard or McElhinney could reappear on the waiver wire, in which case Toronto would have first dibs. (Another possibility in the Hurricanes' Peter Mrazek, whom Babcock coached in Detroit and memorably chose as his No. 1 over Jimmy Howard for a spell.)

"I'm pretty comfortable," Babcock said of the Leafs' net depth. "The one thing about the league is, things all kinda settle out over time. Usually goalies become available. I'm comfortable with Sparks' second game [Monday's 4-1 win over L.A.] and how he's started at practice, so that's a real good thing."

Albeit minor, Andersen's injury has put everyone on notice. On the flip side, it granted McAdam — a seemingly inconsequential piece of this summer's Matt Martin salary-dump trade with the Islanders — with 48 hours he'll never forget.

You gotta love an emergency backup goalie tale.

Coincidentally, the first professional hockey game McAdam had ever seen live was in the same Bay Street building he rushed to Monday.

"I watched the Leafs play the Sens when I was a kid. We were visiting friends. So it's kind of a weird coincidence that this is the first place I got to dress for a game as well," McAdam says. "Pretty crazy."

For his NHL roster debut, the 24-year-old was handed a sweater stitched with 60, a number previously only worn by one warm body in 101 years of Maple Leafs lore: Carlton the Bear.

McAdam chuckles when we tell him he was wearing the same sweater as the polar bear high-fiving kids in the stands.

"In unique company," McAdam laughs. "I've worn a million numbers. I usually switch every team I go to, actually. I like changing it up. They just threw this to me. I'm 50 with the Marlies and I'm 35 down in St. John's, so I'm all over the map."

After winning his Newfoundland Growlers debut and stopping the first half-dozen shots he faced from the NHL's hottest forwards during Monday's warm-up, McAdam — a .910 goalie for the Worcester Railers last season — was feeling himself.

"Oh, this is easy. I'm gonna be great," he thought. "Then I jumped into the half-moon and let in four out of four. Tavares scored on me. A couple other guys just ripped them by me. All right, there's reality."

As he speaks, McAdam is seemingly still riding an emotional wave. Auston Matthews leaned on him to win a fun bet with Jake Gardiner at Tuesday's practice, and a room full of established NHLers made a point of making him feel at ease.

"Early on in practice, I was getting torched pretty good. I had to adjust to the pace. It takes a couple minutes to seeing these releases and just the quality of players that are here," McAdam says. "It's been a really smooth experience. There's a lot of really good guys in this group you can tell by how many guys reached out and made me feel at home a bit."

The irony is, neither the Leafs nor McAdam is hoping the longshot sees any actual NHL action in the coming weeks.

"I calmed myself down enough that I would've been level-headed enough to go in if I had to, but you never want to wish you're going in. You want the team to win, and you never wish injuries on anyone," McAdam says.

"I have to wait for my moment, but it was a step in the right direction — a cool way to get the first one under the belt."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.19.2018

1110924 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / William Nylander practising this week with Austrian hockey team

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

October 18, 2018, 3:22 PM

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Prior to this week, Nylander had been skating back home in central Stockholm with skills coach Jocke Ahlgren.

Nylander was an eighth overall pick by the Leafs in 2014 and is coming off consecutive 61-point seasons. He had been hoping to land a long-term contract coming out of his entry-level deal but might have to settle for a shorter bridge because of the gap in talks.

The Leafs are 6-1-0 heading into Thursday's game with Pittsburgh and have produced a NHL-best 4.71 goals per game. Nylander has kept in touch with Toronto teammates by text during his absence and continues to skate in his Leafs gear but isn't eager to offer up any hometown discounts.

"In the end I have to take care of myself and do what I and my agent thinks is right," Nylander told Aftonbladet in Swedish on Oct. 4.

"Especially if it's about several years to come. I need to think long term. It's my own future it's about."

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

1110925 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Panthers' Matheson had death threats after hit on Canucks' Pettersson

Mike Johnston | @MikeyJ_MMA

October 18, 2018, 12:23 PM

Florida Panthers defenceman Michael Matheson says he received death threats and other vile messages on his social media channels in the days following his hit on Vancouver Canucks star rookie Elias Pettersson.

Matheson was suspended two games for driving Pettersson into the ice after completing a body check in a game Saturday night. Matheson said he reached out to Pettersson via text message and apologized to the 19-year-old Swede.

"It wasn't my intent and it wasn't at all what I meant to do," Matheson told reporters Wednesday of the play that landed Pettersson in concussion protocol. "At every level I've never been a malicious player or someone that goes around trying to hurt players because I expect to receive the same respect in return and that's not what hockey's about. ... There was no point in my frame of mind where I was thinking, 'Oh I gotta injure this guy.'"

It turns out that some seething Canucks fans didn't think a two-game suspension was enough punishment for Matheson.

If you've ever sifted through a comments section you know they can often be a cesspool, as the 24-year-old Pointe-Claire, Que., native discovered when he checked social media.

"I'm trying to stay off it, but it has been very, very disappointing," Matheson told longtime Panthers beat reporter George Richards. "To think that people could be so inhumane about something ... sports were made to bring people together, to cheer on teams and have passion about their teams. I fully understand and respect that. But there are thousands of people commenting things on my social media pages — sending me death threats, wishing I would commit suicide or get cancer — that's bringing things to a whole new level. People have even threatened my dog."

Matheson posted a photo on Oct. 1 of his little dog, Hank, wearing a Panthers jersey. The caption read: "It's finally October and Hank is super excited to have his jersey on..."

Certain Canucks supporters, and other hockey fans upset at the Pettersson play, began replying to that post after Saturday's game.

Here's a small sample of some of the replies...

"You don't deserve this animal. You monster!"

"Your dog is ugly."

"I feel bad for your dog."

"[Expletive] your dog piece of [expletive]."

"Who are you kidding, you're definitely a cat person you ginger [expletive]."

"Take your ginger [expletive] head, your demon spawn ass, and get back in your hell hole where you belong."

Others eventually came to the defence of Hank (who our sources confirm is in fact a good boy) while simultaneously taking a shot at Matheson.

"He's a piece of [expletive] for what he did yes but no need to hate on his dog," one comment read.

