

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

THE ATHLETIC

'I don't think he realizes his impact': Canes broadcaster Mike Maniscalco is even better when no one is looking

By Sara Civian

It must've been around 4 a.m. in Tampa Bay. We'd just flown in from Winnipeg after the Hurricanes' first regulation loss of 2018-19. Everyone was thinking about some combination of that loss, the bizarre road trip schedule and how soon we could pass out on our comically large hotel beds.

Everyone except Mike Maniscalco.

He must've sensed the new girl's anxiety, so he sat down next to her outside the team hotel as she waited for the Uber to hers. It took at least 20 minutes, so she kept telling him he didn't have to do this.

When the Uber finally arrived, he brushed it off.

"You're family now."

If you've ever met Maniscalco, I guarantee you have a similar story.

His knack for reading a room and putting people at ease has made him a staple of the best broadcasting team in the NHL. It's also why the news that he'd fallen ill on last week's West Coast road trip and is dealing with a serious medical issue has affected so many people.

"You know what, he was one of the only people that could understand me when I first got here," Sebastian Aho told The Athletic on Monday. "The language barrier was hard. He'd always make sure I could answer the questions, and he'd go easy on me at first."

Being patient is harder than it seems for a TV host dealing with a rising star because fans obviously want to hear from him. Maniscalco worked with Aho to figure out what words were safe — he'd even consult Teuvo Teravainen to make the whole process less embarrassing for Aho.

You can thank him for how far Aho has come on camera in so little time.

When Paul Hemming, director of Hurricanes on Fox Sports Carolinas, thinks of Maniscalco, he thinks of the concourse walk.

"Rig is like Canes Royalty when he walks through the concourse," Hemming said. "Every single fan calls out his name, wants a picture, wants to chat about the state of the team. I was lucky enough to join him once

during the preseason ... and I swear the walk alone is a TV show."

In-game host Abby Labar was concise about her mentor: "You never have to ask him. He asks you."

"What stands out (about Maniscalco) is how much the players respect him," said Tripp Tracy, Hurricanes color commentator. "We were on the bus before a game against the Rangers last season, the Canes were on a nice little run but they hadn't won at Madison Square Garden since (Oct. 29, 2010). You know these buses are usually silent, but everyone was having a laugh about something. I honestly almost turned around and told the guys to shut up, I was going back and forth with them. Thank God they won that game. But I remember Mike was just sitting there with his big, gentle giant stature and Jordan Martinook says, 'Hey, what do you think about that, Big Rig?' Martinook is probably the president of the Mike Maniscalco fan club. I could tell you stories about how selfless he is when no one is looking, but what stands out is how much the players respect him."

At the conclusion of another bizarre road trip and a two-game skid, the collective focus wasn't on losses or sleep this time — it was a plane full of people concerned about the guy who is always so concerned about them.

Among them was Dougie Hamilton, who had hoped to score for him against San Jose then he actually did, reminding us all how special this sport can be.

Maniscalco is a true link between the fans and the team because he knows when to sit back and let them enjoy each other where others might get in the way by sticking to the script.

"His fun-loving personality and the relationships he builds with fans is something I admire as I work to grow in this industry," Labar said. "Those characteristics he displays as a genuine and kind person are so contagious, and I don't think he realizes his impact on young reporters. He's such an incredible role model on and off camera."

He doesn't realize it because he's not looking for recognition. He just wants to help.

You might get into the hockey industry for the love of the game, but you stay for the love of people. It's hard

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

to find a better embodiment of that than Mike Maniscalco.

One of the best lines from “Good Will Hunting” reminds us that “You’ll have bad times, but it’ll always wake you up to the good stuff you weren’t paying attention to.”

DGB weekend power rankings: Every slow starter wants to be this year’s Blues. What if you’re already worse?

By Sean McIndoe

When can we look at the standings and say, with some reasonable degree of confidence, that a given team is going to be good or bad? Or more specifically, that their 2019-20 season is going to be good or bad, regardless of what their true talent might look like?

When it comes to the good side of the spectrum, we run into some obvious problems. Injuries, for one. Take any team in the modern salary cap era, then have an injury take their starting goaltender away. They’ll get worse very quickly, and probably a lot worse. The same is often true for their best skater. With maybe a handful of exceptions, even the very best teams are a torn ACL away from seeing it all crumble.

And of course, we know that even the most uninspiring teams can get hot for a few weeks – remember last year’s Sabres, or the 2016-17 Flyers, both of whom won ten straight during the season. Were they good? For a few weeks, sure, but not beyond that. When it comes to definitively slapping an “elite” label on a team, we can all agree that we need to see more than a few weeks. Sorry, Oilers, Sabres and Ducks.

But what about the bad teams? If a team looks terrible right out of the gate, how long before we can write them off? October? November?

It’s tempting to say that the answer is “never,” or at least, “not until the second half,” and we all know why. Last year’s Blues won the Stanley Cup despite an awful start. In fact, as you’ve no doubt read roughly a hundred times by now, they were dead last in the entire league last January. If they can come all the way back from that, anyone can, right?

Well, maybe. But here’s the dirty little secret of last year’s Blues that rarely gets talked about. (Lowers voice and looks around nervously for the narrative police.) They weren’t that bad.

I mean, they were bad. I had them pegged as one of the league’s five worst teams in this very column, more than once. But after they turned things around, emerged as contenders and eventually won the Cup, just the tiniest bit of revisionist history has kicked in over just how bad the Blues’ first half really was. For example, that stat about them being dead last? It’s

As Maniscalco takes medical leave to undergo required procedures and recover, we should all follow his lead and try to make life a little easier for each other. That’s who he is — especially when the cameras are off.

true – they were indeed dead last on the morning of January 3. But only in total points, with 34, and largely because they’d played just 37 games. That same day, the Kings had 35 points in 41 games. So did the Senators. The Hawks had 36 points in 42, the Flyers had 35 in 39, the Coyotes had 36 in 40 and the Wings had 37 in 42. In terms of points percentage, the Blues were ahead of all of them. Even at their lowest point, the Blues were arguably better than six other teams, based purely on their record.

Let’s look at it another way. Because this stupid league has a stupid rule that gives out a stupid loser point for overtime and shootout losses, we can’t just rely on wins and losses anymore. So let’s look at points percentage. Guess how many games below .500 last year’s Blues got at their very worst. The answer: four. They were 8-12-3 in late November and 9-13-4 in early December. That was it. As much as you’ve heard about the terrible first-half, the Blues were never more than a four-game win streak from getting back to .500. That’s still a decent gap, and .500 doesn’t even get you into the playoffs, but at least you can tell yourself that you’re just one good week away from being back on even ground.

Meanwhile, the Dallas Stars and Minnesota Wild have both been five games or more under .500 already, not even three weeks into the season. So if you’re pointing at the Blues and saying “you never know” because you’re a fan and/or the coach of one of those teams, well, know that you’ve already dug yourself into a hole that’s deeper than the Blues’ lowest point last year. Just three weeks in. (And the Senators could join them tonight.)

Does that mean we can write those teams off? No. We’ve seen teams get off to truly terrible starts and still have time to recover. But it’s rare – in terms of a truly awful first few weeks that were followed by a strong recovery, it’s basically the 2015-16 Ducks and then you have to go back to the pre-Cup era. The Stars and Wild and Senators aren’t done yet, or even any time soon. But they’re closer than you might think.

Well, that was depressing. Let’s brighten the mood by talking about the good teams.

Road to the Cup

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

The five teams that look like they're headed towards a summer of keg stands and fountain pool parties.

Worth reading if you missed it over the weekend: The story of Erik and Melinda Karlsson welcoming their newborn daughter into the world.

5. Carolina Hurricanes (6-3-0, +4 true goals differential*) – They've come back to earth a bit, losing three of four and putting up some uninspiring performances during their west coast trip. They've got nearly a week off to get right; we won't seem them again until Thursday.

In the meantime, check out this interesting interview with Hurricanes' VP of Strategy Eric Tulsy.

4. Vegas Golden Knights (6-3-0, +10) – They've won four of five, including an impressive road shutout over the red-hot Penguins on Saturday. Now about all that cheating ...

Also, this was cool:

3. Boston Bruins (5-1-2, +5) – They dropped an overtime decision to the Leafs on Saturday in what was the first of a home-and-home ... kind of. The Bruins get a few days off before hosting the Leafs tomorrow, while Toronto makes a stopover in Columbus for a game tonight. That's not really how this is supposed to work, but Boston will take it. After the Leafs, it's a few more days off before the Blues arrive for a Stanley Cup rematch on Saturday.

