



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes add depth forwards Bracco, Gust, Rempal

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes on Friday signed forwards Jeremy Bracco, David Gust and Sheldon Rempal to a one-year, two-way contracts.

The deals will pay Bracco and Rempal \$700,000 at the NHL level or \$100,000 at the American Hockey League level. Gust will receive \$700,000 at the NHL level or \$80,000 at the AHL level.

“Jeremy, David and Sheldon are three talented, young players that we are excited to add and strengthen our organizational depth,” president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement.

Bracco, 23, had 34 points in 44 games with the Toronto Marlies of the AHL last season. The 5-11, 185-pound forward

led the Marlies in assists and ranked third in points in 2019-20.

Gust, 26, had 31 points in 60 games with the Charlotte Checkers in the AHL last season. The 5-10, 177-pound forward set career highs in assists and plus/minus (+11) in 2019-20 and ranked tied for sixth among Checkers skaters in assists, seventh in goals and eighth in points.

Rempal, 25, earned 21 points in 56 games with the Ontario Reign in the AHL last season. The 5-10, 165-pound forward skated in seven NHL games with the Los Angeles Kings during the 2018-19 season, making his NHL debut vs. the New York Islanders on Oct. 18, 2018. Rempal led Reign rookies in points (40) and assists (25) during the 2018-19 season.

Hurricanes sign Steven Lorentz to two-year, two-way contract

By Chip Alexander

Steven Lorentz, a former seventh-round draft pick by the Carolina Hurricanes, on Thursday signed a two-year, two-way contract, the Canes announced.

Lorentz, 24, will receive \$700,000 in the NHL or \$70,000 in the American Hockey League with a guarantee of at least \$100,000 in 2020-21. In 2021-22, he will receive \$750,000 in the NHL or \$100,000 in the AHL with a guarantee of at least \$200,000.

“Steven took a big step forward this season,” Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. “He was an impact player on the AHL level and we believe he will contribute in the NHL in the future.”

In 2019-20, his first full AHL season with the Charlotte Checkers, he had 23 goals and 23 assists in 61 games. The 6-4, 206-pound forward ranked first among the Checkers and eighth in the AHL in plus/minus (plus-23) and was second among Charlotte skaters in goals and points.

Lorentz was in the Canes’ contingent in the Toronto bubble for the Stanley Cup playoffs but did not appear in a game.

Lorentz was taken in the seventh round, 186th overall, at the 2015 NHL Draft. In a 2016 interview, the Waterloo, Ontario, native noted he had once been a 12th-round pick in the Ontario Hockey League draft.

“It has kind of been like that my whole career,” Lorentz said in 2016. “It’s a process. I just want to take my time and develop into a good player that Carolina likes one day.”

Carolina Hurricanes re-sign forward Clark Bishop to one-year contract

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes have re-signed forward Clark Bishop, a restricted free agent who recently filed for salary arbitration.

Bishop agreed to a one-year, two-way contract that will pay him \$700,000 at the NHL level or \$100,000 at the American Hockey League level, the team announced Tuesday.

“Clark is a versatile, two-way center that knows our system well,” Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. “We look forward to him continuing his development this season.”

In other personnel business, the Canes also announced they had signed center Vasilii Ponomarev, a second-round draft pick in the 2020 NHL Entry Draft, to a three-year, entry-level contract. Carolina also re-signed restricted free agent forward Spencer Smallman to a one-year, two-way contract.

Ponomarev will receive \$700,000 at the NHL level in the first year and \$750,000 at the NHL level in the subsequent two years or \$80,000 at the AHL level for all three seasons. He will receive a signing bonus of \$255,000.

Smallman, who played for the AHL Charlotte Checkers last season, will get \$735,000 at the NHL level or \$70,000 at the AHL level.



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"Vasilii is a strong two-way player with a high hockey IQ," Waddell said in a statement. "We were excited to get a player of his caliber in the second round of the draft and believe he has a bright future."

Bishop, 24, had one assist in five games with the Hurricanes this past season. He has one goal and three assists in 25 career regular-season NHL games with Carolina and played in two Stanley Cup Playoff games with the Hurricanes in 2019.

Hurricanes sign defenseman Joakim Ryan to one-year contract

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes have signed defenseman Joakim Ryan to a one-year, two-way contract, the team announced Monday.

The deal will pay Ryan \$700,000 on the NHL level or \$150,000 on the American Hockey League level during the 2020-21 season.

"Joakim is a solid puck-moving defenseman with NHL experience," Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "He skates very well and is a good fit for our system."

How did Brady Skjei help Jesper Fast decide to sign with the Hurricanes?

By Chip Alexander

Brady Skjei was the player who knocked Jesper Fast out of the 2020 NHL postseason, and also the one who helped convince him to sign with the Carolina Hurricanes.

When free agency began Friday, Fast soon realized the New York Rangers were not interested in re-signing him. The Hurricanes were offering a [three-year, \\$6 million deal](#) to the unrestricted free-agent forward, but for Fast it was stressful.

Who to turn to? Skjei, of course.

The two were teammates on the Rangers until Skjei was traded to Carolina in February. They're friends. Even though Skjei's [big hit on Fast early in the opening game](#) of the NHL qualifying series gave Fast a concussion, that was hockey and did nothing to ruin their relationship.

"No bad love. No harm there," Fast said Sunday on a media call.

Fast chuckled, adding, "I'll have a good opportunity to get him back when I'm practicing with him. No, just kidding."

The Hurricanes quickly finished off the Rangers in the Toronto bubble, winning three straight games. Fast, who was the right wing on a line with center Ryan Strome and winger Artemi Panarin, did not return during the series, forcing Rangers coach David Quinn to shuffle his lines.

Some of the Rangers players noted after the series that they were so consumed by trying to be overly physical that it knocked them off their games. A big part of that was Fast being so well-liked and respected by his teammates, the

Bishop had six goals and 13 assists in 53 AHL games last season with the Charlotte Checkers, the Canes' former AHL affiliate.

Ponomarev, 18, was selected 53rd overall in the draft last week. He had 49 points in 57 games with the Shawinigan Cataractes of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League last season.

Ryan, 27, appeared in 35 games for the Los Angeles Kings in 2019-20, scoring one goal and adding four assists.

Ryan, listed at 5-11 and 185 pounds, was selected by the San Jose Sharks in the seventh round, 198th overall, at the 2012 NHL Entry Draft. He has 24 points (4 goals, 20 assists) in 141 career NHL games with the Sharks and Kings.

Ryan made his Stanley Cup playoff debut with San Jose in 2018. He appeared in all 20 of San Jose's postseason contests in 2019 as the Sharks advanced to the Western Conference finals before falling to St. Louis.

Swede having been an alternate captain and voted the team's "Players' Player" award the past five years.

Before the qualifier against Carolina, Fast was asked about his role in playing with Panarin and Strome. Get to the net, get in on the forecheck, he said. "Move the puck fast and skate as much as possible," Fast said.

Fast, 28, will have the chance to do that with the Canes in Rod Brind'Amour's system.

"They play fast, they play hard," Fast said. "I really like how they play and I feel like I fit the system really good."

Fast will help fill a right wing spot and give the Canes a right-hand shot forward in the lineup.

"There are a lot of players in free agency but we look more at what players can play the way we like to play and Jesper was one of the guys we identified early," Don Waddell, the Canes' president and general manager, said on the Sunday media call.

Fast said Skjei had "only good stuff to say" about the Canes and Raleigh. Fast is from Nassjo, a smaller town in Sweden. While he had become a part of the New York metro scene, moving to Raleigh shouldn't be that difficult of an adjustment.

"Living in New York for seven years, I mean New York is a great city," Fast said. "I loved my time there but I think this will be a good fit. Of course there's a lower tempo there but I think it will fit me and my family real well."

The NHL has targeted Jan. 1 as the start of a new season and training camps could open in December. But with the



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pandemic, that is only a guess for now and Fast said he will remain in Sweden until hard-and-fast decisions are made.

"I'm just glad everything is over and I can look forward to settling myself in Carolina," he said.

Jesper Fast moves from Rangers to Carolina Hurricanes

By Chip Alexander

Jesper Fast didn't get to play very much for the New York Rangers in their 2020 postseason qualifying round against the Carolina Hurricanes in Toronto.

Early in Game 1, Fast was hit hard in the neutral zone by Canes defenseman Brady Skjei, a former Rangers teammate. The forward did not return to the game or the series, won in three straight games by the Canes.

Now, Fast will play for the Hurricanes, signing a three-year contract Saturday, the team announced. The Swede and Skjei will be teammates again, with some things to talk about — if they haven't already.

Fast's deal with the Hurricanes will pay him an average of \$2 million a year.

"Jesper is an intelligent, versatile player who will fit the mold of how the Carolina Hurricanes play hockey under Rod Brind'Amour," Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement.

Fast, 28, gives the Canes a righthanded shooting forward who can help replace the retired Justin Williams, a right wing,

in the lineup. He played last season on a Rangers line with Ryan Strome and Artemi Panarin.

Fast was a sixth-round pick by the Rangers in the 2010 NHL Entry Draft but made his NHL debut in the 2013-14 season and played parts of seven seasons, and 422 regular-season games, with the Rangers.

Fast had 12 goals and 29 points in 69 games for the Rangers in the pandemic-shortened 2019-20 season. Playing right wing much of the season, he averaged 16:36 of ice time a game, was responsible defensively and can kill penalties..

Fast was said to be the most popular player on the Rangers and won the "Players' Player" award the past five seasons, a team honor given to the best "team player."

Rangers coach David Quinn told New York reporters in February that Fast might be the most consistent player on the team and that his "honesty to the game" was infectious.

While the Canes added Fast, they will not be re-signing defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk, who spent the past three seasons with Carolina. An unrestricted free agent, van Riemsdyk signed a one-year, \$800,000 contract Saturday with the Washington Capitals.

THE ATHLETIC

Now the Hurricanes play-by-play announcer, Mike Maniscalco is living his dream

By Sara Civian

One year ago to this day, then-Hurricanes TV host Mike Maniscalco was in serious pain. He received a text from his wife, Kristen, between periods at the Staples Center, where the Canes were playing the Kings on their West Coast swing.

"At first I thought it was the stomach flu, but then (Hurricanes broadcast producer) Jim (Mallia) benched me, Kristen texted me like 'Are you OK? You're sweating and it's noticeable,'" Maniscalco told *The Athletic* last week. "They parked me in the coaches' office in the second intermission. Rod (Brind'Amour) walks in and goes 'Are you sick? You don't look good.' I go 'I know.' and then the rest is history. But this 12 month period has put everything in perspective. It can all be gone tomorrow, so I'm not gonna take it for granted. This opportunity presented itself and I'm still here for a reason, so maybe it's this. I'm here, and here we go. Trust me, sitting there in Santa Clara medical center I was thinking 'Welp, it's been a good ride.'"

[One volleyball-sized mass removed from his stomach](#), one broken foot, one pandemic and one weird NHL postseason later, and we're sitting six feet away at a local establishment. Where do you begin? The heck of a trying year he's had, the role as Hurricanes play-by-play announcer in the playoffs or the opportunity he speaks of — the soon-to-come announcement that the job will be permanent?

Let's talk about a kid from Buffalo with a dream and an unusual path.

Maniscalco realized his passion for play-by-play broadcasting as a sophomore at Buffalo State College in 1995. His parents agreed to let him play football if he maintained a certain grade point average, but as he was training he hurt his knee. What would be a career-ending injury for many was actually a career-starter for him, and the first of many open doors to walk through.

"So I'm like, 'All right, what am I gonna do now?' I was gonna be a writer — the first column I ever got back had Red Xs



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everywhere, the professor told me to get into radio because I knew what I wanted to say, I had an all right voice and no one edits you," Maniscalco said. "So I got involved with the student radio station. One day I walk in and the guys who are doing play-by-play and color they're in the lobby having this conversation — (one of the broadcasters) had to miss a game. I just go 'Well, I can call the game.' And they're like 'really?' I'm like 'Yeah.'

"This is gonna seem shady, but when they asked me if I've ever called games before, I said I called my high school games. I played, I never called my high school games. So the guy who was doing color wanted to be play-by-play, and I knew the team and a lot of the players, so I'm like 'Yeah, I can do color.'

"And so my broadcasting career started from saying I called my high school games when I didn't. The door opened up and I ran through it."

Soon enough, Maniscalco was hanging around the office in his characteristically cheery mood so often that he was promoted to sports director as an underclassman. Folks that worked under him would graduate and recommend him for jobs, as it often goes in this industry.

"You meet more people, you get involved in more things, shifts open up and you work hard and opportunity is there," Maniscalco said. "My dad told me that when someone opens up the door, walk through it. 'Cause if you don't, someone else will."

Those doors included an internship at Buffalo's ABC affiliate, a weekend sports talk show at Buffalo radio station WGR and "The Mike Maniscalco Show" for seven years in Richmond. Then he came Raleigh in 2007. Maniscalco started off doing pregame and postgame radio broadcasts for the Hurricanes' radio show on 99.9 The Fan, and from 2016 up until the 2020 playoffs, he served as the bubbly TV host of the Hurricanes.

At this point he'd given up on the dream of doing TV play-by-play for a major league team. He supposed he was lucky enough to get the occasional fix when he was back in Richmond with the University of Virginia and the odd high-school football game, and he was lucky enough to be in sports at all. But when Maniscalco sees an open door, he walks through it.

"I didn't even think I was on the short list of names [to replace John \(Forslund\)](#), because I liked the role I was in and I thought (the Canes) liked the role I was in," he said. "But I've wanted to do play-by-play from Day 1. I didn't want to be a sports talk show host, it's just that's the job that was offered to me and I wanted to pay the bills."

The "replacing John Forslund" thing is impossible to brush over — especially for Maniscalco, who considers Forslund a "brother."

"There's this one saying that you never be the guy that follows the guy, but somebody has to," Maniscalco said. "I have all the respect in the world for John, the job that he's done and Chuck Kaiton before him. This organization has

had two legends calling games, and I'm very cognizant of that history. The last thing I want to do is step into a situation and be like 'I am way out of my league,' but this is something I have wanted to do — and I know I can do it. The opportunity popped up and I was not going to say no. ... It'll take a while, and I think a big reason why is because John and I are friends. He and I had a good talk before the playoffs started and he was great. But it's still, I can park it and let's go but it's going to be a reminder (that John is gone) for a lot of folks. And I get all of the being upset from the fans' perspective, but one of the things I've noticed is how of course (fans are upset about losing a Hurricanes legend), but the fans are also happy for me. That, to me, has been one of the things that has been so great."