Matheson's only message to those posting these types of messages was: "If you're going that far, you might want to look yourself in the mirror. I'm not going to engage in it. It's definitely not worth it. I know not all Vancouver fans are like that. I'm sure it's a very small percentage of hockey fans who are doing this."

The Panthers and Canucks play each other once more this season on Jan. 13 in Vancouver.

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1110926 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing how and why NHL power plays are scoring at such a high rate

Andrew Berkshire

October 18, 2018, 12:50 PM

A few weeks into the 2018-19 NHL season, a familiar trend is happening: goals per game are up and save percentage is down for the third straight season. Equipment changes, specifically smaller chest pads, are likely partially to thank for that, and October is always a messy month as teams figure out tweaks to their systems and rookies fight for jobs, but this is an emerging trend in the NHL.

The 2015-16 season averaged just 5.42 goals per game between the two teams according to Hockey Reference. This was the lowest mark since 2001-02, the height of the dead puck era, despite the introduction of 3-on-3 overtime presumably increasing goal scoring. The following season saw a modest climb to 5.54 goals per game, while last season there was a huge jump to 5.94 goals per game, the highest mark since the crackdown on obstruction in the 2005-06 season following the lockout. Teams averaged 6.24 goals per game between them that season.

This year has seen yet another jump up to 6.24 goals per game. And while some of that is due to the messiness of October, by the end of the season we will likely see a modest increase over 2017-18 as well.

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.

Conveniently, 2015-16 is also the first season SPORTLOGiQ recorded league-wide microstat data, which can give us some insight into why goal scoring has increased.

Surprisingly, even strength save percentage has actually risen ever so slightly over this period, despite the fact that teams have increased their scoring chance production year over year. Power plays, however, have become significantly more lethal.

This is apparent even looking at Hockey Reference, as you can plot out the changes in power play efficiency over the previous 20 seasons before 2018-19.

Conveniently, 1997-98 represents the lowest average power play efficiency since 1963-64 when the statistic was first recorded, so we can see a not entirely linear, but still very obvious 20-plus year trend of power plays becoming more dangerous.

Interestingly, we see that over the past 10 seasons there have been fewer power play opportunities than there were in the Dead Puck Era, and while efficiency declined at the beginning of this drop, it has



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

been steadily on the rise since the shortened 2013 season – and has exploded over the past three seasons.

My hypothesis here is the half season off from the absolute bedlam of an NHL coaching routine helped some smart people in the game develop new strategies to better operate on the power play. Coaches aren't dumb and they can see power plays are becoming less frequent, so it's now more important than ever to take advantage when you can.

What did they change though? Again, we get the convenient stagnant point in 2015-16, so we can compare each of the following seasons to that one and analyze which kind of plays increased in frequency and by how much on a per minute basis.

To be fair, we'll compare October hockey this season to October hockey from each of the seasons in question.

It's not surprising to see increases across the board here, but the extent of those increases is astonishing. Since 2015-16 the average NHL power play has increased its high danger scoring chances by more than 56 per cent and scoring chances on net by more than 60 per cent. The average PP unit moves the puck into the slot with pre-shot movement almost 65 per cent more often, and the percentage of total shot attempts taken within the slot is up nearly 47 per cent.

East-West passes have increased compared to 2015-16, but they're down this season, and there's a reason for that. Most East-West passes on the power play are between defencemen, and frankly, the point shot on the power play is going the way of the dodo.

More than ever, teams are realizing that unless you have Shea Weber back there, whose mind-bendingly excellent shot scored at a 20 per cent clip from the point over the past four seasons, shots from that far out aren't that dangerous. Point shots have an average conversion rate of about four per cent, and though that increases on the power play due to better pre-shot movement, it's not by as much as you would think.

Teams who rely on point shots from their defencemen, no matter how talented (except for maybe Weber), are quickly left behind in power play efficiency. Just ask the Nashville Predators, who have the most talented group of offensive defencemen in the NHL, and only have an average power play since 2016-17 despite being a stellar even strength scoring team.

Teams have realized that using defencemen as support players, often only putting one out on the power play, makes far more sense than organizing your man advantage around a slap shot from 50 feet out.

The question then becomes, are power plays just good early in the year when team defence isn't as tight? Let's compare what we have this season to the past three full seasons.

Over full seasons, the improvements do look a bit smaller, but one reason for that is power plays actually got better as the 2015-16 season went on. But while scoring chances, shot distance and passing plays all improved as the 2016-17 and 2017-18 seasons progressed, the power play conversion rate actually went down slightly.

My guess as to why this happens is goalies perfect their timing, and as they face more shots through a season they improve. This is a bit of a wild guess though, because I'm not sure what else would explain power play efficiency not rising despite better chances being created. It wouldn't make sense to say it was defensive structure if those chances exist in the first place.

The overarching point here, though, is that power plays are scoring more despite getting less opportunity, which is the main reason scoring is up in the NHL. Goalies are still getting better every year — that isn't going to change any time soon — but smarter coaching has put some power back in the hands of goal scorers, and that's a good thing for the league.

If the NHL called the rule book a little stricter and didn't give us an era with the fewest power play opportunities in league history, we may see an even greater shift in power towards offence.

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1110927 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets' Mark Scheifele: Matthews is 'not at McDavid's level just yet'

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

October 16, 2018, 2:25 PM

WINNIPEG — Hey Mark Scheifele. You played with Auston Matthews and Connor McDavid on Team North America at the World Cup, and you've faced them both in the NHL.

Is Matthews really a better player than McDavid, like the folks in Toronto are saying?

"No."

Care to expound on that a bit?

"Obviously Auston's a great player, he's got a lot of skill and you watch him on a nightly basis, he makes a lot of really good plays," said the Jets centre. "Connor McDavid has put up back-to-back 100-point seasons. He's done a lot that Matthews obviously hasn't done. Matthews is a star in this league and he's going to get better. But he's not at McDavid's level just yet."

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You've heard of those players who stay away from hockey when they leave the rink? Guys who don't go home and surf the Centre Ice package on an off night?

Yeah, Scheifele isn't one of those guys. He's in tune with the league and knows everything that's going on. Also, he will no doubt play alongside McDavid — and against Matthews — when the NHL players go back to the Winter Olympics one day.

He's seen Matthews tearing it up for the 6-1 Maple Leafs, becoming just the 11th player to have 16 points in his first six games — a group that includes Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux. But better than McDavid?