2. Colorado Avalanche (7-0-1, +14) – Random observation: This year's early schedule really seems to enjoy giving teams games against the reigning President Trophy-winning Lightning and reigning Stanley Cup champion Blues in the same week, even though they're in different conferences. We've seen it with Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal so far, and now it's the Avalanche's turn. They started well, smacking Tampa on Saturday, and they get the Blues tonight. If they flex again in that one, it's going to be tough to keep them out of the top spot. I'm guessing their fans think they should be there already.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (4-3-1, +1) – I'm sticking with them, but just barely. Again, to repeat the point we keep hammering away at every Monday, these rankings are meant as a long-term view, not just a snapshot of who's playing well right this second. That's why a team like the Avs can beat Tampa, but not take over their spot. Put simply, I still think the Lightning are the league's most likely 2020 Cup winner.

I'm not alone on that – Dom is with me, as well as several oddsmakers. But others have already bailed. Maybe you have too.

Either way, there can't be much argument about how the Lightning have played this year. They've been

fine, with good games and bad games. They haven't been one of the five most impressive teams in the league based purely on their eight games so far. They're getting outshot, their penalty killing is bad and the goaltending has been shaky. They're also shooting the lights out, which means they have a PDO of 102.7, which isn't really what you want to see from a team that feels like it's underachieving. Put aside the narratives about whether they have to be different to win April; on a lot of nights, they haven't been playing well enough to win now.

But still ... they're the Lightning, right? They're stacked with offensive talent, so we should expect them to be shooting well, and I'm willing to bet that last year's Vezina winner gets back on track soon. As mediocre as their start has been, they already have a tight win over the Bruins and a blowout over the Maple Leafs. We should still be putting more stock in what we've seen from this team over the last few years than what's happened over a few weeks. But that won't last forever.

They've got a light week coming up, but one that features two stiff tests in the Penguins and Predators, before hitting a stretch of the schedule that looks easier than their start. Maybe that's when the turnaround starts and they justify this ranking. It would be nice because right now other teams aren't just knocking at the door, they're thinking about kicking it down.

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: St. Louis Blues – After two weeks, the Blues drop out of the top five for the first time this season.

If you're a Blues fan, you could make a reasonable objection to that: If we just finished saying that the Lightning get the benefit of the doubt when they've looked just OK, why shouldn't the Cup champs get the same courtesy? Both teams have nine points through eight games, so what's the deal?

It's a fair point. My answer would be twofold. First, I think the Lightning are a better team than the Blues, despite last year's playoff results. And second, while Tampa has looked mediocre, the Blues have been downright bad at times. They've lost four straight. Their underlying numbers suggest that their record might actually be flattering them. Their coach is saying ominous things about a lack of buy-in.

Obviously, these are the Blues and nobody is going to panic about a bad start after what happened last year. And it's not like they're plummeting down the rankings – if this were a top ten, they'd have a spot for sure. But right now, a handful of teams have a better claim to top-five status. That might change as early as

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

tonight when the Blues host the Avalanche in what feels like a statement game for both teams.

Meanwhile, surprise teams like the Sabres, Oilers and Ducks keep building their case. They're not there yet, but they've at least reached the point where we don't chalk their record up to a fluky couple of games. Here's an in-depth look at whether the Oilers are for real.

The bottom five

The five teams that are headed towards the best lottery odds and lots of Alexis Lafreniere junior highlight reels.

Some good news for a good guy: We'll get to see Brian Boyle back in the NHL, as he signed a one-year deal with the Panthers yesterday. Florida isn't in our bottom five, but one of Boyle's former teams is ...

5. New Jersey Devils (2-4-2, -10) – A two-game win streak arrived just in time for a team that seemed like they were headed for disaster (and maybe a coaching change). They get a break now, without a game until Friday and while that's probably not ideal in terms of maintaining momentum, it means that a young team will go at least 11 days without having to deal with the sting of a loss.

Saturday's showdown between the Hughes brothers was a fun storyline, even if the game didn't especially deliver. We did get to see Jack Hughes finally get his first goal and Quinn can at least send him this clip every day until their next meeting in three weeks.

4. Detroit Red Wings (3-5-0, -9) – After a promising start, they've lost four straight in regulation, being outscored 17 to 5 in the process. They're home for four of the next five, starting tomorrow against the Canucks.

3. Los Angeles Kings (3-5-0, -8) – The Kings are bad, which everyone expected. Here's a mild surprise, though: They're fun. After years of embracing their Sutter-inspired reputation as a shutdown defensive squad that was happy to beat you 1-0, the Kings are playing high-event hockey at both ends of the ice. We'll see how long it lasts, but it's a nice development for their fans. Winning Cups with stifling defense is great, but if you're going to be bad, at least be worth watching.

Also fun: the Doughty vs. Tkachuk rivalry, especially when it inspires Mark Giordano to fly through the air like he's jumping from the top rope.

2. Minnesota Wild (2-6-0, -14) – They picked up their first win this week, which is progress. But the biggest story was the comments from veteran Jason Zucker, who called out his coach by name after a 4-0 loss in Montreal on Thursday.

"It's going to be each individual guy ... from Bruce on down. Bruce has got to be better," Zucker said, shortly after captain Mikko Koivu had chewed out the team during a postgame meeting.

To be clear, Zucker wasn't just going after Bruce Boudreau; his comments were aimed at everyone, as he made clear by adding "We've got to be better. Everybody's got to be better. That's it." Still, it's rare for a player to publicly point the finger at a coach, let alone by name. Boudreau is already on the hot seat, with an underachieving veteran roster and a brand new GM who didn't hire him. Comments from a respected veteran certainly won't help.

To his credit, Zucker clarified and largely walked back the comments over the weekend and also reportedly apologized personally to Boudreau. That won't kill the story, but it will help keep it from turning into even more of a mess for a team that doesn't need it. A few more wins like yesterday's comeback over the Habs would go a long way to putting all of this in the rearview mirror; the Wild host the Oilers tomorrow.

1. Ottawa Senators (1-5-1, -10) – They're seven games into the season and already on their second three-game losing streak, which seems bad. Three weeks in, their only win on the year has come against (checks notes) the top-ranked Lightning, because the hockey gods hate me and want everyone to laugh at my rankings.

Not ranked: Dallas Stars – Our bottom five features the same five teams as last week, which means I couldn't find room for the Stars. Saturday's win over the Flyers helped in that regard. But make no mistake about it, the Stars are a mess. They can't score, the goaltending has been iffy, they're getting badly outshot and the powerplay is shooting blanks. Plus, like we said up above, they've already dug a big enough hole that they can't even play the "but the Blues" card. There isn't much good news here.

Why aren't they in the bottom five? Maybe I'm an optimist, but I don't think they're this bad. I don't think Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin are going to have the 50-point seasons they're on pace for, and I'm positive that Joe Pavelski and John Klingberg will eventually get going. I'm not as sure about Ben Bishop – you Puck Soup listeners will know where that's coming from – but overall I think this is closer to being a decent team that's underachieving than one that's actually bad.

That's enough to keep them out of the bottom five. But for Stars fans who were sold on this team being a potential Cup contender, that's not much consolation. There's a lot of the season left, but this team has a long way to go.

The only other team making a push for the bottom five is the Rangers, who haven't played much but have

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

looked awful lately after winning their first two. They're at home the rest of the month, which might determine

whether they head into November looking like they're already an afterthought.



Canes Balancing Work, Rest During Break

High-tempo practices, days off highlight five-day gap in schedule

by Michael Smith

In the grind of an 82-game season, it's rare to find a break of more than a few days on the schedule.

And though it's only the third week of the 2019-20 regular season, an extended gap between games has already landed on the Carolina Hurricanes' calendar.

Five days separate the Canes' last game in Anaheim on Oct. 18 and their next game in Columbus on Oct. 24, a quirk of a schedule that's already seen the team play three sets of back-to-back games.

"It's kind of weird, but for me personally and as a team, too, I think we needed this as a rest. Get our minds off hockey for a little bit," Sebastian Aho said after practice on Monday. "I think it's good for us, but it's definitely kind of weird."

From now until the end of the season, the Canes won't go longer than four days between games (Feb. 29-March 5), with the exception of the All-Star break and bye week combo in late January.

In this five-day gap between games, the Canes have carefully crafted a schedule that balances the benefits of such an extended break and also safeguards against the potential downsides.

"It's based on the health of our group, number one. We've got to try to focus on the game Thursday, and a couple guys still need a little rest," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said on Monday. "You kind of have to base it around that and make sure we're getting that rest. We'll crank it up again, and hopefully we're all good to go on Thursday."