The opportunity was already been unperfect as Maniscalco was the guy after the guy no matter what, but his first broadcast as that guy was on a monitor five-seconds behind live play.

"I never had the TV responsibilities for play by play before, in my mind I'm like this is what it is so we'll make it work. The challenges of calling the game off of monitors ... you want to call all the action, if you see something behind the play you want to draw attention to it but you realize you're five seconds behind the play if something else happens," he said. "The first few games with what was going on, it was hard to enjoy the moment. But as it moved along, you get to that point of OK, I stepped back off of a game and I'm thinking this is the most fun ever. I'd say to the guys in the truck, 'Is this not fun?! This is fun.' I went from worrying about everything, like even how I'm going to say hello — to that. Tripp (Tracy) was great and knowing the crew the way I know them, walking into it and they knew how I am, was great."

Maniscalco operates on the philosophy that there's always room for improvement, so he's not going to act like his first broadcast as The Old New Guy was perfect — even considering the circumstances. But he had a well-deserved moment of contentment.

"I went back and listened to every game, and watched every game. You try to learn and there are some moments where you're like 'Oh my god, I can't believe I said that.' Or 'Ugh, I was so behind on the play.' But I think it was the third game of the Bruins series, I got up to get a glass of water and I just let the game run instead of pausing it," he said. "I came back in and the games going and for a minute I didn't realize it was me calling the game — it just sounded like it was a call. And it sounded like it should sound like. So that was kinda neat, like this doesn't sound awful. I've got miles, and miles, and miles to go. But for being thrown into it and all of the situations, I never want to say I'm pleased or happy with it, but for what it was, to have the organization come out and feel I could do this, I think it went as well as I could have expected."

Like anyone arriving on the doorstep of a longtime dream, of course he's got miles to go. But the same philosophy he's adhered to his entire life has never been more applicable.

"Someone has to do it, and why not me?" he said.



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He jokes about what he'd tell his past self if he had the opportunity: "When the EMT in Los Angeles tells you to go to the emergency room, go to the emergency room. I'd tell him that for sure. Don't take that flight to San Jose."

But then he gets real.

"I would tell that guy to keep working hard because you never know who is watching you. Out of all of this, the thing I am most proud of is I've done this I feel the right way. It's an industry that a lot of things aren't done the right way. I feel I was given an opportunity and made the most of it. I didn't politic, I didn't lobby. The organization gave me the chance

and I took it. It's not about proving people wrong, it's about proving the people who believe in you right.

"I remember when I was in the hospital before we even knew was going on, I got a text from Rod: 'Whatever this is you're gonna beat it and we'll see you soon.'

"When Rod Brind'Amour tells you that I'm like, 'Well I'm fine, get me out of here.'"

One year later, the Maniscalco we've all come to know is back in a way we've never seen him before.

Inside Carolina's war room for the draft, free agency and the NHL's wildest week

By Scott Burnside

RALEIGH, N.C. — Late in Day 2 of the NHL's seemingly interminable virtual draft, Don Waddell is trying to lighten the mood. The Carolina Hurricanes general manager launches into a modified Vaudeville act in the team's dressing-room-cum-draft-war-room. There's a Santa Claus joke. And one about a school play.

Punchlines, met with what sound like groans through some of the face masks of the staff in attendance at PNC Arena, are delivered into a computer monitor for the 14 members of the draft team scattered in far-flung points on the hockey map.

With a plan for the team's final two picks in place, owner Tom Dundon and head coach Rod Brind'Amour are engaged in a conversation about the virtues of pickleball (a racquet sport that combines tennis, badminton and table tennis). Dundon, as it turns out, is a big fan. He loves the strategy of the game — and that it lacks the physical pounding on the knees that tennis requires.

These lighter moments offer a brief respite from what has become a marathon Wednesday in the middle of one of the most intense and extraordinary weeks in the history of the league. The Hurricanes have allowed *The Athletic* to take a seat at the draft table, giving us a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse inside an NHL team's process at this pivotal time in an offseason unlike any other.

Usually, the second day of the draft is over inside of five hours; a veritable sprint through rounds two through seven. Today, in part because of the technology required to connect 31 NHL teams remotely along with about 100 top prospects, and in part because entire draft teams can converse either in person or remotely leading up to picks, the second day of the 2020 draft will take more than eight hours to complete.

Under normal circumstances, the Carolina draft team would occupy one of 31 tables on the floor of the Bell Center in Montreal where this draft was originally to be held. Today, the group — coaches, scouts, management, ownership and communications staff — has gathered in the Hurricanes locker room.

In the middle of the room is a U-shaped set of tables. There are two monitors at the opening of the horseshoe, one of which shows the Hurricanes' draft list and the probabilities that players they have identified will be available to them. The list updates in real-time as the draft proceeds.

A second monitor shows the world feed of the draft broadcast. A third screen shows the NHL draft board.

Nearby, tables and chairs are set up for meal breaks in the same place players will gather for breakfasts and snacks during the hockey season. In the area normally reserved for players to stretch, adjacent to the eating area, a small table and computer has been set up for video interviews with media.

Waddell, who is seated at the head of the head table behind a computer with a picture of his grandchildren taped to it, is joined by director of player personnel Darren Yorke, vice-president of hockey operations Paul Krepelka, vice-president of hockey management and strategy Eric Tulsy, head coach Rod Brind'Amour and, of course, Dundon.

The offseason stakes have been high since the introduction of the hard salary cap after the 2004-05 lockout. But, with the COVID-19 pandemic flattening the salary cap at \$81.5 million for the foreseeable future, making the right decisions at the draft has never been more critical. The consequences of failure in the free agency market, which will open in less than 48 hours, may be more dire than ever before, as well.

Prepping for a big week

On Monday afternoon, a little more than 24 hours before the start of the draft, Waddell, Dundon, and members of the coaching, scouting and analytics staff are gathered at the team's brand new practice facility about a 10-minute drive from PNC Arena to discuss plans for free agency.

It's a facility the team has been waiting most of two decades to see built and the final touches are still very much in progress. Stacks of big-screen televisions still in their boxes are stacked inside the front door.

Dundon, 49, is clad casually in a dark Hurricanes hoodie, track pants and 'Canes baseball cap. The owner's casual



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attire has become something of a signature since he bought the team during the 2017-18 season, regardless of whether he's on the stage at the draft or in meetings to discuss the future of the team.

He surveys what will eventually become a video or meeting room at the practice facility. He'd like the chairs to be more in a circular formation rather than in rows, he directs. Better to facilitate the kind of discussion that will follow.

"Unless you're going to preach to them Donnie," Dundon quips to Waddell.

"Oh, I'll preach alright," Waddell warns.

Dundon takes a chair near the door and settles into his role as moderator. If there is an NHL owner who takes a more hands-on approach to things like the draft, we are unaware of who that owner is. Dundon opens discussions by outlining his plans to ensure the Hurricanes are part of the conversation if a certain top NHL star on a team with a world of salary cap issues formally comes onto the marketplace as has been rumored to be the case.

The player, who we can't name because he is under contract, would have a significant impact on the Hurricanes roster.

The fact the player may never leave his current team isn't really the point. In this room, the conversation is a reminder of how the Hurricanes view themselves as an organization and how they believe the rest of the league views them, as well. It's a sign of how far the team has come.

Indeed, the tone and tenor of these proceedings couldn't be further from two years ago when we sat in on the Hurricanes' draft preparations before the 2018 draft in Dallas.

Dundon had just purchased the team a few months earlier and was learning the NHL on the fly, surrounded by a phalanx of laptops, pouring over draft lists and peppering his scouting staff with questions about prospects whose names it's unlikely he'd have ever encountered had he not bought an NHL club.

Waddell had been co-opted from the team's business department to the GM chair, in part because Dundon couldn't find a fit after looking outside the organization. Waddell has since been a finalist for the GM of the year award while still holding down the business job.

Two years ago, talk of chasing a star player might have been a flight of fancy. Now, with an emerging cadre of top-flight players, including Andrei Svechnikov, Sebastian Aho, Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce and Dougie Hamilton, the Hurricanes are in a different place.

"It's gotten around the league. I get a lot of phone calls that this is a destination for players," Waddell says. "That's a good thing when you're starting to get those calls instead of trying to persuade people strictly by money to come here."

Dundon agrees.

"That was the goal right?" he says. "You change the brand. You win and people want to be part of it and it feels that way.

We haven't won as much as I think we will but definitely it's got to be the goal right?"

Now, the Hurricanes are confronted with a conundrum that all emerging teams face: the feeling they are close — maybe really close — but only if they don't take a detour en route to the top.

A first-round loss to Boston in the Toronto bubble was a sobering wake-up call after they cruised through the New York Rangers in a three-game sweep in the play-in round.

The Hurricanes, like most clubs, have a handful of players who did not play up to expectations especially as it relates to salary cap expenditures. The team's goaltending is also a topic that will loom large throughout the draft and continue to be a focal point once free agency opens [at noon](#) ET on Friday.

Petr Mrazek and James Reimer are under contract for another season each at a total of \$6.525 million. Good value for competent NHL goaltending and there is a comfort level within the organization if the status quo is maintained. But this offseason presents a bevy of goaltending options both via free agency and trade and multiple goaltending experts and scouts believe an upgrade is critical if the Hurricanes are to take a step towards being a true contender.

At the moment, the discussion is on how the 'Canes might construct the power play if the aforementioned player is added. What might it mean for Svechnikov — would he move to net-front, for instance? How would the acquisition affect the distribution of talent up and down the lineup? How would the players view the move?

Among those in the room is former captain Justin Williams. A day after the draft's completion, he will announce his retirement from the game. A three-time Stanley Cup champion considered one of the greatest big-game players of all time, Williams is here to give his opinion on specific players on the Hurricanes roster and players around the NHL that could be of interest.

His voice carries significant weight and he answers thoughtfully but with candor.

As for this particular player, Williams sees no issue with the existing leadership group in embracing such an addition if it were to happen.

"They just want to win," Williams says with a shrug.

When Dundon moves the discussion to adding a skilled forward via free agency or trade, Brind'Amour quickly points out it doesn't make sense to make those kinds of moves if it comes at the expense of the team's considerable defensive depth.

There is discussion of another skilled player on an Eastern Conference team who may have fallen out of favor for not returning to summer training camp in great shape.

"We're working hard to not bring guys like that in here," Brind'Amour pipes in.



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The name of a veteran Western Conference player who might be available is floated to the group. He doesn't bring much offense, but he brings experience and grit. How do you quantify assets like that?

"I don't put that much value in that, to be honest," Dundon says.

"It means something," Brind'Amour counters. "I don't know how you weigh it, but you have to weigh it somehow."

Brind'Amour's willingness to disagree with the owner without hesitation is important. It allows the rest of the group to offer honest opinions as opposed to worrying over office politics. It's the way Dundon wants the team to run.

"Tom doesn't hold any grudges," Waddell said. "Him and I have had battles. Battles. Two minutes later we're on to the next subject. He challenges you but I think everybody sitting in those rooms feel very comfortable saying, you know what, I'm going to speak what I believe in my mind. Doesn't mean he's going to agree with it all the time but at least I've said what is on my chest and that's the way he'd want it."

A draft like no other

In the hours leading up to the first round on Tuesday evening, much of the talk regarding strategy and prospects has already been put to rest after weeks of scouting staff video calls. Instead, logistical issues dominate the discussion in the bowels of PNC Arena.

The league has provided a collection of nameplates with prospects' names on them for use during the draft. There is some debate about how staff might be able to get a nameplate up behind Waddell before he announces the team's selection.

It would make for a great presentation: Waddell calling out a name with the moniker already affixed to a stall behind him. But no one wants a shot of veteran vice-president of communications Mike Sundheim standing behind Waddell, struggling to jam the nameplate into place in the seconds between confirming the pick with the NHL's central registry and when the camera goes live on a Carolina selection.

"I think you should just focus on making the right pick," Brind'Amour says with a laugh.

About an hour before the opening of the draft is set to begin, Waddell, Dundon and members of the coaching staff disappear for a few minutes into one of the coaches' rooms off of the locker room area to discuss a potential deal involving a goaltender and draft picks.

The deal would have involved multiple teams and ultimately is abandoned.

As the start of the draft nears, Waddell and Yorke gather in front of the computer screen next to Yorke's seat at the head of the draft table and thank 14 members of the staff scattered literally across the globe, from Moscow to Tampere, Finland; Borlänge, Sweden to Boston; Plymouth, Mich. to Saskatoon, Sask.

For scouts, this has been a season of incredible challenges given the cancellation of junior, college and European seasons and playoffs along with the cancellation of the World Championships and the NHL draft combine.

The Hurricanes have adopted a process they feel puts them in good stead in assessing players' developmental arcs even without the luxury of having seen them, in some cases, in many months.

"We have a process in place for when a player gets injured and if they miss the World Championships or they miss the playoffs and you go back and you watch video. That problem is scalable," Yorke said. "So we did the exact same thing here for the pause.

"As long as you have a process in place to count against recency bias or sort of paralysis by analysis I think you end up making a better decision," added Yorke who is starting his 12th season with the team.

Waddell and Krepelka have been in touch with other teams about current NHL players and draft picks, but Carolina's 13th overall pick isn't really part of that dialogue. This is a deep draft and the Hurricanes have set their sights on a player they feel can be a significant contributor to the team in the future.

There are variables, of course, including the top goaltender available in the draft, Yaroslav Askarov. If he's available, that will force the draft team into a last-minute decision.

But the Russian goalie prospect goes to Nashville with the 11th pick.

In the end, the Hurricanes get their guy: Seth Jarvis, a skilled center who had 98 points in 58 games for Portland of the Western Hockey League last season.

Asked about Jarvis, Yorke says he's seen him play more than a dozen times.

"He's a great kid."

As it turns out, the players' nameplates don't actually fit in the brackets above the dressing room stalls, so Sundheim performs rapid surgery on the card and has it above a stall a few minutes later when Waddell and Brind'Amour welcome Jarvis to the team via a video call.

"Can you see that?" Brind'Amour asks the Winnipeg native, pointing to the nameplate bearing his name.

"We've got you a spot but you've got to go earn it," Brind'Amour says.

As the first round draws to a close, plans are made for the next morning when rounds two through seven will begin at 11:30. Waddell wants to meet with staff at 10 a.m. to go over plans.

"Tomorrow's the day," Yorke says.