Not in Scheifele's opinion.

"Toronto's played seven games. Edmonton's only played three," cautioned Scheifele. "It's still early in the season and there's still so much that will happen. Every year there's ebbs and flows. Auston's had a great start and you want him to keep going, but it'll be interesting to have this conversation later in the season."

The question was posed to Oilers coach Todd McLellan, who coached that Team North America squad as well. You know who he's going to pick.

"I would agree with you wholeheartedly — except we have Connor," began McLellan. "Auston Matthews, and Connor, and Sid, and Nathan MacKinnon, and Taylor Hall... This league is blessed with a tremendous amount of talent right now. Young players who are full of courage, and full of talent who entertain on a nightly basis. Auston would be one of them."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

"You are allowed to pick your own guy, Todd," someone said.

"I believe he is (the best player). But I'm not going to take anything away from Auston Matthews. He's had a tremendous start, and he's a good kid. I've had the pleasure of being around him.

"But, 97 is a damned good player. I'll tell you that."

Scheifele faces McDavid tonight in Winnipeg. He's quietly hoping McDavid isn't catching wind of this growing conversation in the Canadian hockey world.

"I'm sure Connor likes challenges," Scheifele said, "and wants to be the best player he can be. I'm sure Auston having a great start is only pushing him to do more.

"And that's bad news for us."

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1110928 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens focused on turning hot start into a winning culture

Eric Engels

October 18, 2018, 2:33 PM

BROSSARD, Que.,—The Montreal Canadiens skated the ice into oblivion at their south-shore practice facility on Thursday.

Nothing a good Zamboni job won't fix, but we're bringing it up because they didn't necessarily have to do that. With nearly three full days to spare between Wednesday night's 3-2 win over the St. Louis Blues and this coming Saturday's game against the Ottawa Senators, it would have been understandable if the Canadiens took Thursday off. They had earned it by beating the Pittsburgh Penguins, Detroit Red Wings and Blues in succession.

Instead they pushed through a one-hour practice at warp speed, with the intensity ratcheting up from drill to drill.

It ended with some wind sprints, which followed a three-on-three sequence in close quarters.

When you talk about "creating a winning culture"—and the Canadiens have been putting those four words together a lot since they opened training camp in September—this is what it's about.

"We're here to work," said forward Phillip Danault. "No matter where we are [in the standings], we're having fun. But when we come to the rink, it's business time. We're here to get better as a team. Obviously we saw it today—we had a big win yesterday and we're back at the rink, even if we could've had a day off."

Tomas Tatar, Tomas Plekanec and Paul Byron opted for treatments, taking an opportunity to rest and heal whatever wounds have accumulated over the last month.

But everyone else, sick or banged up, was participating on Thursday.

That included 20-year-old defenceman Victor Mete, who missed Wednesday's game after a shot in Monday's win over Detroit hit him in the same part of the hand he broke late last season.

"It's really sore," Mete said before adding, "but it's strong, and I didn't want to miss anything."

A glimpse of Karl Alzner skating in his spot against St. Louis was enough to bring Mete back to the ice in a hurry.

The internal competition that's taken hold has undoubtedly contributed greatly to Montreal's (unexpected) 4-1-1 start to the season. Alzner, who signed a five-year, \$23.125-million contract just a year ago, was scratched for the first five games. Plekanec had to sit for three games before getting a chance to play games 999, 1000 and 1001 of his career. Matthew Peca, who signed a two-year, \$2.6 million contract this past summer, played three mediocre games to start the season and was scratched from Montreal's fourth.

Don't be surprised if Charles Hudon, who accumulated points in consecutive games from Montreal's fourth line, is the odd man out on Saturday after two penalties taken in the win over St. Louis nearly cost his team points in the standings.

"We're all pushing each other," said Nicolas Deslauriers, who will fight to take his job back when he returns next week from a facial fracture suffered in exhibition. "That's what good teams do."

Good teams also don't rest on their laurels when things are going well.

It's why when Canadiens coach Claude Julien was asked after Wednesday's game what he was most proud of with regards to his team's hot start, he replied, "I'm not proud."

"Right now I'm not proud of anything, because it's only six games," Julien said. "I'm glad with the way things are going, but there's no reason to get carried away with where we are. I think there's still lots to accomplish. I'm happy with the start of the season, but it stops there. We have to keep plugging away. And there's a lot of good things happening, and I could be proud of a lot of things. But I prefer being humble in these situations where things can change quickly."

That's the attitude the Canadiens are trying to cultivate from top down, and it's permeating throughout the organization.

Earlier this week, Joel Bouchard, who coaches Montreal's AHL affiliate, put his team on blast for what he felt was a sub-standard effort at practice following a loss last Saturday.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not accepting that," said the Laval Rocket bench boss on Tuesday. "We have work to do, and I was demanding work for just 40 minutes of practice. If they're not capable of doing that, I'm stopping after 26 and we're starting over tomorrow. I'm not wasting my time on the ice."

Bouchard did indeed cut practice at the 26-minute mark, but he wasn't done talking about what he's trying to instill in his team.

"It's funny, all I heard for three days [around Montreal and Laval] was about how Tomas Plekanec is a true professional," Bouchard said. "He's made several millions in his career and he's made it to 1,000 games. Everyone's talking about how good he was in practices, how he prepared with such attention to detail. As far as I know, none of these guys have played 1,000 games in the NHL. But they can act like professionals, unlike they did today."

The message was clearly received, with the Rocket jumping out to a 4-0 lead before pulling out a 5-2 win over the Hartford Wolfpack and improving their record to 3-2 on Wednesday.

Neither the Rocket nor the Canadiens are expected to be world-beaters in their respective leagues this season, but the mandate from general manager Marc Bergevin is for everyone in place to help build towards a brighter future for the organization.

What's clear right off the hop is that the bar is being set high and the culture they're aiming to establish is taking shape.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

1110929 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs' high-octane offence sputters in shutout loss to Penguins

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – When the red-hot Toronto Maple Leafs collided with the battle-tested Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday night, all signs pointed to an offence-heavy duel brewing between two talented rosters.

And then the game began.