The Canes took Saturday off after touching down from a red-eye flight in Raleigh as the sun peeked over the horizon. The team practiced at Raleigh

Center Ice on Sunday morning and then put in a good hour's worth of work back at PNC Arena on Monday.

"High-tempo practices. We get some off-ice workouts, too," Aho said. "You can get good practices in and work on the little things."

Another day off on Tuesday will follow.

"Relax," Aho smiled. "Try to not think about hockey and get some rest, for sure."

The Canes will practice again on Wednesday before boarding then an afternoon flight bound for Columbus.

By then, the hope is that the Canes will have a clean bill of health. Erik Haula, the team's leading goal-scorer (7), left Friday's game in the second period with an upper-body injury (important: not a concussion) and did not return. Brind'Amour has since been optimistic about Haula's prognosis, though the forward has not practiced yet this week.

"We will probably give him a couple days to rest. The schedule kind of permits us to just rest him," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "I don't anticipate him being out, though."

Forward Ryan Dzingel was another did-not-practice on Sunday, but he returned to the ice Monday, a good indication of where he's at health-wise.

When the Canes take the ice in Columbus on Thursday, the Blue Jackets will have played twice in the same five-day game-less segment for the Canes.

With that in mind, is there any concern of not being as sharp or game-ready?

"I don't believe that stuff because it's only five days. It's not five months," Aho said. "For sure, it helps when you keep your tempo up so when the games come after this break, it's not a shock to the body, either."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Until the puck drops next, the Canes will rest hard and practice harder, taking advantage as best they can of a seemingly random extended gap in the schedule with the goal of rebounding from a tough end to their three-game California road trip.

"We watched some video yesterday and closed that. It's over now. We look forward. That's how it is in this league. There are so many games," Aho said. "When you lose, you lose, and you have to move forward, and when you win, you can't really feel too good about yourself because there's always another game."



Dumba, Fleury tattoos honor friend lost to suicide

Wild, Hurricanes defensemen discuss unique tribute, aim to spread awareness of mental illness

by Dan Rosen

Matt Dumba is trying to keep his composure, but his eyes are welling up. He begins talking, and his voice cracks even more.

The Minnesota Wild defenseman is trying to tell the story behind his first tattoo, an intricate design that covers most of his back.

But to Dumba, it's more than a tattoo; it's a constant reminder of the immeasurable and unseen pain mental illness can inflict on someone, the quiet suffering no one, except for the person experiencing it, can see or feel.

It's a tribute to his friend Kale Williams.

"The first piece on my back was a memorial piece for one of my friends who passed away when I was [playing] in junior," Dumba said. "It's pretty emotional. I don't think I've ever talked about it, really, but it's a memorial piece for him."

He chose to talk about it on this day, in Chicago in early September. He's not sure why he finally opened up about it, but he was finally ready to tell the story.

Williams was from Red Deer, Alberta. He was the kid who made everyone smile, the friend everyone wanted to have, Dumba said.

Williams didn't play for the Red Deer Rebels of the Western Hockey League like Dumba did from 2010-13. He was unable to play hockey because of a neuromuscular disorder called Charcot-Marie-Tooth

disease that attacked his nerves, deteriorating his limbs enough to create ankle and foot problems.

But Williams felt like part of the team.

Because his stepfather, Dean Williams, worked for the Rebels, Kale Williams was a longtime fan. One of his closest friends, former Red Deer forward Scott Feser, introduced him to Dumba and Haydn Fleury, now a defenseman for the Carolina Hurricanes. They took to him like he was one of them.

"He started coming to our games, coming to our parties," Fleury said. "He was the life of our team parties. He was a really cool, really charismatic kid."

Williams killed himself at age 17 on Feb. 10, 2013, a tragic and shocking turn of events for Dumba, Fleury and all those who knew him.

"No one knew that he was hurting like that," said Dumba, who was 18 at the time.

His friends and family said they believe Williams was suffering from an untold mental illness, which is the cause of approximately 90 percent of suicide deaths, according to research documented by the Boston Children's Hospital.

"I was in shock for the three days after, and then the funeral came and I just remember breaking down," said Fleury, who was 16. "The Victoria Royals were in town and it worked out that two of Kale's friends played on Victoria. I remember seeing this picture of him in a blue car as a little guy, and I just broke down and cried. I'll remember that for the rest of my life."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

The two players remember him each day with the tributes they wear on their bodies; like Dumba, Fleury also has a tattoo honoring Williams.

A year after Williams' death, Dumba had the tattoo put on his back. It has a sugar skull with an Afro and a pick in it because he said Williams liked to grow out his hair. On the skull is a chain with a small Jesus piece around the neck because he and Williams liked to rap together.

"A lot of cultures use a sugar skull for a celebration, like they grieve through the celebration of that person's life," Dumba said. "That's why I put it there. He was always the happiest kid ever. You see him dancing. Really funny. Witty kid."

Nearby is a lion and the word "courage" because, Dumba said, "I'm a Leo and I love 'The Lion King.' It's for the courage to come back and the courage for my friend Kale.

"It's about having the courage to talk to those you might think are going through some tough times. Bravery. Stand up. Be there for whoever needs you."

Fleury's tattoo, which he got when he was 19, is on his left arm. There are four playing cards; the letters K and W are on the clubs and diamonds, respectively, to represent Williams' initials, and there is a two of hearts and a 10 of spades to represent the date he died.

Under the cards is a pair of dice with the numbers four and six, representing Williams' favorite number, 46, which was worn by Colin Fraser, his favorite Red Deer player, who shares a birthday with Williams' brother, Kobe, now 20, and used to come to the Williams house for birthday cake before he played in the NHL.

Fleury also honors Williams in each game by writing "KW" on each of his sticks.

"I'm always thinking of him," Fleury said. "This game can produce some hard times, but if you keep it in perspective, you realize it's just a game and there are bigger things out there. When it comes to something like that, experiencing it at such a young age, 16, it was really hard. That puts life into perspective. As much as hockey is a passion and a love, at the end of the day it's really just a game, and there are a lot of things people can go through in their lives. Things can be a lot tougher than a bad game or a bad day at the rink."

Dumba and Fleury don't hide the impact Williams' suicide has had on them, how it has shaped them to be the people and professionals they are today, and how it has made them aware of the impact mental illness can have on someone.

"Now if someone wants to talk, I'll be the person who is the good listener," Fleury said. "A lot of people just have to get things off their chest. If they're struggling, they just need support, people being there for them. You can be the friend, the brother."

Keeping perspective helped Dumba get through last season, when the pectoral muscle injury he sustained on Dec. 15 put an end to what was shaping up to be the best season of his life. He had 22 points (12 goals, 10 assists) in 32 games.

Perspective has helped Fleury get through the tough times in the game, including being demoted to Charlotte of the American Hockey League last season and taking longer than he and many others thought it would to fulfill his potential as the No. 7 pick in the 2014 NHL Draft.

"When you do have that positive attitude look at life, knowing things can be taken away from you just like that, it forces you to live in the moment, in the now, with the people you're around," Dumba said. "I don't think I've always had this outlook. I've been full circle with this whole topic. It's taken years to build it up. Through the trials and bumps, relationships, you kind of get a different perspective for what's going on.

"When something you love gets taken away from you it's a hard adjustment, a tough reality. On a simpler scale, that was hockey for me last year, but on a grand scale, the loved ones, the people around you, it's a whole different level."

Dean Williams said he believes Dumba and Fleury are keeping the memory of his son alive.

"I guess in a way that is Kale's legacy," said Williams, Red Deer's vice president of marketing and sales. "The fact that those guys in their position are still talking about it means that mental health is getting out into the public and it's not such a stigma anymore. Before if you had a mental health issue it was kept quiet because they were embarrassed. We have learned through Kale that it's nothing to be embarrassed about. It needs to be talked about."

Williams said the Rebels have made a five-year commitment to help fund mental health initiatives in Red Deer. He said Ciara Williams, Kale's older sister, now 26, is working for the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta so she can be in the business of helping others.

"One of the things that society doesn't do is they don't treat mental health issues like an injury," Dean Williams said. "If you break your arm by falling off your bike, you go to the hospital and they treat it. With mental health it's a little more difficult because there are different causes and different elements. We need to get it out there in the public, find out what causes it and guys like these two NHL friends of Kale's that are getting it out there, that helps."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Fleury will be the Hurricanes spokesman for their Mental Health Awareness Night at PNC Arena on Jan. 31, when they play the Vegas Golden Knights.