He's right. Find a gem or two late in the draft and the life of an NHL franchise brightens considerably. Miss the mark and it puts pressure on other parts of the organization to make up for the misses.



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The Day 2 marathon

Breakfast on Wednesday brings with it a flurry of conversations, including two possible deals involving goaltenders from the Western Conference.

There is also communication with the New York Rangers about former seventh overall pick Lias Andersson. Things have not worked out for the Swedish forward and the Rangers are looking to recoup a solid second-round pick for the player.

The Hurricanes have two second-round picks 41st and 53rd overall and they are proving to be attractive commodities. If Andersson tops out as a third-line player given the talent already in place in Carolina then what is his value to the Hurricanes?

And what if you end out missing out on an impact player in the second round – and there will be some – for a player that has a limited upside, Dundon wonders aloud.

The possible deal expands to include a couple of other parts, but ultimately the Hurricanes decide the fit isn't right and Andersson ends up going to the still-rebuilding Los Angeles Kings for the 60th overall pick.

Carolina is actually on the clock for their first pick of the second round when a call comes in; would they be interested in two later second-round picks for the 41st?

There is a brief flurry of conversation, but in the end the team sticks with their plan and selects Noel Gunler, whose birthday happens to coincide with his draft day.

Throughout the day, there will be offers from various teams looking to move up or down.

In each case, it's Tulsy, a master of advanced statistics, who is the go-to person for quickly breaking down the value of those picks and whether it makes sense for the Hurricanes.

Tulsy uses data compiled on how players in a particular part of the draft have turned out to help assess the value of picks being offered. He also examines data on the history of trades to ensure what is being offered — or what the 'Canes are offering — is a reasonable market price.

For instance: late in the draft, when the Hurricanes are offered to trade their 140th overall pick for No. 159 and a 2021 seventh-rounder, it's noted that other deals made by Pittsburgh, Florida and Nashville were all within that realm. The team then refers to players on their draft list who might be available with those picks before finally deciding to agree to make the deal.

Even as the pace of the second day slows to glacial, Dundon regularly questions the draft team on how things are proceeding, especially if he sees a player selected at a draft position that differs significantly from the Hurricanes' draft board.

He was, for example, particularly interested when Columbus went off the grid to select Yegor Chinakhov with the 21st overall pick. What might have been the team's motivation for making such a surprising pick?

As the team is about to make its third-round, 69th overall selection, Dundon tells Waddell to hold on a second in case there's a last-minute offer that makes more sense.

"Just in case someone wants to do something crazy," the owner says.

The phone remains silent and the 'Canes select defenseman Alexander Nikishin from Spartak of the Kontinental Hockey League.

When the Hurricanes select the relatively [diminutive Zion Nybeck](#) in the fourth round, Dundon jokingly asks if there was anyone taller available. It's part of a long-running bit with Yorke, Tulsy and the rest of the staff about the size of the players on the Hurricanes' draft list.

And when Nybeck's stats come up on the television screen in the draft room, Dundon notes that he is listed at 5-foot-7 and not 5-foot-8.

"He shrunk," Dundon quips.

Lest his true feelings are misconstrued, Dundon is quick to praise the pick. "I'm on board with it," he says. "I just think it's funny the guy is 5-foot-7."

The jabs about player size also belie the Hurricanes' philosophy that it is preferable to pick the best player they believe is available, regardless of stature or position.

If Dundon's queries initially rankled staff when he took over the team, they have learned that it simply comes with the territory. Dundon points out he's not picking the players, but he feels it's important to ask questions to make sure that they don't fall into patterns of picking only certain types of players.

"He's passionate about it and he's very educated about it," Waddell said. "It's one thing to have the boss to come in and try to derail what you're doing but when he's right involved and understands what you're trying to do, it makes it a lot easier," Waddell said. "To have somebody that is willing to write those big checks and try and make our franchise better, it presents some challenges because obviously he wants the best."

Late in the day, Dundon packs up some food for his wife who is at a nearby hotel where the kitchen is closed due to COVID-19.

There is talk of drafting a goaltender with one or both of the team's final two picks, but the 'Canes actually end up drafting their biggest player with the 159th selection, adding 6-foot-3 center Lucas Mercuri and there is some chuckling that Dundon has missed the 'big' pick of the day.

The team's final pick is Ronan Seely, a solid defenseman with the Everett Silvertips of the Western Hockey League. He is the 208th pick taken in the draft — almost eight hours into the proceedings.



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Waddell answers questions from the media via a video call, as does Yorke, who gives a detailed assessment of each of the Hurricanes' new prospects, including their skating styles, the evolution of their seasons and their potential upside as they grow and mature.

Finally, Waddell returns to the war room with a small glass of wine to toast the staff, especially those hanging in remotely, on a [job well done](#).

It's one of the well-worn cliches of the draft that being selected isn't a destination. It's a starting point. The same could be said of the entire organization. With free agency looming about 40 hours away and the start of the 2020-21 season now penciled in for [Jan. 1, 2021](#) these two days seem very much like the start of something as opposed to the end.

As staff pack up for the night, Waddell reminds them that they will reconvene the following morning to go over their free agency list as the quest to get better, to get to the top, continues.

The market opens

Usually, there is a week or so from the end of the draft to the start of free agency. For several years, there have been opportunities for communication with free agents including on-site visits before the market opens.

None of that is the case this year. Still, this offseason promises to reshape teams like never before as capped-out franchises scramble to move salary while at the same time shoring up rosters for a run at the 2020-21 Stanley Cup.

Goaltending is one of the early areas of movement at the clock passes noon ET on Friday.

The Hurricanes had discussions with Henrik Lundqvist after the future Hall of Famer was bought out of his contract by the New York Rangers. But Lundqvist signed a one-year deal with the Washington Capitals.

Other netminders also quickly find homes once free agency began. Braden Holtby signs in Vancouver. Corey Crawford in New Jersey. Jacob Markstrom in Calgary. Thomas Greiss in Detroit. Cam Talbot in Minnesota. Matt Murray, who was traded to Ottawa, signs an extension there.

All of this is tricky. Age, injury history, motivation: when it comes to many of the goaltenders in question, all of these factors were fodder for debate among the team's executive group and coaching staff.

At the end of the day, Waddell says, the team decided the team would stick to the status quo in goal. The cost, both in dollars and in some cases other assets, was simply too high.

"It's not like we had to make a change there, but we had to explore our options," Waddell says.

It is a function of the team's solid nucleus that through the first few days of free agency the team's most emphatic move is signing highly sought-after, versatile forward Jesper Fast to a three-year, \$6-million deal late on Saturday.

His signing hearkens back to Monday's discussion of grit and toughness in the video room of the team's practice facility. Fast seems to embody those intangible elements.

Fast was named as the "Players' Player" award winner by his teammates in New York — for five consecutive years — a fact that didn't go unnoticed by the Hurricanes.

"That's how much he means to a hockey club," Waddell says.

Also, with Williams retiring, bringing in another right-hand shot to play up and down the lineup was desirable.

Since free agency has opened Waddell has continued to spend long days at PNC Arena watching as the marketplace has established itself in this most strange of offseasons.

As the start of the 2020-21 season approaches, perhaps there will be some bargains to be had for a team like Carolina that has shown great patience.

Of course, when camp will open and when and under what circumstances games will be played remains anyone's guess.

For a host of reasons, the Hurricanes hope it is sooner than later. They are young with much to prove and there is an anxious to test whether they are ready to take those final steps forward.

"We'll be ready whenever the NHL says we're going to start," Waddell says. "But, for us, if they said we're starting tomorrow we'd be ready to go."



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Inside the Canes Draft Room

By Michael Smith

Shortly after 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 6, inside the NHL Network studios in Secaucus, N.J., Commissioner Gary Bettman delivered opening remarks for the 2020 NHL Draft.

Some 400 miles southeast, the Carolina Hurricanes front office gathered at PNC Arena, where the team's locker room was converted into draft headquarters. Physically distanced and clad in Canes-branded masks around a U-shape of tables included President and General Manager Don Waddell, Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke, Owner Tom Dundon, Vice President of Hockey Operations Paul Krepelka, Vice President of Hockey Management and Strategy Eric Tulsky and Head Coach Rod Brind'Amour.

The scene was more or less similar for 30 other markets around the league, all connected as one virtual draft floor for an event like no other.

This experience wasn't unexpected, not at least since the COVID-19 pandemic derailed 2020, and since the WNBA, NFL and MLB had all successfully staged virtual drafts earlier in the year, the Canes were able to learn, adapt and prepare for an event that was going to be different in many respects but hopefully familiar, as well.

In the extra months of preparation time leading up to the draft, the Canes worked to ensure the process, for both the team and for the prospects they selected, would best replicate the experience that would have played out at Montreal's Centre Bell in late June.

From a scouting standpoint, the pandemic and the shift to a virtual draft necessitated a heavy reliance upon virtual collaboration through Microsoft Teams. The Canes also established a process to scale scouting efforts with seasons cut short, and postseasons, tournaments and the Scouting Combine all scrapped.

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

From a draft experience standpoint, the Canes aimed to capture the essence and excitement of draft day and share that with their newest prospects, leaning into the virtual aspects of the event to ensure an immediate connection to the team.

Working in collaboration with the marketing and PR departments, the Canes created hype videos that featured scenic shots of Raleigh, Canes highlights and voiceover work from Andrei Svechnikov, a budding young star and a second overall pick from two years ago. Personalized touches for each video included shots of the prospect's name on the back of the Canes' red home jersey and highlights of the prospect.

These bespoke videos were shared with each prospect shortly after the draft, a one-of-a-kind memento in a one-of-a-kind year.

"You see the athlete's excitement and the parents' enjoyment and the emotion on their faces, it's something that never gets old," Yorke said. "We wanted to build a connection right away with the athletes, to ensure they're not losing out on the experience of being drafted had they been able to be in Montreal."

On the night of the first round, anxious energy flowed throughout the Canes locker room. Months and months and even more unexpected months of preparation was leading to this, and all anyone could do was simply hurry up and wait.

A catered Angus Barn dinner helped abate some nerves. Meanwhile, Waddell, along with Director of Communications and Team Services Mike Sundheim and a two-person video crew discussed the black third jerseys in the background of the camera shot. Which player's jersey should go where? After Waddell announced the pick, would the camera pan up to reveal the nameplate in the stall behind him, or would he slide it in himself?

"I think you need to worry about making the right pick," Brind'Amour ribbed Waddell.

With the first overall pick in the 2020 NHL Draft, the New York Rangers were on the clock. It was going to be Alexis Lafrenière. That much had been known for months, but the made-for-TV event played up the drama of each selection by letting the five-minute clock tick down.

"What's taking them so long?" chuckled Peter Karmanos Jr., who was in town for the first round.

As picks came off the board, so too did names disappear from the Canes' master draft list, which was displayed on a television screen to Waddell and Yorke's left. On a screen to the right was the world TV feed of the draft. On the TV at the front of the room, the Canes flipped between the big board of picks and the NBCSN broadcast.

The Buffalo Sabres selected Jack Quinn with the eighth overall pick.



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"There hasn't been a surprise yet," Yorke said.

Iaroslav Askarov, the highly-touted, top-rated goaltender of the 2020 class, was still available, and there had been no movement up or down the draft board.

"If you hear a trade announced, you know someone is trading up to get the goalie," Waddell said.

Marco Rossi to Minnesota. Cole Perfetti to Winnipeg. Nashville finally nabbed Askarov with the 11th overall pick. Had he still been available two picks later, the Canes would have had a decision to make.

"That settles that, huh?" Karmanos said.

As Florida debated their pick at 12th overall, the Canes keyed into the best player available on their board: Seth Jarvis, who they had ranked in their top 10. Yorke and the Canes were ecstatic.

"He's a great kid," Yorke said to Karmanos.

The Canes couldn't officially submit the pick into the system until they were on the clock, but there was no hesitation.

"Congrats on all your hard work," Yorke told his scouting staff, who were connected from around the globe via a video call on Microsoft Teams. "We just took Seth Jarvis."

Sundheim attempted to slide Jarvis' nameplate into the holder in a corner locker stall, but it wouldn't quite fit, so he had to shave the top of it ever so slightly. That, along with the team's draft hat and third jersey, served as the backdrop for a FaceTime call with the newest member of the organization.

"I'm super excited," a smiling Jarvis said. "Thank you guys so much."

Brind'Amour motioned over to the stall and Jarvis' nameplate.

"Now you've got to go earn it, right? Brind'Amour said.

A landline phone connection at Waddell's draft workstation, which also included his laptop and two additional screens with a photo of his grandkids taped to the back, was eerily quiet all of Tuesday night.

Coming into the virtual draft, Waddell thought that might be the case.

"It's going to be way different. I like to work in person. I've made a lot of deals on draft day over my years. You like to be able to read people and see what they're thinking" he said before the draft. "I think some things may go by without being able to be done because of not being in the same room."

Later in the first round, Waddell left the room. His landline rang.

Brind'Amour went running to grab Waddell, only to find the Canes' general manager prank calling his own phone.

"I like that kid. He was excited," Brind'Amour said afterward. "Great job, Darren."

The Canes fielded more trade offers for pick No. 53 but again elected to hang onto it, using it to select Russian center Vasiliy Ponomarev, who would ink his three-year, entry-level contract just a week later.

After selecting stout Russian blueliner Alexander Nikishin with the 69th overall pick, the Canes had some time to kill, as they weren't slated to make another selection until No. 115.

They chatted with Minor-League Goalie Consultant Paul Schonfelder about the options available in net, but a run of goaltenders early in the fourth round - four in a span of 12 picks - took potential targets off the board. Waddell worked the phones, listening to various trade chatter. Would the Canes be interested in moving up from No. 115? Not really, was the consensus.

Diminutive but skilled forward Zion Nybeck was the Canes' pick at 115th overall. NHL Central Scouting listed him at 5-foot-6, but Yorke said Nybeck was inching closer to 5-foot-8 now.

"I'm on board with it," Dundon insisted. "I just think it's funny he's 5-7."

Though size was a popular point of discussion and an occasional punchline in the room on day two, the Canes' drafting strategy was predicated on a high level of hockey sense and the ability to effectively play the modern, possession-driven, transitional game - regardless of position or size or various other attribute.

Later, talk turned to a player who was listed at 5-foot-10.

"He's too tall for us," Yorke joked.

"He's a giant!" Dundon added.

When the best player available on the Canes' list came off the board before they were set to make the 140th overall selection, they reassessed their strategy. Trading down was suddenly a viable option, so Waddell picked up the phone.