Toronto was scoring an average of almost five goals per game heading into the contest, but its elite playmakers were swiftly silenced by suffocating defensive play from the Penguins and spectacular goaltending by Matt Murray in a 3-0 loss. That snapped Toronto's five-game win streak, and dropped them to 6-2-0 on the season.

It was exactly the kind of game Toronto isn't primed to win: A low-scoring affair deep into the third period with zero space, where the veteran savvy of Penguins' stars like Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin ultimately got the best of them.

"They were a better team than us tonight," said winger Zach Hyman. "They were a lot heavier than us, a lot stronger than us. They had the puck more than us. They're a really good team, and you can see why. It wasn't a good night for us."

It was Malkin who would score the Penguins' first two goals, one on a first period power play and the other off an errant pass by Nazem Kadri when the Leafs' net was empty late in the third period that Malkin got credit for. Frederik Andersen had been yanked with three minutes still remaining in the period, leaving the Leafs too much time for a mistake like that to occur. Kris Letang pocketed the other empty netter to seal the win.

In a one-goal game until the final 2:07 of the third period, the Leafs found for the first time this season they simply couldn't capitalize on even one chance.

"It's a grind out there, there's no room," said Leafs coach Mike Babcock. "When you're a good team and you're playing good teams, there is no room. That's just the reality. You have to find a way to play your game within the no room."

"It's just a sour taste when you don't execute and don't win some of those battles when you need to and find a way to get it done," added John Tavares, who finished minus-2. "We had some good looks, if we were able to get one of those in it changes the game, but at the same time we know we can be a lot better."

Babcock said before Thursday's game he wasn't going to be hard-matching any of his lines with the Penguins' big guns, but rather he'd see how events played out and adjust. That meant starting Auston Matthews' potent line with Patrick Marleau and Kasperii Kapanen out against Crosby, Jake Guentzel and Bryan Rust first, a decision that didn't yield positive returns for Toronto.

Through two periods, Matthews' unit was well-acquainted with their own end at 26 per cent possession, even when Matthews had won 71 per cent of his draws against Crosby to that point.

Matthews entered the game on a seven-game point streak and as the NHL's leading scorer with 16 points, but the Penguins' relentless backcheck and stifling defence was too much to overcome.

"We had a hard time getting on the inside" Matthews said. "There's ways we can improve. It seemed like they were just calm, cool and

collected out there, they played smart and didn't force anything, they made plays and had us running around quite a bit."

When the third period began, Babcock had gone back to an old reliable approach, starting Kadri's line with Connor Brown and Par Lindholm out against Crosby. That Kadri hard-match is what Babcock had gone with the last two seasons at home against an opponent's top line, but the change of assignment didn't help the Leafs' cause.

What could have is if the referees didn't miss a blatant high-sticking call on Hyman in the first period. The winger was taken down by Guentzel's stick catching him in dangerous territory, a mishap that required eight stitches above Hyman's right eye. Given that the hit drew blood, the Leafs should have received a four-minute power play, in a game where open ice was at a premium.

Babcock would have liked to see the call go Toronto's way, but it was nowhere near the loss' deciding factor. The Leafs haven't seen much adversity so far in this young season, and have an opportunity now to learn from a disappointing result against a team that's had the type of success – with two Stanley Cup wins in the past three years – that Toronto would sooner than later like to emulate.

"All victories you have to earn," Babcock said. "[The game] was right there for us to find another step and get better, find a way to get on the inside and they did a good job to keep us from doing that. They're a more veteran, polished playoff team than we are and it showed."

Andersen no worse for wear

In his first tilt back from a mild knee injury, Andersen turned in the strong performance Toronto needed against Crosby and the Penguins. But even his 36-save showing couldn't make up for the Leafs' lack of goal support in a game where Murray (also returning from injury) looked to be in playoff form. The night got off to a bit of a rocky start for Andersen when he served up some big rebounds early in the first period that nearly turned up in the back of his net, but the goaltender recovered quickly and stopped 16 of the Penguins' 17 shots in the frame, while the Leafs managed only nine shots at the other end. Andersen's only error was on Malkin's power play goal that came six seconds into the man advantage off a clean faceoff win by Crosby. When the Penguins had sustained pressure on Andersen for minutes at a time in the second period, his play is the only thing that kept Toronto alive in a one-goal game. Thursday's game was the fifth time in eight contests the Leafs have given up at least 30 shots on net, and the third time in a start by Andersen. He finished with a season-high .973 save percentage.

Kadri can't buy one

The Leafs' third-line centre may not have been able to light the lamp yet this season, but Kadri has claimed to still be happy with the chances he's been generated. Thursday was more of the same for him, starting with the first 10 minutes of the opening period. With linemates Lindholm and Brown, Kadri was flying around the Penguins end as the Leafs' most threatening forward and posted a 92.9 shot attempt percentage after 20 minutes. But he was also clearly too anxious to find twine at times, and saw the puck jump right off his stick as a result. But as the game went on, Kadri had more high-danger scoring chances than any other Leafs forward (four for, zero against) and led the way in possession at 75 per cent. His point-blank chance on Murray late in the third period was Toronto's best chance at an equalizer, and after all that, it was Kadri who had the ill-fortune to see his pass trickle down into the Leafs' empty net to end the night.

Babcock has said before that Kadri does best with a specific assignment, like he's gotten the last two years as Toronto's matchup guy. But Babcock has moved away from hard-matching this season, and that could be part of the reason he's struggling to make his mark. The bright side is that last season he went through a stretch of 20 games with only one goal and had still put up 32 by the end of



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

the year. A slow start to the season won't necessarily lead to a down year overall, but adding another skill player to his line might be the spark Kadri needs to get rolling. He finished with minus-2 with a team-high five shots on net and at 71 per cent in the dot.

Fourth line fight continues

Through no fault of his own, Tyler Ennis has taken the biggest tumble down the Leafs' lineup since the regular season began, but Thursday's game showed he's not done fighting for more consistent ice time. Ennis played the entire preseason and first two games of the regular season with Matthews and Marleau, but was replaced there by Kapanen in game three and demoted to the fourth line. Ennis has been trading opportunities with Andreas Johnsson ever since, slotting out for the Leafs' previous two games as a healthy scratch before getting a chance against Pittsburgh. And Ennis didn't waste a shift. Skating with Frederik Gauthier and Josh Leivo, Ennis was aggressive on the forecheck hounding pucks and played hard around the net to set up chances for his linemates. While Johnsson may bring more skill to the ice than Ennis, it's the veteran who's savvier when he doesn't have the puck, and isn't as easily knocked off when he does. How Babcock chooses to handle the rotation going forward is unknown, but Ennis made a strong case for more responsibility. Ennis played only 8:57 against the Penguins, but had two shots on goal and finished even.