He and Dumba have discussed arranging a summer golf tournament in honor of Williams to raise money to support mental health awareness.

"It's something I'm really passionate about it, and I definitely want to get more into it, more involved as my life progresses," Fleury said. "Everyone has a voice, and I think more importantly everyone has a set of ears and can be a good listener."

Dumba said he has done work in the Twin Cities with children, including some who have eating disorders.

"I was a little naive to begin with about it, and as I talked to the nurse there I kind of found out mental health issues can come from anything," Dumba said. "Some of these girls are little girls, cute as can be, and you're wondering, why are they going through this? It's great to talk to them, listen to them and let them know that there is someone here to just try to understand more about them. Some of them just choked on food when they were younger and now they have a phobia of eating. It's crazy how powerful the brain is, how strong it can be and how susceptible it can be."

Dumba said he wants to study more about mental health awareness for later in his life.

"I've talked to my mom and little brother about that being what I want to get into, to raise awareness for, support initiatives," Dumba said. "I just want to keep building my knowledge about it. You have to know what you're jumping into. There is so much I don't know."

If they knew more as teenagers, maybe they would have seen the problems Williams was having. They only saw the smiles, the dancing, the rapping.

"You'd think he was joking if he said something out of context," Fleury said.

Now they memorialize him with body art, remember him by telling stories, and live their lives the way they believe he would want to live his. Maybe by doing that, they'll one day prevent someone else from becoming another victim.

"Oftentimes, the happiest people are just the best at hiding it, which is also very scary," Dumba said. "I encourage people to speak to their loved ones, open up and express themselves. You want to bring light to this darkness."



NHL Power Rankings: Fast starts most likely to continue

By Adam Gretz

In this week's edition of the NHL Power Rankings we are taking a look at 10 fast starts around the league and which ones are most likely to continue, and which ones are most likely not to continue.

How are we defining a fast start? It's pretty simple, actually — teams that as of Monday have a .640 points percentage or better so far this season. A .640 points percentage over an 82-game season would be a 105-point pace, so it is obviously pretty high level of play.

There are 10 teams that qualify, and not all of them will continue that level of play throughout the season. Just for comparisons sake, there were nine teams off to the same start through same date a year ago and

three of them ended up missing the playoffs. In 2017-18, four of the nine teams off to a similar start also ended up missing. So it stands to reason that a handful of these teams are going to significantly cool off.

This isn't necessarily a ranking of which of these teams has played the best so far, but a ranking of which ones are most likely to continue playing well.

Who is for real and who is not? To the rankings!

Fast starts that will continue

1. Colorado Avalanche. Entering play on Monday they are 7-0-1 on the season and have the best record in the league, earning 15 out of a possible 16 points in

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

the standings. The scary thing about them? They may not be playing their best hockey just yet.

2. Carolina Hurricanes. Speaking of not playing their best hockey yet, the Hurricanes have won six out of their first nine games and have just three goals from the trio of Sebastian Aho, Nino Niederreiter, and Andrei Svechnikov. It is a testament to the depth they have assembled that three of their top players can be off to such a slow start and the team can still win the way it has.

3. Washington Capitals. They are the highest scoring team in the league, have been one of the top possession teams, and still haven't received great goaltending from Braden Holtby. The latter part should scare the rest of the Metropolitan Division because even if Holtby doesn't return to his former Vezina Trophy form he can still be better than he has been.

4. Vegas Golden Knights. The top of their lineup is full of impact players (especially Mark Stone, who has been incredible to start the year) but one of the big wild cards on this team is the emergence of rookie Cody Glass. He already has six points in his first nine games.

Fast starts, but with some questions

5. Boston Bruins. The biggest question here is the same one they have had for the past two years — will they get enough secondary scoring after their top line? Right now if one of David Pastrnak, Brad Marchand, or Patrice Bergeron does not score a goal, no one is scoring. They managed to find enough secondary scoring to reach Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final a year ago, so it may not be a huge concern in the long-run, but this is still a very top-heavy team so far this season.

6. Pittsburgh Penguins. Interesting team so far in the sense they have probably overachieved given the injury situation that has taken half of their forward lineup away. They are playing the way coach Mike Sullivan wants them to play, and they have played extremely well, but we still haven't seen the Penguins as they were meant to look this season. Still not entirely sold on the defense, and I question how much of this early success is entirely sustainable.

Fast starts, but with some real concerns

7. Anaheim Ducks. The Ducks won five of their first seven games last year — thanks mostly to John Gibson — before completely falling apart. The one thing that should give a little more optimism this time around is Dallas Eakins seems to have them playing a more sustainable style of hockey — one that does not rely entirely on goaltending — and they have actually carried the play in some of their wins. The concern is I am just not sure there is enough offense here and their two goalies have a combined save percentage of .940. What happens when that drops a bit?

8. Arizona Coyotes. They barely missed the playoffs a year ago and have probably been better than you realize at the start of the season. The concerns here are the same as in Anaheim, where they are still very dependent on incredible goaltending and there is not a ton of offense to work with.

9. Buffalo Sabres. For the second year in a row the Sabres are one of the big stories in the NHL with a fast start, entering play on Monday with a 7-1-1 record. There is reason to believe they can avoid the total meltdown they experienced a year ago thanks to an improved roster (offseason additions of Colin Miller, Henri Jokiharju, Marcus Johansson, while Rasmus Dahlin has a full season in the NHL under his belt) and what seems to be a better coach. But there are also still some real concerns. Carter Hutton won't keep stopping 95 percent of the shots he faces. Victor Olofsson won't keep scoring on 30 percent of his shots. They still play in an extremely tough division. There is reason to expect some regression here as the season goes on.

10. Edmonton Oilers. It's been amazing start, but James Neal is not going to keep scoring on 30 percent of his shots and once that stops this team has the same problem it has had for years in that there is not enough depth after Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. They have feasted on a light schedule so far (and those points still count) but this is a team that needs to prove it over a full season before anyone fully buys into it.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019



What We've Learned About the Hurricanes Through Nine Games

Hamilton's on fire and Haula's a perfect fit, but it hasn't been all sunshine for Carolina through their 6-3-0 start.

By Brett Finger

A lengthy break between games for the Carolina Hurricanes gives them time to practice and rest after a busy stretch of nine games in 16 days that saw them get off to a 6-3-0 start.

It also gives us a bit of time to look at their first section of games and see what there is to learn from it.

There's a lot to unpack from Carolina's blazing-hot start and rough California road trip, so here we'll try to dive into some of it.

Dougie Hamilton.

Five goals and five assists (three of them primary assists) in nine games is impressive, even more so from a defenseman.

Through the opening weeks of the season, Hamilton has put his talent on full display and, as a side effect of the trade involving Justin Faulk, he has seen a pretty dramatic increase in usage.

Hamilton is averaging a team-high 23:28 of ice time, including 3:12 on the power play and 2:07 on the penalty kill. Those numbers are eye-popping when compared to his 19:40 average TOI last season with just 1:52 on the man advantage and a negligible 15 seconds on the PK.

When asked during training camp if the Faulk trade opens up room for him, he said it absolutely does. More recently, he was asked what the biggest difference has been for him this season, and he had a good answer.

"I think opportunity is the biggest thing," Hamilton said after Carolina improved to 5-0-0 with their win over the Islanders. "I've wanted this opportunity for a while, so it's nice to have it and I'm just trying to do my best."

He's taken full advantage of the opportunity, silenced any remaining critics, and played like a guy who is

truly comfortable and happy about his situation. The coaching staff has been forced to put more trust in him, and he has proven every step of the way that he is worthy of having that trust on both ends of the ice.

This version of Dougie Hamilton is one of the best defensemen in hockey, and it's the guy that Carolina hoped they were getting when they acquired him from the Calgary Flames two offseasons ago.

Erik Haula is a perfect fit

When you have a farm system as deep as the Hurricanes', you're able to take some gambles. That's exactly what Don Waddell and company did over the offseason when they dealt Nicolas Roy to the Vegas Golden Knights for Haula, who was coming off of a devastating knee injury and skated in just 15 games with the Knights a season ago.

Through nine games as a Hurricane, Haula has scored a team-high seven goals. He's tied for third in the NHL in goals as of Monday afternoon.

He has established his area on the ice early on, as each of his seven goals have come between/below the hashmarks - three via back-door tap-ins, two via deflections, and two via shots. He has a whopping 20 high-danger shot attempts in all situations thus far, which is double Nino Niederreiter's second-placed 10, and just one behind James van Riemsdyk's league-leading 21 high-danger shot attempts.