They ended up striking a deal with Los Angeles to move back 19 picks to No. 159 and add a seventh-round selection in 2021. And, in the end, they nabbed who they wanted in the first place: sizeable center Lucas Mercuri.

The phone lines were much more active on Wednesday, Oct. 7, a marathon day two of the 2020 NHL Draft.

The Canes began the morning by entertaining trade talks with the New York Rangers and Ottawa Senators, who were both interested in the 41st overall pick. Early in the second round, Los Angeles entered the picture as another suitor, but the Canes were increasingly intrigued by the options on their draft list.

Waddell floated a trade scenario that involved moving down a few spots and collecting a late-second-round pick in the process.

"I'd take the pick," Yorke said. Brind'Amour, in agreement with Yorke, gave a thumbs down to the offer.



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So, the Canes made the pick and snagged Noel Gunler, a player many had ranked as a first-round talent.

"I know it sounds cliché when teams say they don't expect a player to be there, but we really didn't," Yorke said on a media call later. "So, for us to get a player who has that speed and skill and hockey sense in the second round wasn't something we expected."

Just as they did with Jarvis the night prior, the Canes wanted to contact Gunler as soon as possible.

"Is he playing a game or in practice?" Sundheim asked, a query never before considered in a draft. As it turned out, Gunler did have practice, but that had taken place earlier in the morning in Sweden after a restless, abbreviated night of sleep.

Waddell and Brind'Amour chatted via FaceTime with Gunler, who was celebrating his 19th birthday.

Restlessness set in as the second day of the draft dragged on.

A counterpart joked with Waddell that "some of these players are going to be retired by the time the draft is over."

Collective groans echoed through masks when a timeout was called in the last round.

Waddell, in the midst of it all, continued to work the phones.

"Oh, you want one of my sevenths next year?" he asked. "Holy mackerel, call me next year!"

It was around 7 p.m. on Wednesday when the Canes made their final pick, the 208th overall selection, of the 2020 NHL Draft. That came some six-and-a-half hours after they made pick No. 41, their first of what turned out to be a long, but productive day.

"This is what we live for," Waddell said on a media call before the beginning of the final round. "This is what our scouts have worked for all year, so whether it takes four hours or 10 hours, we're going to be prepared to make the next selection."

As business wrapped, Waddell brought a glass of red wine over to the Microsoft Teams chat with the team's scouting staff.

"A little toast for you guys for all your hard work," Waddell said.

Cheers.

"Now it's time to go back to work on the 2021 draft," Yorke said, as he exited the locker room.

That could at least wait until the next morning.

Notebook: Fast a 'Perfect Fit' for Canes System, Culture

By Michael Smith

Carolina Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell was in between phone calls about 90 minutes into the opening of free agency on Friday.

"We're staying in touch with a lot of guys. We don't have a lot of cap space, that's number one. I've said all along, if we can find a way to upgrade our team by not using all of our cap space, we've got to look at that," he said. "We're talking with some teams about different needs. Whether anything gets done or not today, I don't look at it like this is the only day you're going to do deals. There are going to be lots of players that don't get signed today, and that's going to continue into the weekend."

Sure enough, once the dust settled, the Canes made their first signing of the offseason on Saturday, inking forward Jesper Fast to a three-year, \$6 million contract.

"I know Brady Skjei from playing with the Rangers. I talked with him, and he had only good stuff to say," Fast said in a virtual chat on Sunday. "Of course, talking with Rod and Tom, they convinced me they wanted me there. In the end, I'm really looking forward to getting there and meeting all the guys."

Fast also talked with Skjei after the playoffs. Recall, Skjei laid a huge hit on Fast just 32 seconds into Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Qualifiers. The hit knocked Fast out of the series with a concussion and helped spark the Canes in a dominant, three-game sweep.

"I have a good opportunity to get him back here a little more when I'm practicing with him. No, just kidding," Fast smiled. "No bad blood. I've known him for many years. He's a good friend, so no harm there."

When the Canes' decision makers then sat down after the season to identify potential free agent targets, Fast was high on their list. A day and a half after the start of free agency, he was on their roster.

"We play a very fast system. Rod likes to always be on the attack with the puck," Waddell said on Sunday. "There are a lot of good players in free agency, but we look more at what players can play the way we like to play. Jesper was one of the guys we identified early."

Fast had played his whole career, spanning 422 regular-season games and seven seasons, with the Rangers, who selected him in the sixth round (157th overall) of the 2010 NHL Entry Draft. The Nassjo, Sweden, native was tracking to put up career numbers in the 2019-20 season prior to the pause, with 12 goals, 17 assists and 29 points. In total, Fast has accumulated 147 points (55g, 92a) in the NHL since 2013.

Fast isn't going to be relied upon for scoring, but it is an added bonus when the bottom six can add an offensive punch. He's a versatile, right-shot winger, and at 6-foot-1 and 191 pounds, he can throw his body around. Fast recorded 125 hits in 2019-20, the third consecutive season he's crossed the century mark and the fifth time he's done so in the last six seasons. The 28-year-old paced the Rangers and



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ranked 21st among NHL forwards in shorthanded ice time (162:35) in 2019-20 and tallied a pair of shorthanded goals.

"I've played them a lot and seen how they play. They play a fast game, and they play hard. I really like how they play, and I feel like I fit the system really good. I feel like everyone has good character and works hard. That's what drove me to Carolina, as well," Fast said. "I talked to Brady, and just heard amazing stuff about Rod. I have not heard a bad word about him, so I'm really looking forward to getting a chance to work with him."

Fast will bring effort and leadership to the Canes, both qualities Rod Brind'Amour likes to see in a player. Fast served as an alternate captain for New York from 2018-20 and received the "Players' Player" award, voted on by the Rangers players and given annually to who "best exemplifies what it means to be a team player," in five consecutive seasons.

"You know what he means to his teammates," Waddell said. "We all talked to Brady, and Brady couldn't say enough good things about Jesper. It was a perfect fit for us."

Cap Crunch

Remember, about 600 words ago, that quote from Waddell?

"We don't have a lot of cap space, that's number one," he said. "I've said all along, if we can find a way to upgrade our team by not using all of our cap space, we've got to look at that."

CONTRACT TRACKER

After the signing of Fast, the Canes now have around \$5.8 million left under the flat salary cap of \$81.5 million. That's not a lot of wiggle room, especially with restricted free agents Haydn Fleury and Warren Foegele still left to sign - and more on them below.

Experts Laud Canes' Draft Picks

By Michael Smith

Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke spoke glowingly about the eight players that comprised the Carolina Hurricanes' 2020 NHL Draft class, noting the common thread of a high-level of hockey sense.

"They earned the selection. They were able to show their talents to us and basically force us to select them," Yorke said. "We're thrilled with this class."

And, by all accounts, they should be thrilled with their haul, again considered to be among the most highly regarded draft classes from 2020.

When you're analyzing an NHL Draft just days after completion, though, it's important to consider that the true return on a class won't be evident for another three to five years, as these players progress through their development cycles in hopes of becoming NHLers. However, early returns

That's not to say the Canes have finished their offseason business, but a number of factors - asset management and value, perhaps chief among them - have to be considered.

"If there's something that fits into all those parameters and makes our team better, we've got to take a look at it," Waddell said on Sunday.

Four Players Elect Arbitration

Four of the Canes' eight restricted free agents have elected salary arbitration: Fleury, Foegele, Clark Bishop and Gustav Forsling.

What exactly is salary arbitration? In this case, it's a tool that restricted free agents can utilize if they feel the contracts they're being offered aren't reaching fair market value for what they're worth. A third-party arbitrator, then, can settle the dispute.

OFFSEASON PLAYER TRACKER

Hearings will be held Oct. 20 through Nov. 8, but negotiations don't always reach that point. Recall last offseason when Brock McGinn had elected salary arbitration but then re-signed a two-year, \$4.2 million contract prior to the hearing.

In fact, of the 40 restricted free agents (compared to 26 this year) who filed for arbitration in 2019, only six, including Joel Edmundson (with St. Louis) and Anton Forsberg, had their salaries determined by an arbitrator.

The Canes, meanwhile, remain in contact with the representation for Fleury and Foegele.

"The good thing is we are talking. They have the right to file," Waddell said. "Our goal is still to try to get things worked out and avoid going to arbitration."

are very promising on the eight players the Canes added to their prospect pipeline this week.

NHL Draft winners and losers: Ranking every team's first round (\$)

The Athletic, Scott Wheeler

Grade: Overtime winners

"I didn't hide how much I loved what the Hurricanes did at the 2019 draft (still the best performance of the draft a year later!) and the Jarvis pick, with Askarov off the board, feels like it's almost too on brand. The Canes have a habit of taking slick, puck-dominant, playmaking types. And those are exactly the things that Jarvis does best. You want the play running through him. You want the puck in his hands and his linemates to revolve around him. When people talk about the depth of the 2020 draft a decade from now, they'll talk about those big names in the top-10. But they'll also point to a talent like Jarvis at 13th overall."



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NHL Draft winners and losers: Ranking every team's Day 2 picks (\$)

The Athletic, Scott Wheeler

Grade: Winners

"It was no surprise when they took my best player available on Wednesday at No. 41 with Noel Gunler, who ranked 10th on my final board. On pure talent, Gunler was the most talented player available on Day 2, bar none. ... I'm a huge fan of the job they've done. They see the game a lot like I do, and I think that's reflected in the program they've been able to build. The proof will be in its longevity when the Canes remain as contenders for the next few years, I'd bet."

NHL Draft grades 2020: Corey Pronman evaluates all 31 teams (\$)

The Athletic, Corey Pronman

Grade: B+

"I'm a big fan of Seth Jarvis, who Carolina got at 13. Noel Gunler at 41 will be a talking point of this draft. Among scouts, he's a consensus late first-round talent. ... They targeted high skill afterward in Vasili Ponomarev and Zion Nybeck."

NHL Draft grades 2020: Best picks, value steals, more for all 31 teams (\$)

ESPN, Chris Peters

Grade: B+

"The Hurricanes seem to have a habit of picking players whom I really, really like. Seth Jarvis was a solid pick in the first round - he's a highly productive player with skill. Carolina

also had a strong second round, grabbing two players I graded out in the first round. ... It was great value in this class for Carolina. The Hurricanes have been building up a really strong prospect system, and this group advances it further."

NHL Draft 2020: Team-by-Team Results, Grades and Analysis

Bleacher Report

Grade: A+

"Seth Jarvis of the Portland Winterhawks is a Carolina Hurricane, one year after he was one of two Western Hockey League players to finish top five in his league in goals (42) and assists (56) in just 58 games. ... The Canes may have also got a steal in Swedish forward Noel Gunler with the 41st overall pick. Gunler was ranked as a top-25 prospect by multiple sites, including 19th by McKeen's Hockey and 22nd by Elite Prospects."

2020 NHL Draft: Winners and Losers

Rotoworld

Grade: Winners

"[The 13th overall pick] was an amazing addition for Carolina, given that all it really cost them was money. With that draft pick, Carolina took Seth Jarvis, who is an all-around great forward. He is undersized, but Jarvis is capable of both contributing offensively and helping out the Hurricanes defensively. On top of that, Noel Gunler, who they took with the 41st overall pick, is a potential steal. He's a bit of a gamble, but he wouldn't have looked out of place as a late first-rounder. He's got a lot of upside and an amazing shot."



Hurricanes sign Jesper Fast to 3-year deal

By Cory Lavalette

Free agency got off to a slow start for the Carolina Hurricanes, but things picked up on Day 2.

Carolina signed Swedish right wing Jesper Fast to a three-year, \$6 million contract Saturday, adding another right-handed shooting forward two days after Justin Williams retired after 19 seasons.

The addition of Fast gives Carolina more options in the middle of their lineup. The 28-year-old has spent his entire NHL career with the Rangers, jumping throughout the lineup in both scoring and checking roles. Last season with New

York, he had 12 goals and 17 assists for 29 points in 69 games.

He lasted just 64 seconds in the Rangers' play-in series against the Hurricanes, the victim of a thunderous hit from Carolina defenseman Brady Skjei that knocked him out of the series, which the Hurricanes swept in three games. Skjei and Fast were teammates with the Rangers and their AHL affiliate, the Hartford Wolfpack, since 2014 until Skjei was traded to Carolina at the trade deadline.



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Now the two will be reunited in Raleigh, and Fast — the five-time winner of the Players' Player Award, giving annually to the Rangers player who is deemed by teammates to best exemplify being a team player — would certainly seem to be a fit for the Hurricanes' culture.

Fast and Carolina GM Don Waddell will be available to the media on Sunday at 10 a.m. to discuss the deal.

In other news, Trevor van Riemsdyk, who played the past three seasons in Carolina, signed a one-year, \$800,000 contract with the Washington Capitals on Saturday.

Hurricanes' busy week includes draft, retirement, free agency

By Cory Lavalette

The NHL will have to play a condensed schedule to stuff 82 games into a 2020-21 season that will start, at the earliest, nearly three months late on Jan. 1, 2021. The whole league — including the Carolina Hurricanes — got a crash course in multitasking in the last week with the opening of free agency coming less than two days after the conclusion of the NHL Draft.

It was particularly hectic for the Hurricanes, who selected eight players at the draft, saw a franchise icon retire, and — after being quiet on Day 1 of free agency — added a speedy winger to its forward corps.

Here's the week that was at the start of the NHL's surreal offseason.

Jarvis leads draft class driven by hockey sense

The front office for every team in any team sport will tell after an amateur draft that they're thrilled with the players they were able to select. In the case of the Hurricanes, many pundits seemed to agree that Carolina got a talented player in first-round pick Seth Jarvis — a forward from the Western Hockey League's Portland Winterhawks — and followed that up with several value picks on the draft's second day.

"When I say, 'What's the best thing about Seth?' it's as hockey sense," Darren Yorke, Hurricanes director of player personnel, said following the draft. "It is hard to do anything better in the last two years than what Seth's accomplished. And it's because of how smart he is. ... He makes other people better. He can score. There are so many layers to his game, that it really is special."

On the draft's second day, Carolina capitalized on some players who slid down in the draft. Forwards Noel Gunler and Vasily Ponomarev — ranked 27th and 44th, respectively, in North State Journal's pre-draft rankings — were picked in the second round at 41st and 53rd. Zion Nybeck, an undersized but stout Swedish forward ranked 53rd by NSJ, was available in the fourth round at 115th overall, while Russian Alexander Pashin (NSJ No. 64) fell to Carolina all the way at 199th overall in the seventh and final round.