In Thursday's loss, the Leafs failed to convert on the power play in a game for the first time this season. They're 9-for-20 (45 per cent) overall with the extra man, tops in the NHL.

Last word

"We focused on our game. If we play smart, play right, we can beat any team in the league. We stopped [Auston] Matthews, like finally he [does] not score."

– Evgeni Malkin, reflecting on Pittsburgh's 3-0 win over the Leafs Thursday night

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TSN.CA / For Babcock, Crosby remains the gold standard

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Maple Leafs and Penguins skated at Scotiabank Arena on Thursday morning.

Connor McDavid has won consecutive scoring titles and Ted Lindsay Awards and also owns a Hart Trophy. Auston Matthews leads the NHL in goals (10) and points (16) so far this season. But when it comes to the debate over who's the best in the game right now, Maple Leafs head coach Mike Babcock believes it's an easy choice – and it's neither of the young superstars.

It's Sidney Crosby.

"This is what I think. I think one guy's got two Olympic gold medals and three Stanley Cups," Babcock noted.

"We want to have team success because team success, in the end, that's how you're measured. So, when you've been the best player on the best team, to me, that's totally different than being the best player on a team that's not as good. You've got people around you

to raise their game and set a standard so, to me, I mean, it's not even close."

Crosby has no goals and four assists so far this season, but Babcock doesn't expect the 31-year-old Penguins captain to slow down any time soon.

"Pretty young guy," Babcock noted. "Nick [Lidstrom] was, I thought, the best defenceman in the game at 40. You can say the game has changed quite a bit, but [Crosby] can still flat out fly, so I don't think he plans on giving anything away."

Babcock's coaching counterpart tonight, Mike Sullivan, echoed that sentiment.

"He's always bringing ideas to the coaching staff," Sullivan gushed. "We learn as much from Sid as he does from our coaching staff with just the way he thinks the game ... He's such a privilege to coach because of his commitment to be the best player, but also his want and his passion for helping the Penguins win championships."

Is he still the best in the game?

"In my opinion, yes, he is."

But not everyone was singing from the same songbook on Thursday morning. Leafs centre Nazem Kadri has faced the game's top players on a consistent basis during the last couple of seasons. Who does he view as the toughest to stop?

"McDavid's speed is just incredible and so hard to stop," Kadri observed. "It's like you can't really make a mistake when he's on the ice, because if you're beside him, you'll be behind him. To me, that speed really separates him."

Babcock insists Crosby still the gold standard: 'Team success is how you're measured'

During an interview with NHL.com, Sidney Crosby said he believes Connor McDavid is the best player in the game right now. While Crosby does recognize the younger generation is catching up, some believe the Penguins captain remains the gold standard, including the man coaching against him tonight in Toronto.

Before the season began, Matthews said he wanted to one day skate as well as McDavid. So, is there a part of Crosby's game he'd like to learn from and emulate?

"He's so strong on his skates and on his stick," said the 21-year-old. "He protects the puck so well. I don't think anyone can protect the puck like he can."

This will be the sixth showdown in the NHL between Matthews and Crosby. They were matched against each other in both games last season when Sullivan had the last change in Pittsburgh. Crosby dominated the first game on Dec. 9, 2017 with the Penguins holding an incredible 18-0 edge in even-strength shot attempts while the pair was on the ice. In a rematch on Feb. 17, 2018, the Matthews line stepped up and battled Crosby's unit to a draw with shot attempts even at 10 when the pair were on the ice.

"He does it all out there," Matthews said. "He does it all and does it all at a high speed and he does it every night."

Matthews on Crosby: 'I don't think anyone can protect the puck like he can'

Leafs forward Auston Matthews talks about the challenges when facing a high-caliber player like Sidney Crosby and how 'his play speaks for itself', and what kind of skills and tendencies you can learn from his game to incorporate into your own.

Crosby didn't take part in Pittsburgh's optional skate on Thursday and as a result wasn't available to the media. But on Wednesday, he spoke with NHL.com and said McDavid is an "easy pick" as the best in the game right now. But Crosby also had high praise for Matthews.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

"Matthews has emerged this year and it really looks like he's taken even another step. I think there are a lot of guys in the conversation," Crosby told reporter Mike Zeisberger. "He's always had a great shot, but I think he's carrying the puck more. I think it's a confidence thing. He's a big guy like [Evgeni Malkin], so sometimes I think you don't realize how strong you are. Maybe you could hold it for that extra second or hold that guy off or you could beat that guy wide."

As Babcock promised in his post-game news conference on Monday, Frederik Andersen will start between the pipes for the Leafs on Thursday night. Andersen missed the game against the Kings with a knee injury. He was a full participant in the morning skate, but did not speak to the media afterwards.

Matt Murray starts for the Penguins for the first time since Oct. 6. He had been out with a concussion suffered in practice on Oct. 8. Murray, who posted an ugly .831 save percentage in his first two starts of the season, won't be able to ease back in against a Leafs side that leads the NHL in goals.

"Every game is hard," said Sullivan. "We have so much respect for this league and how good the teams are. So, when's the ideal time to bring a guy back into the lineup? I'm not sure there is one. Matt's our No. 1 goalie. He's healthy, he's had a number of good practices, he's prepared for it and now we just have to go out and play well in front of him."

Leafs Ice Chips: Andersen, Murray face huge challenge in return to nets

Frederik Andersen and Matt Murray will be back between the pipes tonight and both goaltenders have battled injuries early this season. It's Murray's first time on the ice since October 6th as he's been combating concussion symptoms, and Andersen missed Monday's game with a knee injury. Mark Masters has more from Scotiabank Arena.

After sitting out the last two games, Tyler Ennis returns to the Leafs lineup tonight replacing Andreas Johnsson on the fourth line. Babcock indicated this is a rotation situation and not a response to how the young Swede played since getting back in the lineup on Saturday in Washington.