In addition to his knack for going to goal-scoring areas, his impact on the Canes has been felt on the other end of the ice.

When Haula is on the ice, the Hurricanes allow 17% fewer unblocked shots compared to league average.

That same impact is felt on the penalty kill, as well. When Haula is on the ice during a 5v4 penalty kill, the Hurricanes allow far fewer shots from the slot and the middle of the ice.

Through nine games, Haula has been everything that the Hurricanes could've hoped that he would be. Flanked by Ryan Dzingel and Martin Necas, Haula has centered the team's most effective forward trio

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

through the early stages of the season and he has helped take some of the burden off of Carolina's other heavily-relied-upon point producers. Based on his body of work, there's no reason to think that his performance will dip in any significant way moving forward.

The summer trade with Vegas is paying early dividends and looks like a steal.

Martin Necas belongs

It was a controversial decision for many to keep Necas and assign Julien Gauthier to Charlotte at the outset of the regular season, but it has unquestionably been the right decision.

Necas is just a special player with a toolbox of talent that's extremely difficult to defend.

When carrying the puck through the neutral zone, Necas dodges around the ice like a gnat and almost always finds a way to get the puck into the offensive zone - with a controlled zone entry, in many cases.

In the offensive zone, he makes smart decisions with the puck to keep possession and set up scoring chances and has a great read of what part of the ice he needs to get to without the puck. He has elite vision both with and without the puck and the hands to make things happen when the puck does find his stick.

The primary concern for him entering the season was his 200-foot game. Early on, there were clear lapses, but those have become increasingly extinct over the past week and a half. He's made a number of quality defensive plays on the back check through the defensive zone and has proven that he's good at evaluating his options when trying to get the puck out of his own zone.

Necas has been one-third of the Hurricanes' best forward line and his skill set will make him a hugely viable option on the man advantage moving forward. He's already shown flashes of brilliance with his playmaking on the power play through the early stages of the season.

There's a lot to be excited about with Necas, and while he isn't a perfect player, he has a very bright future in this league and on this team.

Canes need something from Aho and Niederreiter

There's really no beating around the bush here - the Hurricanes need production from Sebastian Aho and Nino Niederreiter, and it needs to come during this upcoming home stand.

Through nine games, the duo has combined for two empty-net goals and four assists. That's just not enough, especially when factoring in the reality that

Carolina's secondary scoring won't keep them afloat through the course of an 82-game season on its own.

Now, it's important to realize that there's a big difference between not producing and playing poorly. Aho and Niederreiter have both been great at driving 5-on-5 offense and keeping the puck out of high-danger areas in their own zone.

The disconnect comes at the level of production - pucks aren't going in the net. Aho and Niederreiter have taken 48 shots on goal (excluding Aho's two ENG's) and all 48 of them have been stopped. They have also combined for 19 high-danger shot attempts.

Getting chances hasn't been the problem for them, by any means, but at some point they're going to have to get a bounce and find the back of the net.

It's not panic time yet and those two players are way too good to have their slumps continue much longer. It's well within the realm of possibility that, five games from now, they'll both be up to three or four goals, each, and their early struggles will be in the rearview mirror.

If that's not the case, though, Rod Brind'Amour might need to ditch the current configuration of his top-nine and find ways to get them going. As important as it is to get wins now, it's even more important to get those two key players on the scoresheet consistently so they can put themselves in a better position in the middle and latter stages of the season.

Still a top-nine forward short

There's one notable hole in this Hurricanes team, and it's in the top-nine.

I think Brock McGinn can be a useful NHL forward, but he doesn't belong on a line with the likes of Andrei Svechnikov or Sebastian Aho. Be it from in-house or elsewhere, the Canes need an additional forward who can help provide offense.

TSN's Pierre LeBrun has already reported that the Hurricanes are cognizant of that issue, saying that Jesse Puljujarvi and Joshua Ho-Sang are among the players that they've kicked the tires on in trade talks.

Given Puljujarvi's hold out in Finland and the fact that Ho-Sang was put on waivers just a couple of weeks ago, those two players seem like relatively attainable options, though both of them come with red flags that make you wonder just why players with their level of skill haven't been able to stick in Edmonton and New York, respectively - two teams who could seriously benefit from that skill.

In theory, the more time that passes, the lower the asking price will get. The questions are, how long are the Hurricanes willing to wait, what price is too high, and are there other options that involve more proven NHL ability?

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

This early in the season, it's hard to imagine that many teams are eager to move on from viable top-nine point-producing forwards, unless there are question marks surrounding them.

Elsewhere, Taylor Hall's future in New Jersey is in question.

You never know...

Prospect Corner: Updating the Hurricanes of the Future

Junior and overseas seasons are in full swing, and we take a look at some of the early standout performers.

By kleblanchockey

A new Canes season is upon us, which means future Hurricanes are also in action across junior hockey and throughout Europe. Let's check on which prospects have started the early season successfully.

Europe

Carolina's prospect group has a definite European flair this season, with 10 players in the organizational pipeline active in three different countries. As is typical in draft plus-one seasons, sometimes it's difficult for young prospects to receive consistent playing time in the bigger European leagues. This has been the case for 2019 draftees Patrik Puistola and Pyotr Kochetkov.

Puistola's playing time with Tappara has been inconsistent due to the team's title aspirations and the coach's reluctance to play younger players high in his lineup. Tappara is leading Liiga currently, so it's unlikely that this strategy will change any time soon. Carolina's third rounder can drop down a league and play in Mestis, or stay with the Liiga club and fight for more minutes. Kochetkov had a similar early-season playing time issue which was rectified by a trade last week. The second rounder was moved from SKA St. Petersburg to Vityaz, which should allow for more time in the net, the most important piece to a young goaltender's development.

Early season returns from winger Tuukka Tiekola have been excellent, as the fourth rounder has been dominant for Kärpät's U20 team. His 20 points in 13 games are good for eighth in the league, and should earn him more time with the Liiga club as the year progresses.

NCAA

The early season in the NCAA is always tough to evaluate because of the different points of the fall when conferences start their season. David Cotton, Kevin Wall, Matt Filipe, Max Zimmer, Domenick Fensore and Luke Martin have games under their belt, whereas Jack Drury and Luke Stevens don't start until November.

Cotton has continued to build on his successful college career, with a pair of three-point games against Wisconsin and Colgate to open his senior

campaign. Cotton's seven points in 4 games are good for a tie for 13th among all NCAA skaters.

Jack LaFontaine's return to college hockey thus far has been a successful one. After leaving Michigan following his sophomore season, LaFontaine played a year in the BCHL, which helped him to not only develop with an organization that allowed him ample opportunity to play, but also transfer to another school and not have to sit for a year without seeing action. His 2.51 goals against average and .914 save percentage through four games played has been a sign of progress early in his junior season.

Ontario Hockey League

After a couple years with few prominent prospects in the OHL, Carolina fans will be paying attention to the league more closely with two of the club's best prospects featuring heavily.

Ryan Suzuki has had a nice start to his season in Barrie, averaging just over a point-per-game through nine contests on the young season. In his draft season Suzuki posted 75 points in 65 games, and you would like to see a steady jump to closer to a 1.50 points-per-game rate in his first post-draft season. Assuming he plays an entire year without any injury issues, that would place him firmly in the top 15 scorers in the league.

Jamieson Rees missed some early season action with a six-game suspension after delivering a hit from behind, but has been on fire since his return. In just four games, the forward has 10 points, and should be a force for Sarnia all season. Rees' physicality is a staple in his game, but he does need to make more calculated decisions with it from time to time. If he can stay on the ice, he's going to have a breakout season offensively.

Sixth-rounder Blake Murray has had a good start to the season for Sudbury with 13 points in 13 games. The Wolves are among the highest scoring teams in the OHL, led by uber-prospect and potential first overall pick in the 2020 draft Quinton Byfield. Murray was a 30-goal scorer last year, and was one of the younger players drafted in June, so this developmental year is an important one for him. Here's to hoping the Canes found a late-round bargain.

Pipeline Ramblings

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Luke Henman (Blainville-Boisbriand, QMJHL) continues to be a playmaker for the Armada averaging nearly an assist-per-game on the young season. His 12 points in 10 games are good for the team lead.

Jack Drury's (Harvard, ECAC) first action will come on November 1st vs Dartmouth, in what should be a huge sophomore season for the former second round pick.

Domenick Fensore (Boston Univ., Hockey East) has had a steady start to his freshman season, chipping in two assists in a weekend series against Northern Michigan. The blueliner also has five shots on goal in his first three games.