The Hurricanes rounded out their draft class with defenseman Alexander Nikishin in the third round (69th overall), forward Lucas Mercuri at No. 159 in the sixth round, and closed out the draft with defenseman Ronan Seeley at No. 208 in the seventh.

Yorke said the prevailing theme was smarts on the ice.

"We're going to have a common thread, and it's going to be hockey sense," he said of the class.

Williams announces his retirement

Three Stanley Cups, a Conn Smythe Trophy and one the game's best nicknames — Justin Williams will forever be viewed as one of the key players who brought a championship to Raleigh and, more than a decade later, returned to make the Hurricanes relevant again.

We could wax poetic about Williams' career — his statistics, while impressive, never defined his worth — and the value he brought to locker rooms in Philadelphia, Carolina, Los Angeles and Washington, but his moniker of Mr. Game 7 tells one all they need to know about competitive and clutch during his 19-season career.

Fast signs in free agency

The Hurricanes were quiet on the opening of free agency on Friday, but Saturday they added more speed and character to their forward group.

Jesper Fast, who played seven seasons with the Rangers after they drafted him in the sixth round of the 2010 draft, signed a three-year, \$6 million contract to join Carolina.

Some may best know Fast for his exit from Game 1 of the play-in round between the Rangers and Hurricanes when Carolina defenseman Brady Skjei — a longtime teammate of Fast's in New York until he was dealt to the Hurricanes at the trade deadline — delivered a punishing hit that knocked the Swedish winger out for the rest of the series.

In Fast — who confirmed he was concussed on the hit but said there was no "bad blood" with Skjei — Carolina adds more speed to its lineup and another capable penalty killer who has 15-goal potential.

And while no one is going to replace Williams in terms of intangibles, Fast is about as close as a team is going to get to adding an instant character boost to the locker room. Fast was given the Rangers' "Players' Player" Award five straight years, an honor given to the player who best exemplifies being a team player and voted on by the New York players.

"You know what he means to his teammates, and obviously we all talked to Brady, and Brady couldn't say enough good things about Jesper," Hurricanes GM Don Waddell said. "So it was it was a perfect fit for us."

The Hurricanes also added depth signings in the past few days, bringing in defenseman Joakim Ryan and re-signing restricted free agents Clark Bishop and Spencer Smallman all to one-year, two-way deals.



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SportScan

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

The Athletic / LeBrun: NHL agents debate the pros and cons of the UFA 'interview period'

By Pierre LeBrun

Oct 17, 2020

What if Alex Pietrangelo and his wife, Jayne, hated their tour of Summerlin, Nev., last weekend?

What if they didn't like what they saw when the Golden Knights showed them the practice facility, or the schools, or the shopping, or the homes in the area?

Yes, Pietrangelo could have said "no thanks" to playing in Vegas and continued his search for a new team. And I know there are a few teams that would have moved heaven and earth to make room for him if Newport Sports, his agency, had re-opened the bidding on the prized UFA blueliner.

But in my mind, Pietrangelo and a number of high-profile free agents this year were short-changed when the NHL and NHL Players' Association agreed to drop the "UFA interview period" from the new collective bargaining agreement.

They've gone back to the way it used to be pre-2013, where teams have to wait until the opening of free agency to speak and meet with free agents.

It's with the NHLPA's urging that the change occurred. Many player agents had complained to the NHLPA over the years that the UFA interview period gave teams too much control ahead of free agency, that they preferred the old way of doing things when July 1 came and teams under the pressure of the moment sometimes overspent on players.

But as I just pointed out, while that may be beneficial to some free agents, it really isn't ideal for those free agents who are in such demand that meeting and speaking with teams ahead of free agency can make a huge difference.

As it turns out, of course, Pietrangelo and his wife loved what they saw and signed a massive contract.

But I wonder how different things could have been for Taylor Hall or Torey Krug had they been able to go through the interview process ahead of time just like Matt Duchene did last year and John Tavares the year before him.

Not to mention the fact that the opening of free agency should be a marquee event on the NHL calendar, but the splash of news on Pietrangelo or Hall had to wait 3-4 days. Even Krug didn't sign with the Blues until after TSN and Sportsnet went off air with their free-agent shows.

And yes, as an Insider at TSN, this will sound self-serving so let me get that out of the way, but "Free Agent Frenzy" should be just that for hockey fans. And one would think it's also of interest to both the NHL and NHLPA to be a buzzy, news-filled day for TV.

While last Friday was busy to be sure, not having the top three free agents this year sign during the seven-hour show was a downer for viewers.

And here's the thing, it might be like that again next year, and the year after that, if the interview period doesn't return. And right now, there's no reason to believe it will, based on the new CBA.

"I think it is fair to say that the sentiment to discontinue the UFA interview period was a sentiment shared and supported by both sides," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Athletic this week. "I have not heard from anyone — either on the PA side or on our side — that it is a decision that we should revisit going forward. But, as with everything else, we are prepared to review with our appropriate constituents and further evaluate as necessary."

The reality is that it will only change back if the NHLPA wants it to change back. I don't think the league actually cares one way or another.

I asked a handful of NHL GMs for comment on this and none of them wanted to discuss it publicly. If I had to guess what 31 GMs felt about it, I would say half of them want to bring back the interview period while the other half doesn't care either way.

So it's really on player agents to carry the mail on this one.

As such, I reached out to some agents and got a mixed response when I asked how they felt about the UFA interview period from the previous CBA and life without it most recently.

"Quite frankly, I would be in favour of its retention (bringing back UFA interview period) given what has transpired in free agency this past week. I think it would be advantageous to have the interview period for it allows for a reasonable period of time for a player and a team to become reasonably acquainted with each other in terms of taking the process further.

"In addition, without the interview period, the signing of a player subsequent to the start of free agency can delay activity in the marketplace. The feeling-out process and the negotiation process can then have an effect in staling the marketplace until decisions are made."

Allan Walsh, Octagon Hockey

"I have always believed the free-agent frenzy of July 1 should be just that, a frenzy. The introduction of the five-day interview period in 2013 ultimately worked against the players' collective interests. The rules regarding what was allowed were loosely defined. The prohibition against negotiating contracts but allowing discussions on the 'general parameters' of a proposed deal were largely ignored. What we really had was a form of legalized tampering.

"GMs used the interview period to methodically address needs without the time pressure of a starting gun to free agency. On July 1, deals were immediately announced that had been consummated during the interview window. That was not the original intention of the NHL or NHLPA in creating the open window for discussions. While pandemic and flat cap have served as a restraint on dollars and term this offseason, I fervently believe players are better off without the interview period. Once NHL revenues stabilize over the next 12-24 months, the robustness of free agency truly commencing on July 1, led by the best available players will be a significant driver to the 'frenzy' of signings that day."

"Eliminating the talking period is detrimental to the process. Asking players to make life-altering decisions for up to seven years in length without the ability to meet their new employer or to visit potential neighbourhoods and see new school districts just doesn't feel right."



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"I would say that the speaking period was definitely a benefit for the players that no longer exists. Hard to know the impact this year because of all that's going on — next season will be a better measurement of the impact. But like all changes to the CBA, us agents seem to find a way to work effectively with new rules."

"I don't think it plays a major role either way. The interview period provided many false positives in terms of sincere interest. I don't think that is helpful to my clients."

"I think it (the interview period) is very beneficial to the player. If the player wants to see housing options or other things that he would not normally see when he travels there to play, he can do that. In addition, it gives us a few days to gauge the interest in the player and discuss it with the player and his family."

"Pre-interview period, we kind of went dark into free agency. I think at that time I believe there were a lot of conversations that were had, like 'I like your guy if he gets to July 1' kind of thing. You got to July 1 and you waited to find out what happened. When we went to the interview period, my opinion is that it was more beneficial to teams than players in a lot of cases. Because they got to gauge the market, decide which way to go without the pressure to react when the clock strikes noon."

"Let's just say there was a very strong perception among many agents that the potential for information leakage was highly elevated during this period. Our spidey senses were tingling. In the end, it wasn't operating as intended so it was better to just return to the status quo."

First off, let's deal with the last comment from Barry, a veteran of the business who represents the likes of Evgeni Malkin, Morgan Rielly, David Pastrnak and Dougie Hamilton.

A rather juicy point he's making there. That teams, in his mind, perhaps were a little too communicative with each other during the interview period, which worked against the players.

While that may have happened here and there, I don't buy that it was rampant. GMs are just too competitive with each other to do that in a widespread fashion. That's my experience, anyway.

But Barry has been around, negotiated a ton of high-profile contracts, so an interesting point of view.

Certainly, I'm with Meehan, Neumann and Gross in their comments for wanting to bring back the interview period.

Meehan makes the point that without the interview period we see the stalling of the marketplace, which we absolutely saw play out this past week both in terms of signings and potential trades.

On the flip side, while we are going to have to agree to disagree, Walsh, another veteran agent, gives us some valuable points to chew on, including how the original interview period wasn't meant to be a time to exchange actual numbers but that's what often happened and many deals were announced quickly on July 1 when the market opened. But my counter-argument would be — that's a good thing! Hockey fans want that. They want it all to happen in one day, on TSN's Free Agent Frenzy.

And again, Walsh touches on the real reason for the eliminating of the interview period: That the NHLPA wanted to bring back the actual frenzy come the opening of free agency. And no doubt in past years, there were GMs acting like drunken sailors on July 1, the pressure of acting fast getting the better of them.

But I just think GMs have become savvier, for the most part, because of the constraints of the salary cap. This year's free agency, in some ways, may prove to be an outlier because of the flat cap and the pandemic effect on finances, and next summer's free agency will likely be the same, but the fact remains any free agent wanting to visit teams and cities won't be able to make his decision on the opening day of free agency. Not if he wants to make those visits before deciding.

And so I guess in many ways all these agents are right despite their opposing viewpoints because there is no ultimate solution that will satisfy all.

Which is to say, I think the top end of the free-agent class every year would benefit from an interview period. Tavares for sure valued having those teams present to him at the CAA offices in Los Angeles in the week leading up to free agency.

But the middle class of free agents, the guys scrambling, probably do benefit more from a GM's trigger finger on a normal July 1. Still, I also feel many of those second-tier free agents also sometimes benefited from hearing from teams they never thought were on the radar ahead of time.

What eliminating the interview period probably does is fuel some minor tampering here and there between agents and teams. So even though there was no interview period in the week leading up to Oct. 9, there's the sense teams and agents still had ways to gauge the market ahead of time.

Why not go back to "legalized tampering" during the interview period?

Stamkos is a great example of why it's a good thing. In late June 2016, he used the interview period to hear presentations from Buffalo, Toronto, Montreal and San Jose at the Newport offices in Mississauga, Ont. Then he realized he didn't want to leave Tampa and re-signed with the Lightning.

The point being, imagine Stamkos had gone to market to listen to pitches, then realized he didn't want to leave Tampa. You don't think there's a chance then-Lightning GM Steve Yzerman wouldn't have done what Blues GM Doug Armstrong did last Friday when he signed Krug? How can we be sure Yzerman would have waited for Stamkos' answer? My guess is there's a chance Yzerman would have moved on with a replacement player, just like Armstrong did. Especially, as always, because Tampa was a contender.

I know there isn't a perfect answer. And I doubt the NHL and NHLPA are going to want to re-visit this so soon after changing it, but what we just had over the past two weeks was not great.

I feel strongly the UFA interview period should return.

The Athletic / 'No action taken' by those told of sexual abuse by former Minnesota hockey assistant

By Katie Strang

A law firm's investigation into allegations of sexual abuse by a former assistant hockey coach at the University of Minnesota determined that some members of the school's athletic department were aware of the allegations and failed to act, both in investigating the claims and reporting them to law enforcement.

The allegations that former coach Thomas "Chico" Adrahtas sexually abused multiple members of the 1984-85 men's hockey team were first reported in a February article published by The Athletic. Three days later, the university announced the hiring of law firm Perkins Coie to conduct a probe into the allegations and interview former players, staff members and university personnel.

"Collectively, based on credible and corroborating firsthand witness accounts, Perkins found that sexual abuse allegations like those reported in The Athletic were known by individuals within the University's Athletic Department at or around the time of the former assistant coach's departure from the University. Despite this knowledge, available evidence shows no action taken by the University to conduct an independent investigation or report the allegations to the authorities. That is not what the University would do today," the school said in a statement.

"We are committed to learning from this inquiry into the University's past, an inquiry that will strengthen even more our University's commitment to



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having a culture and practice that responds promptly and seriously to allegations of sexual misconduct.”

Since the article’s publication, the U.S. Center for Safesport levied a lifetime ban against Adrahtas. Also, one additional victim, who was not a member of Minnesota’s hockey team but played for Adrahtas in one of his subsequent coaching stops, has come forward to detail abuse by Adrahtas.

In June, the USCSS, which is tasked with investigating all claims of sexual misconduct and abuse within the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee’s purview, found that during Adrahtas’ time coaching at Minnesota and elsewhere he “engaged in a pattern of exploitative and abusive sexual misconduct with multiple young athletes he coached, egregiously abusing a position of authority to manipulate and deceive young male athletes he mentored and coached, for sexual purposes.” Additionally, the investigative report, which was obtained by The Athletic, states that the evidence “overwhelmingly” establishes that Adrahtas exploited at least six additional athletes beyond the three athletes interviewed by SafeSport officials. At least one of the athletes interviewed during the investigation was a member of the Gophers’ 1984-85 team.

According to the university’s statement, Perkins Coie’s investigation “aimed, in part, to determine whether reports of the alleged abuse were made known to the University at the time of the former coach’s employment and, if so, whether any responsive actions were taken to address them.” The firm identified 50 potential witnesses believed to have information pertinent to the investigation; of those, 14 were deceased and several others “did not respond to Perkins’ outreach.” The statement said that 29 witnesses participated voluntarily. Several former players participated in the investigation, though none of these participants provided firsthand accounts of abuse.

The university is not making the full investigation available to the public. According to the statement, that decision was made “in part because it includes private information about former employees.”

In The Athletic’s February story, former Gophers player Tony Kellin said Adrahtas “approached players, always individually, at their stalls within the locker room, raving about a woman named ‘Sheila’ who gave ‘the best blowjob you’ve ever had.’”

Adrahtas conveyed one caveat to players:

“The deal was ... you had to be blindfolded and have your hands behind your back. That to me, right away, right away it creped me out,” said Kellin, who was a junior defenseman at Minnesota. “He was kind of a creepy guy. ... He always rubbed me wrong. He (asked me) a couple times and I said, ‘It ain’t gonna happen.’ No one’s gonna do that to me.”