"Johnny's been good, especially the last two games," said Babcock. "We just didn't want Ennis sitting out too long to be honest with you ... it's just keeping him alive."

Johnsson has one assist and six shots in five games this season while never playing more than 9:24 in a game.

"There's a big difference when you're playing 20 minutes for the Marlies and you're playing eight minutes with the Leafs. That's a big adjustment for you as a player and mentally," said Babcock. "He's going to have to make that adjustment. He's a huge part of our organization and moving ahead he's just got to keep carving his way."

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TSN.CA / Maple Leafs maintain healthy respect for Penguins

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – After the Maple Leafs signed John Tavares to a seven-year, \$77 million free agent contract in July, the team's new depth at centre was frequently compared to that of the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The one-two punch of Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin in Pittsburgh has long been considered among the NHL's best centre tandems, and they have three Stanley Cups to prove it. The addition of Tavares to the Leafs' group with Auston Matthews and Nazem Kadri offered a compelling argument that Toronto had surpassed Pittsburgh.

But that's only on paper. The Leafs haven't accomplished anything close to what the Penguins have on the ice, so Toronto's young stars will still be measuring themselves against two of this decade's best players when the teams meet on Thursday.

"When you look around the league you understand which players set the bar and Sid and Malkin have done that for such a long time," said Tavares after morning skate. "It's not that they've done it, but that they've done it for a long time consistently. You know you have to be at your best, not just because of their skill set but because of their drive and determination to be the players they are."

Crosby and Malkin demand respect from even their most bitter rivals around the league. After the Washington Capitals, who have been bounced by Pittsburgh in two of the last three NHL playoffs, faced the Maple Leafs last Saturday, centre Lars Eller explained why he wasn't all that impressed with Toronto's current crop of stars.

"We were just playing against Crosby and Malkin, so everything kind of drops off from that," Eller said. "It's not that special [what the Leafs have], to be honest...they'll probably be a playoff team, I would think."

Kadri called Eller's comments "bulletin board material" and thought the Leafs had earned more respect from their peers. In the regular season that may be the case, but Toronto has yet to make any noise in the postseason. They Leafs have been ousted in the first round each of the last two years, and have a healthy regard for how Crosby and Malkin led their team to the promised land twice in the last three seasons alone.

"It's not easy, and over the last two years, we've learned that lesson," said Matthews. "They've been a playoff team. They're always in the mix to make a run for it. I think that's just how hard it is to go all the way and win and [it's impressive] that's a team that's [won a Cup] three times."

No discussion involving Crosby is ever complete without debate over whether he still deserves to be considered the best player in the world, or if another skater (like, say, Connor McDavid) has overtaken him.

Leafs' coach Mike Babcock said Thursday there is no arguing Crosby still holds that mantle.

"I think one guy has two Olympic gold medals, and three Stanley Cups," he shrugged. "The measure in the end for all of us is we're all here for the same thing. When you've been the best player on the best team, that is totally different than being the best player on the team that's not as good."

Toronto has had a far better start to this regular season than the Penguins. The Leafs' five-game win streak has propelled them to the top of the league, while Pittsburgh's lost two in a row and sits 10th.

In the past two years, Babcock has hard-matched Kadri's shutdown line with Crosby's unit in Toronto, while it's usually Matthews who ends up against the Penguins' captain on the road. Babcock has taken a different approach this season and hasn't been hard-matching at home much. And considering Matthews is not only the Leafs' hottest player of the moment, but also the NHL leader in points with 16 over his first seven games, letting him take on the Crosby line would be a welcome test.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

"What I'm going to do is I'm going to start the game and see how it goes," Babcock said. "I've just kind of started games and seen who's having success against who and then try to get that more than not. But also who gets on the ice in the offensive zone is important to us as well."

Morning skate notes

- Frederik Andersen will start in net for Toronto after missing Monday's game with a knee injury.

- Tyler Ennis has been a healthy scratch for the Leafs last two games, but will replace Andreas Johnsson on the fourth line against Pittsburgh. Babcock said he was happy with how Johnsson has played the last two games, but didn't want to sit Ennis too long and is motivated to "keep him alive" and in the mix with the Leafs' forwards.

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1110932 Websites

TSN.CA / Maple Leafs maintain healthy respect for Penguins

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1110933 Websites

TSN.CA / NHL concerned by rise in goalie concussions

Frank Seravalli

Corey Crawford is scheduled to return to the Chicago Blackhawks' net on Thursday night for the first time since Dec. 23, 2017 – a span of exactly 300 days.

The 53 games Crawford missed, including the first six this season, is believed to be one of the longest concussion-related absences by a goaltender in the history of the NHL.

His injury is part of an alarming trend affecting NHL netminders.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Last season, 13 goaltenders sustained 15 diagnosed concussions – as confirmed by their NHL teams and reported by local media sources. That’s the exact same number as the previous three seasons combined.

“I think when you hear numbers like that, it is concerning and it definitely makes you give some thought as to why,” said Kay Whitmore, the NHL’s vice-president of hockey operations and goaltender equipment. “We are taking steps to look into the causes and effects of these [concussions], but a lot is still unanswered. Is this a one-year anomaly? More than that? We have to look into the why.”

Two goalies have already been diagnosed with concussions this season. Pittsburgh’s Matt Murray suffered his second in as many seasons Oct. 8 and Vancouver Canucks prospect Thatcher Demko was injured during the preseason. Murray is expected to return Thursday night when the Penguins visit the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The big change seems to be an increase in the number of concussions resulting from shots off the mask. Of the 15 concussions last season, 10 were as a result of shots off the helmet, while two came from collisions. One came from a stick to the mask, one was a result of a backup being hit on the bench without a helmet, and one was unknown (Crawford).

Carey Price sustained the most high-profile concussion as a result of a shot off his mask when he was staggered by Philadelphia Flyers defenceman Shayne Gostisbehere’s blast on Feb. 20. He was shaken up on the play but not removed from the game for examination by a concussion spotter. Price finished the contest, and then sat out the next 31 days after the Habs revealed he suffered a concussion.

Perhaps most surprising is that at least four of the 10 concussions caused by shots were from “friendly fire” in practice. That is what sidelined Steve Mason and Michael Hutchinson in Winnipeg last season, as well Murray and Ottawa’s Mike Condon.