Hurricanes Prospects 2019: Skaters

Player	Position	Team	G	Goal	Assis	P/G	PI
			P	s	ts	M	M
Blake Murray	C	Sudbury (OHL)	13	5	8	1.00	10
David Cotton	C	Boston College (NCAA)	4	2	5	1.75	19
Dominik Bokk	RW	Rögle (Sweden)	12	1	1	0.16	2
Jack Drury	C	Harvard (NCAA)	0	0	0	0.00	0
Jamieson Rees	C	Sarnia (OHL)	4	4	6	2.50	5
Kevin Wall	RW	Penn State (NCAA)	2	0	1	0.50	2
Kirill Slepets	RW	Buran Voronezh (VHL)	16	5	7	0.75	6
Lenni Killinen	RW	Ässät (Finland)	11	0	3	0.27	4
Luke Henman	C	Blainville-Boisbriand (QMJHL)	12	1	9	0.83	2

Player	Position	Team	G	Goal	Assis	P/G	PI
			P	s	ts	M	M
Luke Stevens	LW	Yale (NCAA)	0	0	0	0.00	0
Massimo Rizzo	C	Coquitlam (BCHL)	5	2	3	1.00	2
Matt Filipe	LW	Northeastern (NCAA)	4	0	1	0.25	0
Max Zimmer	LW	Wisconsin (NCAA)	0	0	0	0.00	0
Patrik Puustola	LW	Tappara (Finland)	13	0	1	0.08	2
Ryan Suzuki	C	Barrie (OHL)	9	2	9	1.22	12
Tuukka Tiekso	RW	Kärpät U20 (Finland)	13	7	13	1.54	12
Anttoni Honka	D	JYP (Finland)	14	0	3	0.21	4
Cade Webber	D	Penticton (BCHL)	15	2	3	0.33	6
Domenick Fensore	D	Boston U (NCAA)	3	0	2	0.67	4
Jesper Sellgren	D	Luleå (Finland)	7	1	2	0.43	7
Luke Martin	D	Michigan (NCAA)	4	0	0	0.00	0
Ville Rasanen	D	Jokipojat (Finland)	1	0	0	0.00	0

Hurricanes Prospects 2019: Goalies

Player	Position	Team	G	GA	SV	GA	Save
			P	A	%	s	s

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Player	Position	Team	G P	GA A	SV %	GA	Saves
Eetu Makiniemi	G	Koovee (Finland)	6	3.13	0.906	N/A	N/A
Jack LaFontaine	G	Minnesota (NCAA)	2	2.51	0.914	5	53

Player	Position	Team	G P	GA A	SV %	GA	Saves
Jacob Kucharski	G	Providence (NCAA)	0	0	0	0	0
Pyotr Kochetkov	G	Vityaz (Russia)	6	2.62	0.887	N/A	N/A

Check back in at the Prospect Corner all season long for updates on the future of the Canes.



Weekly Report: Oct. 21, 2019

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers kept their trend of bouncing back going over the weekend, following up a tough loss in Utica on Friday with a dominant win over Syracuse on Saturday.

Week in Review

Team Statistics

Overall record

3-3-0

Home record

1-1-0

Road record

2-2-0

Last week's record

1-1-0

Last 10 games

3-3-0

Division Standings

6th

Conference Standings

10th

League Standings

18th

Utica 8, Checkers 2

The Checkers began their road swing against an undefeated Utica team and couldn't hand the Comets their first loss. Hunter Shinkaruk and Eetu Luostarinen were able to break through offensively but after a hot start from the home team it was too little, too late and the Comets ran away with an 8-2 victory. Full recap

Checkers 7, Syracuse 3

As they have all season, the Checkers rebounded nicely after the loss. Their special teams contributed greatly with two power-play goals and two shorthanded goals, and big four-point nights from Chase Priskie and Brian Gibbons helped propel Charlotte to a lopsided 7-3 win over the Syracuse Crunch. Full recap

Three Stars Of The Week

3rd Star

Eetu Luostarinen

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

2g, 0a

2nd Star

Chase Priskie

1g, 3a

1st Star

Brian Gibbons

2g, 2a

FIVE NOTABLES

1) PRISKIE PUTS UP POINTS

Only six games into his pro career, Chase Priskie turned in a stellar offensive performance in Saturday's win over Syracuse. The blueliner helped set up a pair of power-play goals and lit the lamp himself all in the first period, then notched another assist in the second period to bring his total to four points on the night. Priskie is the sixth rookie in franchise history to record four points in a game and just the second rookie defenseman.

2) GIBBONS GETS GOING

Priskie wasn't the only one to put on a show Saturday night, as Brian Gibbons notched four points of his own. Along with a pair of assists, the veteran forward tallied a power-play goal and a shorthanded goal, making him just the fourth player in franchise history to do so.

3) LUOSTARINEN LIGHTS IT UP

It appears that it didn't take long for Eetu Luostarinen to adjust to the North American game, as the rookie forward has scored a goal in each of Charlotte's last four games. The Finn is tied for the team goal lead and has emerged as one of the league's top rookie performers early on in the season.

4) SHORTHANDED SUCCESS

The Checkers notched a pair of shorthanded goals on Saturday night, one coming from Eetu Luostarinen and one coming from Gibbons. That mark currently ties the Checkers for the league lead. Charlotte finished last season with six shorthanded goals, a total that was tied for 18th in the AHL. The Checkers enjoyed most of their shorthanded success away from home last season, with four of those six goals coming on the road.

5) GOAT'S GOALS

Julien Gauthier made up a scoreless contest Friday by lighting the lamp twice in Charlotte's win over Syracuse on Saturday. That multi-goal performance kept his goal-per-game pace alive, as the forward now has four goals in as many games after missing two contests while on NHL recall. Dating back to last

season, Gauthier has now scored 11 goals in his last 12 regular season games, registering at least one in 10 of those contests.

RANKS

Morgan Geekie is tied for fourth in the AHL in points (8) and tied for sixth in goals (4)

Brian Gibbons is tied for fourth in the AHL in points (8)

Chase Priskie is tied for the league lead in power-play assists (4) and tied for second in power-play points (4), ranks second among league rookies in points (7), is tied for the rookie lead in assists (6) and is tied for the lead among all AHL defensemen in points (7) and assists (6)

Eetu Luostarinen leads all AHL rookies in goals (4) and is tied for fifth in points (4) and is tied for the league lead in shorthanded goals

INJURIES

Stelio Mattheos - Missed six games starting 10/5

Spencer Smallman - Missed six games starting 10/5

Jake Bean - Missed one game starting 10/19

Max McCormick - Missed four games starting 10/5, returned on 10/18

Transactions

Incoming

10/17 - Brian Gibbons assigned by Carolina (NHL)

Outgoing

10/15 - Jeremy Helvig assigned to Jacksonville (ECHL)

Coming Up

Friday, Oct. 25 at 7 p.m. - Checkers vs. Lehigh Valley

Food Drive presented by Farm Bureau Insurance - bring at least four cans of food to support Loaves and Fishes and receive a free ticket to our game on 12/1

Teacher Appreciation Night - for ticket questions, email Jeremy Recoon

Saturday, Oct. 26 at 6 p.m. - Checkers vs. Lehigh Valley

Dia de los Muertos - ticket and themed t-shirt package available now. [Click here to purchase.](#)

Family Night presented by Fairfield Inn and Suites - save 40% when purchasing at least four tickets online.