Multiple players took Adrahtas up on this offer, unsettling some of the veterans on the team who suspected something was amiss. A sting operation orchestrated by some of the players revealed that no woman went in or left the apartment where the act was performed, and players quickly concluded that it was Adrahtas who was performing oral sex on the players.

Multiple people, including Kellin and a Gopher hockey alum who had heard about the situation, told The Athletic that they reported these concerns to then-athletic director Paul Giel, who is now deceased. One influential power broker in Minnesota’s hockey community, Chuck Grillo, said that he called Adrahtas personally “and told him that if the rumors were true he should leave town.”

According to a newspaper article from that time, Adrahtas left the university for “personal reasons.”

Mike Sacks, a former junior hockey player who said he was sexually abused by Adrahtas and who lived with him as a minor while Adrahtas was coaching at Minnesota, sent a letter about his experience with Adrahtas to the American Collegiate Hockey Association in September 2018, which prompted the SafeSport investigation. Sacks, as detailed in the February Athletic article, accepted a scholarship to Minnesota and was slated to play hockey on the men’s hockey team for the 1985-86 season, but he said he was told by a member of the athletic department

following Adrahtas’ abrupt departure that “due to his connection to Adrahtas, it would be best for him to not come.”

Sacks’ attorneys, Lee Jacobson and Nick Economakos, in response to the investigation’s findings, said in a statement that they hope others come forward “so that no travesty like this ever happens again.”

Adrahtas’ attorney did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Let’s build the best all-time team that can’t play defense

By Sean McIndoe

Oct 16, 2020

This year’s Stanley Cup Final matchup between the Tampa Bay Lightning and Dallas Stars set up as a classic showdown between offense and defense. Not entirely — the Stars have plenty of talented offensive players and the Lightning are strong in their own zone. But at a high level, this was the team that scored the most goals in the league against the one that gave up the second fewest.

And offense won. Good.

I know I’m supposed to be impartial, but I’ll always cheer for offense, because it’s more fun. I could appreciate a defensive team, back before that’s what everyone in the league was trying to be. But these days, I’m sick of being told that defense always wins and is the only way to play, even if it’s usually true.

So today, let’s build the best roster of all-time stars that breaks that rule. All offense, no defense. And that last part is a hard and fast rule. If you were ever recognized for your play in your own zone, even a little bit, get out. You’re not welcome here.

How do we do it? By basing this off a suggestion from reader Tyler, who asked: What’s the best roster you can build out of players who never received so much as a single vote for the Selke, Norris or Vezina?

I love it. It’s so simple. Three awards that recognize a player’s ability to keep the puck out of his own net, and we’re disqualifying anyone who ever so much as showed up on a ballot for any of them. This is going to be the most one-dimensional team ever, which means it should be lots of fun.

But first, a few ground rules™:

- Position matters. We need four centers, four left-wingers and four right-wingers. Defensemen can play either side. I’ll do my best to use guys in the position they were best known for, without getting sneaky on anyone who moved around for a season or two.

- No votes means no votes at all. If even one voter thought they were good enough to earn a spot on their ballot, they’re out. We’ll use the hockey-reference database to track who got votes for what.

- We’re starting from 1954 for the Norris and 1978 for the Selke, the first years those were awarded. And while the Vezina dates back to 1927, for our purposes we’re only going back to 1982, when it reverted to being an award that was voted on. Players whose careers started before those seasons are still eligible, but we’re only getting credit for what they did afterwards. Gordie Howe never got a Selke vote, but if we take him then we only get his 1979-80 comeback season. (We will not be taking Gordie Howe.)

Sound good? Let’s do this. Let’s build the most offensive team we can find.



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Forwards

We'll start up front, where things should be easiest. The Norris and Vezina recognize general excellence at a position, so I'm mildly worried about how deep we may have to dig to find guys who never received any votes at all. But the Selke is a specialist award, and it's possible to be a very good player without ever being considered a great defensive forward. So while it may be slim pickings on the back end, we can make up for that by stocking our team with some of history's greatest forwards.

Not all of them, of course. Guys like Steve Yzerman and Ron Francis actually won the Selke late in their careers, Peter Forsberg and Doug Gilmour won it in their primes and Joe Sakic and Mike Modano were finalists. Some guys evolve into strong defensive players as their careers wear on. But most star forwards don't do that; once you know you can light it up in the offensive zone, you tend to stay there. So let's stock up with an army of history's greatest one-way glory hounds.

For example, we can start with pretty much our perfect candidate: Wayne Gretzky, who racked up 200-point seasons while barely ever seeing his own zone. We can give him a couple of elite wingers in Alexander Ovechkin and Jaromir Jagr, two flashy Europeans who've been constantly criticized for their one-dimensional games, but will be close to unstoppable next to the Great One. And for our second line, let's start with Mario Lemieux, and put him with Teemu Selanne and Paul Kariya, two old friends who'll complement his playmaking perfectly. For our third line, how do Pat LaFontaine, Mike Bossy and Ilya Kovalchuk grab you?

Those lines are so good. I think we're going to have to put Brett Hull and his 700 goals on the fourth line. Forget goaltending and defense, this team will never see its own end of the rink. We're going to be unbeatable.

Except.

Yeah ... every one of those players I just mentioned got a Selke vote at some point in their careers. All of them.

I'll admit, I was a little worried about Gretzky since I remembered him adding a little bit of defense to his game in his Rangers years. But nope, he got his votes when he was shattering records. Three of them, to be exact, for his entire career – a third-place vote in both 1985 and 1986 and a second-place vote in 1990.

Lemieux got the only two votes of his career in 1997. Ovechkin hasn't had one in 10 years but got a few in 2008 and 2009 before peaking with a 28th place finish in 2010. Jagr got a fourth-place vote in 2007, then another in 2016. Kovalchuk got a lone fourth in 2013. Hull showed up on a ballot once in his 19-season career, in 2003 when he was 38. And so on down the line.

It turns out that virtually everyone gets a Selke vote at some point. Even guys that were constantly criticized for their defensive play throughout their career have a maddening tendency to sneak in a single vote somewhere over the course of their career.

Pierre Turgeon got a first-place Selke vote. What in the actual hell.

What's the deal? Are the voters trolling? Just looking for attention? Legitimately confused about which award they're voting on? Do some of them consider a Selke vote to be some sort of lifetime achievement award that you can unlock if you last 20 years, even if you never met your own goaltender?

I can't even use Leon Draisaitl, and if you just went by the last few months of expert analysis apparently he has a habit of deking out his team's goalie and shooting the puck directly into this own net. He got one Selke vote this year. From who? Presumably from Tyler, the reader who sent in this question and obviously hates me.

So almost everyone I might want is off the table. But almost everyone isn't absolutely everyone, and I did find a few options for our team. We'll start with the guy who always seems to be at the front of the line when you talk about being snubbed by voters: Marcel Dionne, who won the Lester Pearson from his fellow players twice to go with two Art Ross Trophies and remains the sixth-leading scorer of all-time but never got enough respect from the writers. We don't get his entire body of work

here, but even starting the clock in 1978 we get almost 1,200 career points, including three straight years of 130-point production. But not a single Selke vote, even as he was winding down his career by doing the respected veteran thing in New York in the late '80s.

Another common name from 1980s snub lists will be our second-line center, as we can nab the entire career of Dale Hawerchuk. And he'll be joined by Denis Savard, who had the misfortune of playing in a time when being the first-line center in Chicago didn't automatically mean having everyone overrate your defensive game.

The fourth spot is a tougher call. I could go with Darryl Sittler or Gilbert Perreault, but our 1978 cutoff means I'd be missing some of their best work. Peter Stastny is an option, as is Bernie Federko. But since the '70s and '80s are already well-represented, let's go with somebody from today's NHL. I can't use most of the names you might be hoping for, since many of today's best centers are two-way players who've either won the Selke or come close. Sidney Crosby has finished as high as fourth, Joe Thornton has received a smattering of votes in 11 different seasons, Evgeni Malkin got a vote this year and even Connor McDavid has shown up on ballots.

In fact, one thing we'll realize is that it gets harder to find candidates as we move through time, because the voting pool gets bigger and the ballots go from three names to five, so those weird one-offs become far more common. That makes it somewhat surprising that we can give our last center spot to Steven Stamkos, a two-time Richard Trophy winner who can't see to impress the voters with his two-way game. We'll grab him now, before his newfound grizzled veteran persona inevitably turns into a vote or two in the years to come.

On the wings, my first thought was that we should have an easier time due to the voters' reluctance to send Selke love to anyone who doesn't take a faceoff. But that's a bit of a recent phenomenon — remember the award was invented for Bob Gainey and Jere Lehtinen won it three times — so we still narrowly miss out on names like Mark Recchi, Michel Goulet and John LeClair. Mike Gartner scored 708 goals in his career to go with one lonely third-place Selke vote in 1988. Alexander Mogilny got one fourth-place nod in 2001.

It's not all bad. We can use Luc Robitaille and Pavel Bure on our first line, which is a great start. And as I dig a bit, I can see that right wing is actually almost promising. I could use Guy Lafleur, who couldn't get any votes because Gainey sucked up all the Montreal support, but the 1978 cutoff means I'd lose most of his best work. That's OK, though, because I can load up on some high-scoring stars from the '80s and '90s. Let's finish off the RW slot with three Hall of Famers – sorry, Peter Bondra – as we pencil in Joey Mullen, Dino Ciccarelli and Glenn Anderson.

As seems to always happen with these things, left wing is a lot tougher. I had hopes for guys like Rick Nash, Daniel Sedin or Ryan Smyth, but no luck. Markus Naslund got a single fifth-place vote in 2004. I could use Steve Shutt, but I'd be losing his 60-goal season. Vince Damphousse might be my favorite; he somehow finished in fourth place in 1996, but didn't get a single vote in any of his other 18 seasons, so apparently, it was just a phase he was going through.

Even most of the top active names don't help much; Brad Marchand gets lots of votes, Artemi Panarin got three votes this year and Jamie Benn got two in 2015. But I can find one current left-winger that fits our team: Taylor Hall, the ultra-rare Hart winner who's never had a Selke vote.

I'll fill in the third line spot with a 1,000-point guy who spent some time at right wing but did most of his damage on the left side: Brian Bellows. And since we're dipping into the Norris Division days, and it's my column, we're going to end with a homer pick. That's right, I finally found a way to get Wendel Clark onto one of these teams. Also, he's the captain, because of this.

That was tough going, but I think we wound up with four solid lines. Onto the back end...

Defense

The Selke recognizes a specific style of play, so at least in theory, it's possible to be a legitimate star player who doesn't get any votes. The



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Norris is just for being a good defenseman. If you go your whole career and never get so much as a single vote – not even a late-career sympathy nod – how good could you have been?

We can obviously rule out every Hall of Famer, along with anyone who ever came close. I didn't even waste any time on those guys. Instead, I jumped down to the tier of guys who weren't ever considered elite stars but still had solid careers. We're talking the Mathieu Schneider, Reed Larson, Steve Duchesne, Eric Desjardins brigade. Do any of those guys check out? They do not. In fact, they don't come all that close – each had multiple top-10 finishes in their career.

Dave Babych got votes one time in 19 seasons. Rob Ramage did it one year out of 15. Fredrik Olausson had one year out of 16, which is very concerning because this is supposed to be an all-star team and I just mentioned Fredrik Olausson.

We're in trouble.

I thought the first decade or so of the Norris would offer some sneaky picks, since back then voters only had two slots on their ballot. But nope, even though guys like Leo Boivin and Allan Stanley didn't get as much support as you might think, pretty much every recognizable star from that era got a vote at some point.

So our blue line won't be great. But I think we can find a way to ratchet it up to at least borderline good, even if we end up with six guys who weren't superstars. Let's start with Glen Wesley, who played 20 seasons and was once traded for three first-round picks, but never showed up on a single ballot for anything after his fourth-place Calder finish in 1988. We'll pair him with Carol Vadnais, a six-time all-star in the '60s and '70s who played 17 seasons without any Norris love.

For the second pair, I'll start with Garry Galley, who played 17 seasons and racked up 600 points, peaking with a 70-point season with the Flyers in 1994. I'll pair him with '70s star Ian Turnbull, who got all-star votes in three seasons but never a Norris mention. Hopefully, he can have one of his big games.

I've got a handful of options left for the last two spots. The best of the bunch is Viacheslav Fetisov, who's in the Hall of Fame. But he's there because of his international career and I'd only be getting his NHL days, so that feels like a bit of a cheat. I could go with Steve Smith or Bret Hedican. The two best defensemen available to me are probably a pair of stay-at-home veterans in Ken Daneyko and Luke Richardson, but they don't really fit the no-defense vibe I'm going for.

So instead, let's go with a pair of offensive defensemen who quarterbacked a few power plays in the high-scoring '80s and '90s but didn't get a lot of voter respect out of it. We'll go with Jeff Brown, who had seven seasons with 55-plus points, and Dave Ellett, a multi-time all-star who scored one of the most memorable goals in original Jets history (and also one of the most famous for the Kings, who he did not play for, but I don't want to talk about it).

That was rough. Let's see what the goaltenders have in store for us.

Goaltenders

Yikes.

The good news for the Vezina is that the ballot only has three spots, and it's in the hands of the GMs instead of the writers, so we're dealing with far fewer votes. But that's still enough that 10 to 15 goalies get a mention each year, which covers close to half the league.

I didn't even bother with any stars. The first name I checked was actually Andy Moog, who felt like a guy who was right at the border of good and great. The results weren't inspiring – Moog got votes in eight different seasons, including one where he was a finalist.

Kirk McLean got a bunch of votes. So did Sean Burke, Jon Casey and Tomas Vokoun. Bob Essensa was a finalist. So was Murray Bannerman. Tim Cheveldae almost was. The list of guys who got support in a single season includes Ken Wregget, Rick Wamsley, Brian Boucher, Greg Stefan, Mike Smith and Glenn Healey.

What's left?

Not much. It turns out that any goalie who's had so much as a single standout season has a vote somewhere on their resume. And since goaltending is voodoo, almost everyone has that standout season. This is a mess.

I briefly panicked when I was finding Vezina votes for Ron Tugnutt, Jeff Hackett and Manny Fernandez. But I did find a few names that were at least recognizable, if not inspiring. We could turn to Garth Snow. Or Stephane Fiset. Or Jocelyn Thibault.