“Guys are just shooting faster and harder than they ever have before,” said Andrew Hammond who missed 11 games in 2015-16 after taking a shot off the mask. “Everyone is a butterfly goalie now, unlike before. They’re so good down low. You have to get the puck up to score, and unfortunately a goalie’s head is right in the way.”

There were a combined 189 man-games lost due to goaltender concussions last season. The most missed in any of the previous five seasons was 53.

In response to the increase in concussions, the NHL has expedited expanded testing on goalie masks.

Currently, the masks NHL goalies wear must only pass a safety standard test, which was established in 2014-15. But that test only measures how a mask physically holds up to pucks shot at 75 mph or collisions, not the impact of shots on the head.

That is the next step in the evolution of testing.

Energy transfer testing will examine how each manufacturer’s mask holds up to pucks shot at high speeds from all directions, measuring the impact on the head from each manufacturer using a sensor-equipped dummy inside the helmets.

Whitmore hopes to commence testing in the next four to six weeks, with the objective to discuss preliminary results with league officials in San Jose at the NHL’s All-Star meetings.

In the NFL, there is information clearly posted in locker rooms to inform players which helmet brands test best, giving players the opportunity to make informed decisions about which one to wear. The NHL intends to deliver the same information to goaltenders.

“We are committed to doing whatever it takes to improve the safety [of goaltenders],” Whitmore said. “We want to make sure that mask technology keeps up with players’ stick technology. At the end of the

day, the eye test [appearance] and the feel test [comfort] may win, but we want to give players more info to make a more educated choice.”

By and large, mask technology hasn’t changed much in the last 20 years. Denser foam has been added by some mask manufacturers and others have increased Kevlar or resin reinforcement in the outer shell. That has led some goaltenders, like Hammond, to switch brands to feel more comfortable.

Hammond, who is currently playing for the AHL Iowa Wild, says it’s not unusual to see two or three shots ring off a mask in a practice. Pittsburgh defenceman Olli Maatta downed Murray last season with the Pens; coach Mike Sullivan would not say who or what felled Murray in practice earlier this month. Demko was drilled in the mask in Canucks training camp and hasn’t felt right since.

Hammond believes that the increase in “friendly fire” headshots comes not from a lack of respect, but as a byproduct of an uber-competitive environment.

“Some guys just don’t know how to let their foot off the gas. They are fighting every day to try and make it and stay in the NHL,” Hammond said.

There is no question the Blackhawks have been extra mindful of their shot placement since Crawford rejoined the team in late September.

“I think that goes without saying,” Jonathan Toews told reporters. “As long as you know it’s him in the net, you’re [shooting] down there.”

The origin of Crawford’s concussion remains unclear, though Crawford has said it didn’t occur in the final game he played on Dec. 23, when he exited after he allowed three goals on seven shots in fewer than 14 minutes of work.

Minimizing goalie concussions is a difficult task. Goalies are always in the line of fire.

The cause of concussions last year ranged from the fluky, such as Hutchinson catching a redirection on the chin in a routine morning skate shooting drill, to the hazards of the position, like Marc-Andre Fleury getting blindsided by Detroit’s Anthony Mantha last October in a legal collision that cost him 25 games.

That was Fleury’s third concussion in three seasons, totaling 38 games out of the lineup.

“The thing is, we don’t protect ourselves [from collisions], because you’re watching the puck all the time,” Fleury said in September. “You see where it’s at, then you don’t see guys coming from the side. I think the blindside is the worst. You can’t protect or see them.”

All of this has Fleury concerned about his long-term health, a hazard of the position just coming into better focus.

“I do think about it,” Fleury said. “This last one lasted a little longer than the previous ones, so I’m still thinking about it. Every day you wake up, you don’t feel great, you’re dizzy. It’s disturbing.”

Jonathan Bernier, COL	13 games	Shot in game
Mike Condon, OTT	3 games	Shot in practice
Corey Crawford, CHI	47 games	Unknown
Marc-Andre Fleury, VGK	25 games	Collision in game
John Gibson, ANA	1 game	High-stick in game
Andrew Hammond, COL	12 games	Errant stick on bench
Michael Hutchinson, WPG	6 games	Shot in practice
Michael Hutchinson, WPG	5 games	Shot in game



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

Chad Johnson, BUF	2 games	Shot in game
Steve Mason, WPG	7 games	Shot in game
Steve Mason, WPG	20 games	Shot in practice
Al Montoya, MTL	24 games	Shot in game
Matt Murray, PIT	9 games	Shot in practice
Carey Price, MTL	13 games	Shot in game
Tuukka Rask, BOS	2 games	Collision in practice

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1110934 Websites

TSN.CA / Data is influencing the strategy behind pulling goaltenders

Travis Yost

There's little doubt that when it comes to big data and the application of data science, the National Hockey League is quite a ways behind the other major North American professional sports leagues.

But management teams, coaches and players are paying attention. In spots we're even seeing evidence of data influencing decision making.

One of those battlegrounds concerns the strategy of pulling goaltenders. Historically, coaching staffs have been extremely conservative. Down a goal, you would usually see the goalie pulled from the net with about 70 seconds remaining. Down multiple goals, coaches would get a little bit more aggressive, pulling their goaltenders at around the 100-second mark.

But that's changed emphatically over the past few years. The first big change we observed was during the 2014-15 season, right around the time that a lot of research and material on goaltender pull strategy started appearing in public forums.

Researchers have long argued that coaching staffs, generally speaking, were waiting far too long to get their goalies out of the crease. It's a simple probability exercise – one that weighs the benefits of deploying an extra attacker versus the cost of either falling further behind or running out of time.

I think it's the running out of time aspect that was historically lost on most coaching staffs. The best way to think about it is by talking about the in-game probability of accumulating points. If you pull the goalie early and fail to score, you end the night with zero points in the standings. If you pull the goalie late and don't score, you end the night with zero points in the standings. If you pull the goalie early or late and give up a goal, you still end up with zero points in the standings.

More and more teams are recognizing that time is of the essence here. The 2018-19 regular season is already flush with examples of coaching staffs changing their behaviour.