Food Drive presented by Farm Bureau Insurance - bring at least four cans of food to support Loaves and Fishes and receive a free ticket to our game on 12/1

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

By the Numbers

CATEGORY	RECORD	AHL RANK	LAST WEEK	Goals	Morgan Geekie, Julien Gauthier, Eetu Luostarinen (4)
Power play	26.9%	3rd	3rd	Assists	Chase Priskie (6), Brian Gibbons (5), Three tied (4)
Penalty kill	90.0%	6th	13th	Power play goals	Morgan Geekie, Brian Gibbons (2), Three tied (1)
Goals per game	3.67	6th	t-10th	Shorthanded goals	Brian Gibbons, Eetu Luostarinen (1)
Shots per game	33.17	t-7th	t-2nd	Game-winning goals	Anthony Louis, Morgan Geekie, Brian Gibbons (1)
Goals allowed per game	3.83	t-27th	t-16th	Shots on goal	Morgan Geekie (21), Julien Gauthier, Eetu Luostarinen (17)
Shots allowed per game	28.33	11th	10th	Penalty minutes	Max McCormick, Roland McKeown (10), Julien Gauthier, Clark Bishop (8)
Penalty minutes per game	14.67	t-11th	12th	Plus/minus	Fredrik Claesson (+4), Cavan Fitzgerald (+2), Clark Bishop (+1)

LEADERS

CATEGORY	LEADER(S)	Wins	Anton Forsberg (3)
Points	Morgan Geekie, Brian Gibbons (8), Chase Priskie (7)	Goals-against average	Anton Forsberg (2.93)
		Save percentage	Anton Forsberg (.906)

TODAY'S LINKS

- <https://theathletic.com/1311501/2019/10/21/i-dont-think-he-realizes-his-impact-can-es-broadcaster-mike-maniscalco-is-even-better-when-no-one-is-looking/>
- <https://theathletic.com/1308688/2019/10/21/dqb-weekend-power-rankings-every-slow-starter-wants-to-be-this-years-blues-what-if-youre-already-worse/>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/canes-balancing-work-rest-during-break/c-310341000>
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/matt-dumba-haydn-fleury-honor-late-friend-with-tattoos/c-310327544>
- <https://nhl.nbc.com/2019/10/21/nhl-power-rankings-fast-starts-most-likely-to-continue/>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2019/10/21/20924883/what-we-learned-about-carolina-hurricanes-through-nine-games-hamilton-haula-aho-niederreiter-mrazek>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2019/10/21/20924836/carolina-hurricanes-prospect-corner-pyotr-kochetkov-patrik-puistola-ryan-suzuki>
- <http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/weekly-report-oct-21-2019>

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

SportScan

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

1158063 Carolina Hurricanes

With van Riemsdyk back, Canes have full house on D

BY CHIP ALEXANDER OCTOBER 21, 2019 07:50 AM

Trevor van Riemsdyk assumed the first time he really tested his left shoulder, it would be from a hit in a Carolina Hurricanes practice or a puck battle along the boards in a game.

Instead ...

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News Observer LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158064 Carolina Hurricanes

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By Sara Civian Oct 21, 2019

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The Athletic LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158063 Carolina Hurricanes

With van Riemsdyk back, Canes have full house on D

BY CHIP ALEXANDER OCTOBER 21, 2019 07:50 AM

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1158076 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets 4, Maple Leafs 3, OT Blue Jackets break out of overtime funk on Nyquist's winner

Brian Hedger The Columbus Dispatch

TORONTO — John Tortorella didn't have many complaints when he met with reporters Monday at the Blue Jackets' morning skate.

His team came into a game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena with a 3-3-2 record. But Tortorella knew it could've been a much shinier mark had overtimes in their previous two games gone better for the Jackets.

"Wish our record was a little better right now, but I am encouraged at how we have played," he said. "I'm a little (ticked) off about getting scored on the first shift the last two overtimes. I think we need to be better in those situations, but hopefully that's something we can solve."

Well, they got another chance in a game against the Maple Leafs and, indeed, solved it for a 4-3 overtime victory decided by Gustav Nyquist's goal on a penalty shot 1:57 into the extra period.

It was awarded to the Blue Jackets after Toronto's Mitch Marner hooked Nyquist on a breakaway set up by a pass from Alexander Wennberg. Nyquist's shot in OT rewarded goalie Joonas Korpisalo for an impressive night in net (28 saves) and gave Columbus a huge second point.

Despite losing two of three games played in a four-day span, the Blue Jackets (4-3-2) came out of it with four of six possible points — getting the victory on a night they were largely outplayed.

Riley Nash and Pierre-Luc Dubois scored in the first period, providing an early 2-0 lead, and Alexander Wennberg's second goal of the season — which broke an 0-for-18 skid on the power play — tied it 3-3 with 9:51 left in the third.

That one forced overtime and guaranteed the Jackets would get at least a point in their third straight game to go beyond regulation.

"We've protected the puck very well," Tortorella said earlier in the day. "We've developed offense. It's just that last play. We just haven't finished. If we can just get our guys more consistently scoring goals when they have the opportunity, without sacrificing the way we have to play away from the puck, we'll be OK."

Outside of the goals by Nash and Dubois in the first, this game was a struggle for the Jackets, who coughed up the 2-0 lead by allowing three unanswered goals by Toronto's Kasper Kapanen, Auston Matthews and Alexander Nylander. That gave the Maple Leafs a 3-2 lead with just 14.5 seconds left in the second.

Columbus squandered its first four of five power plays, allowing Kapanen's short-handed goal in the first, and just couldn't break through again on Toronto goalie Frederik Andersen until late in the game.

This was not like the Jackets' recent games, when they outplayed their opponent in tight games. This was survival after the Maple Leafs turned up the heat to a high setting.

In fact, if it hadn't been for Korpisalo's excellence, it might've been a Toronto rout. Instead, it was a huge road victory that should provide a boost of confidence for a young, scrappy team that needed one.

Anderson back

It wasn't an issue related to his shoulder injury from the playoffs last season, but Josh Anderson's six-game absence for an upper body injury to start this season was still upsetting.

Heading into the game against Toronto, the Blue Jackets' 25-year old power forward had played just two games after being injured in either the opener Oct. 4 against Toronto or the following night in Pittsburgh.

"It's very frustrating," said Anderson, who was removed from injured reserve Monday and played against the Maple Leafs, totaling 18:02 of ice time. "You work your whole summer just to try to be in shape, and then you go through the whole training camp for three weeks and you (exert) yourself just to get ready for the season, then two games in you're right behind the eight ball again. So, it's stressful."

Anderson was out two weeks with the injury, but it might've felt a lot longer because of the timing. He also dealt with a nagging shoulder injury to start training camp, after arriving in Columbus still feeling adverse effects from something that happened in the Jackets' playoff run last spring.

That injury, which didn't require surgery, occurred in the second round against the Boston Bruins and lagged throughout the summer. Getting injured again so soon this season stung even more.

"It definitely hurts, but things happen in hockey," said Anderson, who didn't record a point and was tagged with a minus-4 plus/minus rating in his first two games. "Injuries happen. You've just got to take your time and get back to being healthy."

Now that he has, Anderson's goal is to get back to the level he ended at last season, when he set career highs in nearly

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

every offensive category — including 27 goals, 20 assists, 47 points and a team-high plus-25 plus/minus rating.

“You can’t change it,” Anderson said of his heavy, contact-driven power game. “I’m not going to go out there and play a skilled hockey game just because I’m coming back from an injury. You’ve got to get into it, bang around a couple times and really just get into the game. We’ve done such a good job of playing the right way this year and staying above the puck, so hopefully I can add to that.”

Anderson is from Burlington, Ontario, located 45 miles south of Toronto, and grew up a big Maple Leafs fan. He said 45 family and friends were slated to attend the game.

Murray plays

After missing the game Saturday against the Islanders with an undisclosed upper body injury, defenseman Ryan Murray returned to the lineup in Toronto.

Murray took the full morning skate and pregame warm-up before the decision was made to play. Had Murray not played, Tortorella said Dean Kukan was slated to skate in his second straight game.

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1158078 Columbus Blue Jackets

Rugged Josh Anderson returns to lineup for Blue Jackets against speedy Maple Leafs

Brian Hedger The Columbus Dispatch

TORONTO — John Tortorella misses the “old-school” NHL, which was decidedly more physical, but the Blue Jackets’s coach still has a team that can make life difficult for opponents.

“We’re still banging around,” Tortorella said Monday at Scotiabank Arena before a morning skate for a game against the speed-and-skill oriented Toronto Maple Leafs.

“That has to be part of our team, as far as how we have to play. I believe it’s the best way to play. So, we have to play that way.”

They have, too, for nearly all eight games they’ve played — the exception being the second half of a 7-2 loss in Pittsburgh on Oct. 5. Otherwise, the Jackets have started out the way they ended last season, concentrating on forcing turnovers by “staying above the puck,” and taking a toll whenever they get a chance to take out an opponent’s body.

“We have to take ice,” Tortorella said. “We have to take time and space (away). When you’re concentrating on taking time and space, body comes into play. So, we’re still talking about that. We still want to bang. It’s just you can’t go out there looking for things and overrun a guy, with the quickness that’s on the blue line now — where they just beat you up the ice and cause the odd-man rushes.”

The Blue Jackets will get an added boost Monday, too, as power forward Josh Anderson re-enters the lineup after missing six games with an upper-body injury.

Anderson, who is from Burlington, Ontario, and grew up a Maple Leafs fan, will slot back into the lineup at right wing on the third line. He will skate with center by Boone Jenner and rookie left wing Alexandre Texier, knowing he still needs to play with an edge.