In the end, I'm going to hand the starting job over to a guy who lasted 16 seasons in the NHL: Martin Biron, who showed up on Calder ballots in 2000 but was otherwise snubbed despite multiple 30-win seasons. And I'll back him up with an active goalie who's been very good for most of his career while also walking the line between starter and backup well enough to stay off Vezina ballots: Thomas Greiss, whose 11 seasons give us a Jennings winner. He's been great the last two years on Barry Trotz's defense-first Islanders; playing behind this team might be good prep for his upcoming time with the Red Wings.

Here's the final roster:

No Selke, Norris or Vezina votes

Luc Robitaille

Marcel Dionne

Pavel Bure

Taylor Hall,

Dale Hawerchuk

Glenn Anderson

Brian Bellows

Denis Savard

Joey Mullen

Wendel Clark

Steven Stamkos

Dino Ciccarelli

Glen Wesley

Carol Vadnais

Martin Biron

Garry Galley

Ian Turnbull

Thomas Greiss

Jeff Brown

Dave Ellett

That's a good team! Could they win anything in today's NHL? They might. They could certainly score. The blue line isn't awful. And the goaltending could hold us in there, and maybe even steal a game or two. I think we'd be OK. And more importantly, we'd be fun, which was the whole point.

The Athletic / Sports TV ratings are a lot healthier than the critics are likely to point out



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By Daniel Kaplan and Bill Shea

Oct 15, 2020

LeBron James' victory cigar was barely extinguished before one of the post-series subplots surrounding the 2020 NBA Finals began to take shape. After the Lakers vanquished the Heat on Sunday to win the 17th title in franchise history, plenty of attention shifted to how the six-game series performed in the television ratings.

With the finals airing at the same time as the MLB playoffs and NFL regular season for the first time in history, the series averaged just short of 7.5 million viewers on ABC, making it the lowest-rated finals since such record keeping began in 1988, according to Sports Business Daily.

That 49 percent TV ratings drop from last year's NBA finals was hardly unique. Similar trends have been present across the board in 2020, ranging from U.S. Open tennis (45 percent), U.S. Open golf (42 percent), Stanley Cup final (61 percent), Kentucky Derby (43 percent), college football (30 percent) and even a roughly 10 percent drop in the first five weeks of the NFL season.

From this data set, the landscape of sports TV ratings appears damning, with record-breaking rating declines and unheard of low viewerships.

Ratings have become easy fodder in the nation's raging culture wars. A Google search for "NBA ratings" returns multiple posts from conservative media and their proxies. They trumpet the declines as proof that social justice displays by NBA players and the league have turned off millions of fans. The president trolled the NBA about its ratings in a tweet earlier this week and U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban have bickered publicly about the ratings.

"I need a cleaner environment to make these kinds of sweeping generalizations one way or another," said media consultant Patrick Crakes, meaning 2020 is a year unlike any and has little utility in comparing to past seasons. "I think whatever the impact is from the political conversation is something that has to be researched through primary studies, primary research studies, strategic primary research studies, and sorted out, but I don't think its impact is showing up in the viewing."

The fact is that overall sports TV consumption is up year over year, according to Nielsen, and compared to all other TV programming – except news – sports is easily in a league of its own, including the NBA. U.S. Open golf, the Indy 500, the Stanley Cup, and Kentucky Derby all suffered major declines, and had little to no social justice platforms (the other sport mentioned above, U.S. Open tennis, embraced social justice themes.) There are just more sports on TV than usual, and so the audience fragments.

The Lakers' Game 6 clincher airing against Sunday Night Football is a prime example. The NBA game averaged 8.2 million viewers while the NFL matchup between the Seahawks and Vikings averaged 15 million on NBC.

"What is ridiculous is to pretend the NBA is alone in this and not suffering from the same conditions as other leagues," said Sports Media Watch founder Jon Lewis, who has monitored and analyzed TV sports ratings since 2006. "The NBA is suffering from the exact same conditions as other sports and leagues. If it was just the NBA, there might be more of an argument."

In drilling down into more specific audience demographics coveted by advertisers, the NBA was the most-viewed programming on 30 of its 41 playoff game nights among adults age 18 to 49, and on 34 of the 41 nights among males age 18 to 49.

There's also the reality that nearly every form of scripted entertainment on TV is withering, leaving sports and news as the most-watched programming categories ("Saturday Night Live" was the only top 40 show last week that was not of the two genres). The top cable news networks – CNN, MSNBC and Fox News – that offer round-the-clock coverage saw a 72 percent leap in viewership last week versus the same week in 2019,

the Associated Press reported. From 2011 to 2019 across the big four networks, according to Octagon, aggregate sports viewership declined 0.1 percent, compared to 22 percent for all other programming.

"What we've been talking about for a number of years is this idea that the whole business of television is separating along lines of live content and pre-produced content," said Mike Mulvihill, head of strategy at Fox Sports. "So we're now in a situation where traditional TV, which was already becoming more and more about premium sports and news coverage, has only come to be even more dominated by premium sports and news coverage (as the pandemic shut down TV show productions). And the on-demand world is increasingly taking control of entertainment programming. If you look at the kinds of content that are drawing the biggest audiences right now, of the 20 most-watched shows of the fall, 18 of them are NFL games.

"Another was the presidential debate, and another was the vice-presidential debate. When you look at the most-watched shows of any given week, it is always entirely dominated by live sports and news at the top of that ranking."

Still, these are steep declines—and what to make of baseball, which had a small increase in the regular season, with more uneven results thus far in the playoffs. MLB's shortened season made each game important and the widened playoffs certainly helped. And critics like Cruz might note that MLB did not cloak itself in social justice platforms as prominently as the NBA, although they did cancel a handful of games at the end of August in the wake of the Jacob Blake shooting in Kenosha, Wisc. But neither did the NHL – who also postponed two days worth of playoff games during that time – and the Stanley Cup was down more than the NBA Finals.

"I would agree that some viewers have tuned out for this reason, and that is a shame," Dan Cohen, who leads Octagon's global media consulting group, said via e-mail. "However, I would argue that there are a handful of consumer trend data points that are playing a far greater role in the recent NBA declines. Has the hashtag #GoWokeGoBroke theme gained mainstream media attention and incited changes in some media consumption? Yes. But it's not the No. 1 or No. 3 reason why NBA ratings are what they are this year. It's a lot sexier to write headlines about the impact of social justice advocacy on NBA ratings than it is to write about the erosion of the pay-TV ecosystem or the congested programming schedule of this year's NBA playoffs."

Those measurements are even tougher to gauge with so many other factors in play. Many sports were pushed into untraditional windows that threw off fans' circadian sports rhythm, and there is only so much viewers can consume with a glut of offerings. Notably, the two sports with the best results so far – the NFL and MLB – are playing in their traditional windows. Throw in the presidential election, the pandemic, and it's tough to compare this year to others.

That's backed up with new polling from Marist College published this week, which shows that 35 percent of fans say pandemic concerns and 20 percent say election coverage have decreased their live sports broadcast consumption. 46 percent of self-described sports fans in the poll report spending less time watching live sports broadcasts than in the past, Marist said in a statement.

"We don't see anything in the ratings for the NFL or for baseball, to indicate any kind of political backlash, you know, we can look at those ratings, broken out by a long list of characteristics, you know, geographic region, the size of the market, your household income, the level of education of the head of your household, and there's nothing in the composition of the NFL audience that suggests any kind of political backlash," Mulvihill said. "The audience is smaller than it was a year ago. But that's not being driven by any one type of person. So there's no characteristic that you would point to and say, 'Okay, this characteristic is watching a lot less football and maybe that's tied to a political response.'"

Veteran TV analyst and consultant Lee Berke, president and CEO of Scarsdale, N.Y.-based LHB Sports, Entertainment & Media Inc., agrees.

"I'm not seeing a correlation between ratings performance and commitment to social justice. Fans want to see this as a part of their



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experience. You want to attract the next generation of fans. You have to demonstrate those values to attract and keep a new fan base. Some fans were turned off, but far more were attracted.

"The people that are handwringing about it or imparting some lesson here, there are certainly things that have thrived. WNBA ratings have gone up," Berke said.

The NBA and live sports are filling TV schedules starved for other content – the pandemic halted a lot of Hollywood's productions – and putting up mostly decent numbers in that context. The networks would be far worse off without live sports — something expected to help the ratings-strapped NHL cash in as it negotiates its next TV rights deal.

Cuban, who declined to speak with The Athletic, told Sports Business Radio last week that he doesn't even understand the fascination with TV ratings.

"The reason ratings exist is for advertisers to make decisions on where to advertise. If you're an NBA fan or not an NBA fan, I don't know why you would care about it. Are you enjoying the games? Or are you not? You know, and if we want to have a discussion about the presentation, that's great. If you want to have a discussion about, you know, different features of a broadcast, that's great, too. But to me, I mean, it's just more partisanship... when people decide to talk about the NBA ratings for better or worse, or NHL or NFL. NFL...they're trying to make up typically a political point. And, you know, to me...it's fun for me sometimes to argue on Twitter because you get people who try to troll you and don't really know what they're talking about. So it can be fun as a competitive side of me, but it's really a useless event. If you think about it, it serves absolutely no purpose."

Mulvihill, whose life is ratings, agrees with Cuban in that the discussion about ratings during the pandemic misses the bigger picture of sports leading the re-emergence of society. Movies and artistic theaters remain closed, as do other wide swaths of American society. But sports like the NBA found a way.

"The larger picture, what the NFL and every professional sports league isn't getting enough credit for is that these events are happening at all," he said. "Like if you look across every sector of culture and entertainment, the only business that has really found a way to go forward through some combination of ingenuity and determination and investment of capital is really sports."

"I mean, entertainment production is essentially shut down, Broadway shut down, and said they're going to be shut down through the middle of next year, there are no new movies coming out, there are no concerts to go to. And so I think we're a little bit over-focused on ratings being down six percent, eight percent, whatever it is week to week, and not focused enough just on the fact that sports have really made an enormous effort to lead the American comeback."

Sportsnet.ca / NHL Off-Season Power Rankings: Hate It or Love It Edition

Luke Fox@lukefoxjokebox

October 15, 2020, 2:30 PM

Monster signings, juicy trades and two weeks have passed since Steven Stamkos hoisted sport's most storied chalice, officially triggering hockey's first off-season in autumn.

With a loaded draft class, a couple intriguing free-agency decisions, coaches fired and hired, and RFA negotiations as tricky as ever, the league has undergone some drastic roster shuffling under a flattened salary cap.

We step back to evaluate the NHL landscape and rank the moves its 31 general managers have made so far this summer/ fall in our annual NHL Off-Season Power Rankings: Hate It or Love It Edition.

Word to 50 Cent and The Game.

While there's still plenty of time to tinker and trade, and a Manila envelope is stuffed with unsettled arbitration cases, some clubs have improved for the better and others have taken a step back — on paper, of course.

All teams have been ranked from one through 31, according to off-season performance only. This is not an order of strength heading into 2020-21 -- we'll get around to that at training camp -- but strictly an assessment of recent front office moves.

1. Colorado Avalanche

Love it: Joe Sakic becomes the latest GM to win a Brandon Saad trade. Swiping top-four defenceman Devon Toews from the cap-crunched Isles for picks. Rewarding Ryan Graves, Andre Burakovsky and Valeri Nichushkin for their career years without going overboard on term.

Hate it: Not convinced Philipp Grubauer and Pavel Francouz is a Cup-winning duo in net.

2. Buffalo Sabres

Love it: Eric Staal trade is a clear win in our books. Taylor Hall should boost Jack Eichel's mood. Cody Eakin one of the better under-the-radar UFA signings. A league-minimum flyer on Tobias Rieder. Coach Ralph Krueger becoming a selling point in Buffalo. Brandon Montour (one year, \$3.85 million) needing to prove it.

Hate it: Goaltending has not been upgraded. Key RFAs Sam Reinhart, Victor Olofsson and Linus Ullmark still unsigned.

3. Calgary Flames

Love it: Securing the best available goalie on the market, Jacob Markstrom, and giving the franchise its first long-term bona fide No. 1 since Miika Kiprusoff. Chris Tanev's injection of heart, soul and defence. Brad Treliving's double trade-down on the draft "floor." Louis Domingue (\$700,000) as an inexpensive third-string netminder.

Hate it: So many names floated in trade rumours without actually moving. Wondering if there is enough offence here to get the job done.

4. Washington Capitals

Love it: Hendrix Lapierre at 22nd overall could be steal of the draft. Nonsense veteran coach Peter Laviolette stepping to the plate. Giving Henrik Lundqvist the perfect landing spot at the perfect cap hit (\$1.5 million). Re-upping Brenden Dillon for less than \$4 million per season. Right-shot defenceman Trevor van Riemsdyk sliding in for \$800,000.

Hate it: Sad goodbyes for Braden Holtby. Rumours that Capitals didn't take bubble playoffs seriously enough. Alex Ovechkin still unsigned for 2021-22. Seeing youngsters like Chandler Stephenson and Andre Burakovsky hit their stride in other markets.

5. New Jersey Devils

Love it: Removing GM Tom Fitzgerald's interim tag. Not trading Kyle Palmieri yet, because he could be one valuable deadline piece. Taking advantage of the Maple Leafs and buying low on 20-goal guy Andreas Johnsson. Ryan Murray for (checks notes) a fifth-rounder?! Upgrading the Cor(e)y mentor goalie role from Schneider to Crawford.

Hate it: Jersey hasn't given us an offer sheet yet, despite Mike Futa's leak that it was something ownership was definitely interested in.

6. Toronto Maple Leafs

Love it: Great value in Kasperii Kapanen trade by striking early. T.J. Brodie could be the best partner Morgan Rielly has ever had. Zach Bogosian, Wayne Simmonds, Jason Spezza, Jimmy Vesey, Travis Boyd, Alexander Barabanov, Mikko Lehtonen and Aaron Dell each at \$1.5 million or less brings an influx of low-risk depth.



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Hate it: Andreas Johnsson traded at low value. Travis Dermott feeling a roster squeeze before he reaches full potential.

7. Vegas Golden Knights

Love it: The nerve of owner Bill Foley to shoot for the stars — and hit. Alex Pietrangelo and Shea Theodore could be Canada's top pairing at the 2022 Olympics. Robin Lehner finally landing a deal with term.

Hate it: Sold Nate Schmidt at pennies on the dollar. Failed to trade Marc-Andre Fleury despite dangling picks and salary retention, which results in a very good but very expensive tandem (\$12 million). May miss Paul Stastny more than they think. Too many core players chucked into rumour mill.