We had a pair of goalie pulls on Tuesday night that I would say deviate from historical norms. The Carolina Hurricanes, down one goal, pulled Petr Mrazek with about two-and-a-half minutes left on the clock. The Buffalo Sabres, down three goals, pulled Carter Hutton with just under five minutes to play. (The fact that the Sabres pulled Hutton at five minutes isn't as interesting as the fact that the Sabres were unwilling to concede defeat at that point in the game;

this has not always been the case.) The night before, Dallas pulled Ben Bishop with nearly eight minutes to go while down two goals!

So, just how big is the deviation from prior periods? We can look at all goalie pulls since the 2007-08 season and plot out the average amount of time coaches have waited before sending their extra attacker on. Here's what that looks like:

Despite in-year variances, the trend is obvious – behaviour started to change during the 2013-14 season, and really took off in future seasons. The last two years have seen a marked increase in aggressiveness, too. The 2018-19 season seems like another launch point, where teams are getting their goaltenders out at around two minutes (down one goal) and three minutes (down multiple goals).

What's fun is that you can drill back into games where teams did pull the goalie early and did realize a positive result. On Oct. 6, Vegas pulled the goalie with two minutes remaining down a goal and equalized through Max Pacioretty, then won the game in the shootout. On Oct. 13, Carolina pulled Curtis McElhinney with a couple of minutes left on the clock and down a goal. Not only did Justin Williams equalize at 18:51, but Carolina went on to win the game outright courtesy Sebastian Aho in overtime. In both games, ironically enough, Minnesota was on the losing end of these goaltender out scenarios.

At any rate, it's a very interesting trend for the league – and one that I think is going to catch on as more and more teams find success with it.

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1110935 Websites

USA TODAY / With 10 goals in seven games, Auston Matthews reminds of the days when 70 goals was possible

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

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When Wayne Gretzky set the NHL scoring record of 92 goals in a season in 1981-82, there was considerable buzz during the year about how many goals he might score. During Brett Hull's 86-goal season in 1990-91, USA TODAY published a story about whether it was possible for a player to score 100.

It's been a while since a goal scorer has lit up the hockey world. Maybe that will change.

Nobody is saying Toronto Maple Leafs star Auston Matthews will score like Hull or Gretzky, but Matthews' 10 goals (and 16 points) in the first seven games have rekindled the romance with the pure goal scorer. The wonder of projecting how many goals a player can score has returned.

"I would hate to put a number on what Auston can do, because I think the sky is the limit for him," said former NHL goalie John Vanbiesbrouck, now USA Hockey's director of hockey operations.

Matthews scored 40 goals as a 19-year-old rookie and netted 34 in 64 games during an injury-shortened 2017-18 second-year season. That's a 45-goal full-season pace.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 19, 2018

He's been even more impressive early this season, often looking unstoppable as he roars up ice. (If Matthews, who is scoring at a 45.5% rate, kept up this pace, he'd score 117 goals, an NHL record.)

"To score 50 in this league is an incredible accomplishment, to close in on 60 would be MVP stuff," NBC analyst Ed Olczyk said.

From 1981-1994, every player who led the NHL in goals netted 60 or more. From 1988-1993, no goals leader had fewer than 70. But since the NHL started awarding the Rocket Richard trophy to the goal-scoring champion in 1999, Alex Ovechkin (2008) and Steven Stamkos (2012) are the only winners to register 60 or more.

Detroit Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill said: "I don't know if 60 goals is realistic in today's game."

"I think he's capable certainly of getting in that 50-goal range," he continued, "but I think the focus of his team is trying to do everything they can to win, and that sometimes can restrict you from getting higher than that."

registered multiple points in all seven. Gretzky, Mike Bossy, Mario Lemieux and Kevin Stevens are the only others with seven multiple-point games to start a season.

It's interesting to note Gretzky didn't have 10 goals after seven games in his record-breaking goal (92 in 1981-82) season.

"I don't know what it is. I'm just trying to play hockey, have fun, get those opportunities and try to cash in," Matthews said.

Olczyk, who tallied 42 goals in 1987-88, said uncanny anticipation is what separates Matthews from peers.

"He is very intelligent without the puck," Olczyk said. "You can see it when you watch him. He's very strong and he's got a great stick. But the puck finds great players. When you put yourself in the right spots, you get more looks."

Matthews' strong start comes at a time when scoring is on the rise. The scoring average rose 7.2% (2.77 to 2.97 goals per game per team) from 2016-17 to 2017-18. This season's team average is 3.12 goals per game, which would be another 5.1% increase if it holds.

Olczyk said "just like the National Football League today, the NHL rules cater to the offense."

"Almost unanimously teams are playing with more speed than ever before," Nashville Predators general manager David Poile said. "This feels like this is the fastest the league has ever been."

Poile said he has observed that scoring chances are up. Plus, the NHL has cracked down on defenders slowing down would-be scorers by slashing down on their sticks. An effort also is underway to shrink the size of goalie equipment.

Matthews is thriving in this environment.

"He would be good in any decade," Vanbiesbrouck said. "He could have played in the Original Six for sure. ... I don't think there are any walls that can't be knocked down by his abilities."

Vanbiesbrouck noted that Matthews, though a quality playmaker, enjoys shooting the puck. "Some guys turn down shots, but he's not turning down any," Vanbiesbrouck said.

In addition to Matthews' fast start, the Edmonton Oilers' Connor McDavid scored or assisted on Edmonton's first eight goals -- good for nine points in four games. The Boston Bruins' Patrice Bergeron has 13 points in six games, making the trio the only players averaging more than two points per game.

In the heyday of Gretzky, Lemieux and Hull, one treat of NHL fandom was checking stats to see if who scored. Are we getting to that point with Matthews and McDavid?

"I am there already," Olczyk said.

Former NHL player Mike Murphy, now the league's vice president of hockey operations, said, "If you can get above 60 today I think you are talking Gretzky-like."

Vanbiesbrouck said Matthews' shot release ranks in quickness "with the top players who have ever played."

Detroit goaltender Jimmy Howard said Matthews could score "50 to 60 easily."

"He's so dangerous, and they have built a good team around him," Howard said. "His release is very deceptive. It's on his stick, it's off. He can go high, or go low. He has the reach, strength."

Vanbiesbrouck said the most unique aspect of Matthews' game "is that he can play and think at such high speed."

Matthews scored at least one goal in six of the first seven games and

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