8. New York Rangers

Love it: Not wasting any time signing lottery windfall Alexis Lafreniere to his entry-level deal. Braden Schneider at 19th overall isn't too shabby either. Taking a one-year flyer on Jack Johnson for \$1.15 million.

Hate it: Seeing Henrik Lundqvist play his final game as a Ranger in a building without fans. Carrying \$13 million cap space in dead buyout money. Getting jacked by Steve Yzerman, who stole a second-round pick by taking Marc Staal's contract. The potential of arbitration cases Anthony DeAngelo, Ryan Strome and Alexandar Georgiev vaulting the club into cap hell.

9. Columbus Blue Jackets

Love it: Turn RFA Josh Anderson into a more offensive talent (Max Domi) without needing to over-commit on term. Stockpiling goaltending depth at team-friendly salaries. Mikko Koivu at \$1.5 million.

Hate it: Alexander Wennberg not living up to his potential. Ryan Murray traded away for next to nothing. No. 1 centre Pierre-Luc Dubois thus far unemployed for 2020-21.

10. Florida Panthers

Love it: Bill Zito wasting precisely zero time putting his stamp on the roster. Finding a Mike Matheson buyer and bringing in a heart-and-soul guy like Patric Hornqvist. Bargain buys Vinnie Hinostroza, Alexander Wennberg and Carter Verhaeghe.

Hate it: Putting MacKenzie Weegar on the block. Watching offensive weapons (Mike Hoffman, Evgenii Dadonov) walk for free when they likely could've been dealt at the deadline for decent returns.

11. Winnipeg Jets

Love it: Paul Stastny trade fills Bryan Little void and may keep Patrik Laine happy for another year. Dylan DeMelo eschewing free agency to re-up in Winnipeg at fair value. Nathan Beaulieu, Derek Fobort and Luca Sbisa depth signings guard against blue line injuries.

Hate it: Sounds like Laine — like Jacob Trouba before him — is not long for the Jets, and Kevin Cheveldayoff is under pressure to win a trade that may be impossible to win. Was Laurent Brossoit the best backup goaltending option the Jets could land?

12. Ottawa Senators

Love it: Making all of the draft picks. Killer prospect pool. Evgenii Dadonov's 25-goal, 70-point potential for three prime UFA years at \$15 million. Cap space for days. Josh Brown's AAV.

Hate it: Erik Gudbranson's cap hit. A ton of money and term given to Matt Murray in a crowded goalie market. Whatever went sideways with Anthony Duclair. Unfinished business with Connor Brown and Chris Tierney. Worrying if Brady Tkachuk wants to hang around long-term.

13. Edmonton Oilers

Love it: Tyson Barrie was the best reasonably priced power-play quarterback available to slide in for the injured Oscar Klefbom. More Tyler Ennis. With lowered 3C expectations, Kyle Turris has a chance to revive a sagging career. Jesse Puljujarvi lives!

Hate it: In a buyers' market for goalies, the Oilers are running it back with Mikko Koskinen, 32, and Mike Smith, 38. Andreas Athanasiou going unqualified cements the trade as a loss. Will Oilers regret giving up depth defender Matt Benning?

14. Detroit Red Wings

Love it: Holding six picks in the first three rounds of the 2021 draft. Recruiting an influx of NHL-calibre players — Troy Stecher, Thomas Griess, Sam Gagner, Bobby Ryan, Vladislav Namestnikov, Marc Staal — without committing term. Weaponizing cap space for the Staal deal. Still holding \$18.7 million below the ceiling.

Hate it: Tyler Bertuzzi and Anthony Mantha still unsigned. Buyout of Justin Abdelkader will be on the books until 2026. We're still waiting on a thunderbolt move from Steve Yzerman — Mikhail Sergachev offer sheet? Patience is the prudent course, but it's not fun for headlines.

15. Montreal Canadiens

Love it: Kaiden Guhle at 16th overall. Tyler Toffoli at a \$4.25-million cap hit. Jeff Petry re-upping early. Karl Alzner buyout freeing up space. Jake Allen already agreeing to a paycut in 2021-22. Locking up Brendan Gallagher just when everyone thought things were about to get ugly.

Hate it: In comparison to the rest of the market, Josh Anderson and Joel Edmundson may end up being overpays. Dangling a Phillip Danault trade.

16. Dallas Stars

Love it: Veteran Anton Khudobin getting financially rewarded for a tour de force post-season. Rick Bowness deciding his own future. Disgruntled RFA Julius Honka interested in coming back to North America, a la Jesse Puljujarvi. Reasonable Andrej Sekera extension (two years at \$1.5 million).

Hate it: Looking at the age of the top six and wondering if they came two wins short of their best shot at lifting a Stanley Cup. Quiet depth drain up front, as Corey Perry and Mattias Janmark leave.

17. Los Angeles Kings

Love it: Quinton Byfield becoming the highest-drafted Black NHL player in history, getting shoutouts from Magic Johnson and Snoop Dogg. Acquiring Olli Maata on the cheap to eat back-end minutes. Not rushing the rebuild.

Hate it: Kings have \$13.6 million in cap space, and we wonder if they cannot weaponize it better to take advantage of the desperate cap-strapped opponents. Realizing the final years of Drew Doughty and Anze Kopitar's prime might be going waste.

This is awesome. @SnoopDogg officially welcomes @byfield55 to LA.

(@LAKings)pic.twitter.com/q1DjPn8KB

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) October 9, 2020

18. St. Louis Blues

Love it: Kyle Clifford (two years at \$1 million) plays Blues hockey. Torey Krug is not as good as Alex Pietrangelo, but he's younger, he helps with lefty-righty balance, he is a power-play maestro — and he comes \$2.3 million cheaper every year.

Hate it: Vladimir Tarasenko is still hurt, and no scoring help is on the way. Jake Allen carried a high cap hit for a backup, but can Ville Husso deliver as many wins? Alexander Steen (IR) may have already played his final NHL game.

19. Philadelphia Flyers

Love it: Erik Gustafsson for one year. Brian Elliott coming back to support Carter Hart.

Hate it: Have yet to see a move that makes the roster decidedly better than last year's. Matt Niskanen's early retirement. Philippe Myers offer signed yet.



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20. Boston Bruins

Love it: Craig Smith for three years at \$3.1 million should be swell value. Bruins still rumoured to be in the mix for UFA scoring help.

Hate it: So many surgeries necessary for key players. Blue line taking a hit with Torey Krug and Zdeno Chara off the roster. The uncertainty surrounding Jake DeBrusk.

21. Anaheim Ducks

Love it: Getting something in return (a fifth-rounder) for Erik Gudbranson's cumbersome contract. Kevin Shattenkirk getting rewarded with term after a stellar prove-it showing in Tampa. Defence prospect Jamie Drysdale at sixth-overall in the draft.

Hate it: John Gibson still doesn't have an NHL backup. Road back to relevance still feels like a long one.

22. Vancouver Canucks

Love it: Nate Schmidt for a song. Quickly reacting to Jacob Markstrom loss and securing Braden Holtby short-term and sans expansion protection as a fantastic mentor/partner for Thatcher Demko.

Hate it: With Markstrom, Chris Tanev, Tyler Toffoli and Troy Stecher all departing, it's difficult to argue that the once-rising Canucks have not gotten worse over the past week. Jake Virtanen could make 'em pay too much in arbitration. Loui Eriksson and Sven Baertchi are still on the books. Bottom six weighing down the cap picture.

23. Pittsburgh Penguins

Love it: Jack Johnson buyout means admitting to past mistakes. League-minimum deals for Mark Jankowski and Evan Rodrigues may pan out.

Hate it: Matt Murray trade return doesn't feel like enough for No. 1, Cup-champion goalie. A first-rounder for Kasperii Kapanen looks steep in retrospect. How will trading Patric Hornqvist for Mike Matheson sit in the room?

24. Minnesota Wild

Love it: Kirill Kaprizov finally ready to set North America on fire. Power forward Jordan Greenway extended. Commitment to Jonas Brodin gives defensive defencemen everywhere hope. Already holding Pittsburgh's first- and third-round picks in 2021 draft. Nick Bonino is a fine stopgap up the middle.

Hate it: Eric Staal for Marcus Johansson. Matt Dumba is still totally getting traded, right? Giving Cam Talbot \$11 million in a flooded goalie market.

25. Tampa Bay Lightning

Love it: Stanley Cup banner coming soon. Role players Pat Maroon and Luke Schenn rewarded for delivering on one-year rental deals.

Hate it: Tyler Johnson on waivers. Steven Stamkos trade-bait rumour. Mikhael Sergachev, Anthony Cirelli and Eric Cernak still unsettled. Losing Carter Verhaeghe for nothing.

26. Nashville Predators

Love it: Value signing depth pieces Matt Benning, Brad Richardson and Nick Cousins. Cutting losses with Kyle Turris, an ill fit.

Hate it: Losing Mikael Granlund and Crag Smith for nothing. Still wondering which forwards are going to drive enough offence here.

27. New York Islanders

Love it: By letting good soldiers and solid playoff performers Andy Greene and Matt Martin test free agency, they may be lured back at a lower cost.

Hate it: Mathew Barzal and Ryan Pulock are unsigned. Patiently developing Devon Toews into a sure-fire top-four defender, then trading him for a couple second-round picks. No offence injection... yet. Aging

vets Johnny Boychuk (\$6 million) and Andrew Ladd (\$5.5 million) still taxing the cap picture.

28. San Jose Sharks

Love it: Doug Wilson's loyalty to Kevin Labanc is commendable in a cutthroat business. Reports that Erik Karlsson is back to 100 per cent health. If/when Patrick Marleau breaks Gordie Howe's record, he'll do it in teal. Matt Nieto for the league minimum.

Hate it: Doug Wilson's loyalty to Kevin Labanc might actually set the Sharks back. Placing your return-to-playoffs faith in a Martin Jones-Devan Dubnyk tandem like it's 2017.

29. Chicago Blackhawks

Love it: Only bridging Calder finalist Dominik Kubalik after he posted a 19.1 shooting percentage as a 30-goal rookie. Mattias Janmark should be worth every penny of his \$2.25 million.

Hate it: Brandon Saad for Nikita Zadorov. Disgruntled Jonathan Toews. Betting on the inexperienced goaltending duo of Collin Delia and Malcolm Subban to carry the day.

30. Carolina Hurricanes

Love it: At least they got an asset for Joel Edmundson's negotiating rights.

Hate it: Justin Williams leaves the NHL poorer in his absence. Exciting team on the rise has cap space and has yet to take a discernable step forward this off-season. Quiet UFA leaking of depth from blue line (Sami Vatanen, Trevor van Riemsdyk, Edmundson). Futures of stars Dougie Hamilton and Andrei Svechnikov up in the air. Kicking tires in the goalie market (Markstrom, Frederik Andersen) but not coming away with an upgrade.

31. Arizona Coyotes

Love it: Darcy Kuemper not traded. Adin Hill extension. Gila River Arena to serve as voting centre.

Hate it: The Oliver Ekman-Larsson saga. Michael Grabner buyout. Giving up so much for Taylor Hall, then losing him for nothing. Not finding a way to land a first-round draft pick — sinful for a franchise on the rebuild.

TSN.CA / Pondering the potential of an all-Canadian division in the NHL

Travis Yost

4-5 minutes

There has been some talk about the National Hockey League going with an all-Canadian division for next season, in large part due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the border remaining closed between Canada and the United States.

We got our strongest indication yet that the idea is well under consideration on Wednesday afternoon, thanks to a passing comment from Las Vegas Golden Knights owner Bill Foley.

Foley — addressing a question about the risk of trading defenceman Nate Schmidt to a division rival in Vancouver — suggested to Sportsbook Radio and Vegas Hockey Hotline host Brian Blessing that the risk would be minimized for at least next season because of the all-Canadian division.

The NHL has not publicly laid out plans for next season, still working to engineer a regular season that won't force players into bubbles for months on end. But certain variables, like the closure of international borders, will force the league to make significant changes.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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An all-Canadian division would not be hard to assemble – the league already operates one seven-team division (Central), leaving 24 American teams to be split into three other divisions. And much like the NHL's experimentation with the play-in series for the 2019-20 postseason, an all-Canadian division could end up being a refreshing wrinkle to an oft-stale regular season.

Absent unsigned restricted free agents and a few notable unrestricted free agents, most rosters are now set. So, how competitive could an all-Canadian division be?

First, an overview of how these teams finished last season before the stoppage:

Their season ended as unceremoniously as possible – a play-in series loss to the lowly Chicago Blackhawks – but the Edmonton Oilers were the most successful of the seven Canadian teams in the regular season last year.

The bigger takeaway is that most of the Canadian teams were of similar performance – five teams were tracking to finish within three points of one another, which is remarkable. Even an underachieving Montreal Canadiens team pulled off a surprising postseason upset of the Pittsburgh Penguins, leaving the rebuilding Ottawa Senators as the lone minnow in the hypothetical division.

It's also interesting that the Canadian teams, despite being tightly clustered against one another in the standings, had disparate results against one another.

If we subset the regular season table down to just the matchups where Canadian teams played one another, we see much noisier performance. That's to be expected when you are only looking at 25 per cent of the full regular-season data, but I was particularly intrigued by how poorly Vancouver looked in their matchups, and how great Winnipeg and Montreal did in theirs:

It's probably fair to say that Ottawa hasn't done anything this off-season that would suggest they'll improve on a last-place finish next year, but beyond their rebuilding efforts, this already-competitive group of teams has entered a subtle arms race – an expected consequence of six of these teams having qualified for last year's postseason.

I'm particularly intrigued by Montreal, an already capable team at even strength that added two highly skilled forwards in Josh Anderson and Tyler Toffoli. Montreal still has some serious special-teams questions to answer next season, but do not discount how much success they had against their Canadian peers.

One other interesting wrinkle on this possible division – there are a number of big-name players moving from one Canadian team to another this off-season. T.J. Brodie (from Calgary to Toronto), Tyson Barrie (from Toronto to Edmonton), Chris Tanev (from Vancouver to Calgary), Jacob Markstrom (from Vancouver to Calgary), and Toffoli (from Vancouver to Montreal) could be seeing plenty of their former teams.

These teams are already hypercompetitive with one another in a normal season. In an all-Canadian division with a healthy serving of intra-division roster turnover? Let's just say the league may be striking gold with such a restructuring, making the most out of a very difficult economical and logistical situation.

Data via Natural Stat Trick, Evolving Hockey, NHL.com, Hockey Reference

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