“You can’t change it,” said Anderson, who will have 45 family and friends attending the game. “I’m not going to go out there and play a skilled hockey game just because I’m coming back from an injury. You’ve got to get into it, bang around a couple times and really just get into the game.”

Rookie forward Jakob Lilja will be a healthy scratch to make room for Anderson’s return and goalie Joonas Korpinen will make his seventh start of the season.

Ryan Murray, who participated in the morning skate, is questionable with an upper-body injury that kept him out of the Jackets’ 3-2 overtime loss to the New York Islanders on Saturday at Nationwide Arena. If Murray doesn’t play, Dean Kukan will fill in a second straight game with Markus Nutivaara on the second defense pairing.

The Blue Jackets dropped both ends of their third straight Friday-Saturday back-to-back this past weekend but earned two points by taking each game to overtime. A win against the Maple Leafs, who won 4-1 to open the season Oct. 4 in Columbus, would be a welcome reward.

“We’re not far away from being a five-win team here,” Tortorella said. “It’s just a fine line of a couple things happening and maybe scoring that big goal at a key time that would’ve helped us. We’ve just got to stay with it here and go about our business.”

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158079 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets need to finish

Jacob Myers The Columbus Dispatch

Seth Jones paused for a moment in the locker room after Saturday night’s overtime loss to the New York Islanders at Nationwide Arena. He was asked if he believed the way the Blue Jackets played will eventually lead to more scoring and more wins.

The short answer was yes. The defenseman, and just about everyone else on the team, remained confident after the second overtime loss on back-to-back nights. But he couldn’t mask another feeling that crept up after they flubbed many opportunities. It sucked.

“You get two points and you really think you deserve four,” Jones said.

Coach John Tortorella used the word “frustrated” not to describe the team’s inability to capitalize on its chances, but for gifting the Islanders a goal because of a “blown

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

coverage" that occurred when Cam Atkinson exited the Jackets' zone trying to get a breakaway on the other end.

It wasn't just the mistake that irked Tortorella. He realized how much those extra points have benefited the Jackets (3-3-2) in past seasons with playoff berths on the line. Even eight games in, and even more so against a divisional opponent, those points matter, and the Jackets are on the wrong side of those results of late.

"These are points that — they're so important," Tortorella said. "We've gotten in (the playoffs) the past couple years the second wild card, I think it is. Look at our overtime record."

It took less than a minute on both nights for the Blackhawks and Islanders to score in overtime. That hadn't been the case the past two seasons, when a player like Artemi Panarin could either find a goal or create one, and the Jackets could walk out of a building with two points instead of one.

Last season, the Jackets were 10-4 in games that went to overtime or a shootout, which included the second-to-last game of the season when they clinched a playoff spot. In the 2017-18 season, they were 15-7 in those games and made the playoffs by a point.

The Jackets have consistently outshot their opponents, though that doesn't always tell the full story. In this case, the quality of scoring opportunities has been there as well.

"Other than half a game in Pittsburgh, we have played real good hockey," Tortorella said. "We have to finish. I'm not just talking two nights, I think we've put a lot of good minutes in the early part of this year."

The common link between the success in overtime last year and the Jackets' inability through eight games to put away their chances is having a player or collection of players who will consistently produce points. That was the biggest question at the beginning of the season, and will continue to be until proven otherwise, because those points make a difference.

"I know we have the skill in here to put the puck in the net and create," Jones said.

Off to Cleveland

Late Saturday night, the Jackets sent forward Markus Hannikainen to AHL affiliate Cleveland without any other subsequent roster moves. That could mean that Josh Anderson (upper body injury) might be returning soon.

Anderson has missed the past six games.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158080 Columbus Blue Jackets

Reed: Eight observations as Blue Jackets return to win column in Toronto

By Tom Reed Oct 21, 2019

TORONTO —Eight observations from the Blue Jackets' 4-3 overtime win against the Maple Leafs on Monday:

1. Power-play tweak pays off

A tactical adjustment, a more direct approach on the power play and a bit of luck contributed to the game's defining moment inside Scotiabank Arena.

Midway through the third period, Blue Jackets coaches shifted their power-play alignment and deployed defenseman Zach Werenski in an unfamiliar position.

"I have never really played that side on the half-wall," Werenski said. "I've played it a little bit, but not too much."

Given the woeful state of the power play and the Blue Jackets' need for a goal, Werenski embraced the challenge. With 11:08 remaining, the visitors sent two defensemen over the boards instead of using four forwards and one defender — the team's default grouping.

The Blue Jackets were in the throes of an 0-of-18 slump, dating to the season's third game. They not only had failed on their previous four tries Monday night but had yielded a first-period shorthanded goal.

"There was way too (many) passes on the outside," coach John Tortorella said. "We didn't penetrate much at all. (So we) put in a different look."

With the Blue Jackets trailing 3-2, Werenski knew what was expected of him in this alignment.

"I feel like they put me out there just to fire (the puck)," he said.

The defenseman accepted a pass from partner Seth Jones and ripped a slap shot from the right circle that felled Maple Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly. The puck fortuitously caromed back to Werenski, who took another shot that goalie Frederick Anderson kicked into the path of Alexander Wennberg. The Swedish center deposited the rebound into the net to tie the game at 10:09.

It was a big momentum swing after the Leafs had erased an early 2-0 deficit and scored the next three goals.

"Jonesy put it in my wheelhouse and I tried to shoot it as hard as I could," Werenski said. "I was hoping it would get by and get on net. Sometimes, when you shoot the puck, good things happen and it came right back to me."

WENNBERG CLEANS UP WERENSKI'S REBOUND AND IT'S 3-3. #CBJ FINALLY GET A POWER PLAY GOAL PIC.TWITTER.COM/ZJ2HHKZTF8

— ALISON (@ALISONL) OCTOBER 22, 2019

Credit the coaches for trying something different on the fly to spark the somnambulant special-teams unit. A season ago, they started five-on-four power plays with the four forward/one defenseman setup 79 percent of the time.

Through nine games this season, Werenski and Jones have been on the ice together in five-on-four action for just 4:52 — including the entire 1:17 of the game-tying power play Monday.

2. A historical win, of sorts

On a night the Blue Jackets failed to finish a handful of glorious chances on breakaways and clean looks, Gustav

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Nyquist got them home and made some history in the process.

Nyquist became the first Blue Jacket to score a game-winning goal on an overtime penalty shot. He earned the honor driving to the net and accepting a pass from Wennberg before Leafs forward Mitch Marner hooked him.

Nyquist, who had failed on his only other career penalty shot, beat Andersen to the glove side. It snapped the Blue Jackets' two-game losing streak with both defeats having come in three-on-three OT.

"I just tried to see what was open and hit the spot," Nyquist said.

In NHL history, his tally was the 16th penalty-shot goal in overtime, according to a league release.

ANOTHER ANGLE #CBJ PIC.TWITTER.COM/T2DY98J16O

— ALISON (@ALISONL) OCTOBER 22, 2019

3. Overcoming a crippling combination

The Blue Jackets showed resilience in bouncing back from a brutal combination of goals — any one of which could have deflated them.

I'd love to see the percentage of teams that have won games in which they surrendered a shorthanded tally and goals in the final minute of two periods. That's what happened to the Blue Jackets against the Leafs.

Kasperii Kapanen scored a shorthanded goal midway through the first period. Auston Matthews tied it at 19:21 of the first period, and William Nylander gave the Leafs a 3-2 lead at 19:43 of the second period.

"The guys were still upbeat (after the second period) and we knew we were still in the game and one shot away as far as tying it," Tortorella said. "We just stayed with it and found a way."

4. Reason behind no draws for Dubois

For the second consecutive game, center Pierre-Luc Dubois did not take a faceoff. On Monday morning, he confirmed to The Athletic what some had suspected.

"I want to take face-offs but health-wise, I can't right now," said Dubois, who did not reveal the nature of the ailment.

Whatever is hindering the third-year pro isn't impacting other parts of his game. He scored his team-leading fourth goal in the first period with a power move coming out of the corner against Matthews. He also registered five shots.

Dubois nearly ended the contest in the opening seconds of overtime but was denied on a breakaway.

"He's just playing with a ton of confidence with the puck," Tortorella said. "He thinks he can beat people and he's doing that and also making some good plays along the way."

5. Wennberg's run of redemption continues

This stat stopped me cold. Wennberg's third-period goal gave him two in nine games — equaling his scoring output from all of last season.

It's ridiculously early, but the Swede looks like a more competitive and relaxed player than in the past two seasons.

Nyquist's penalty shot was set up by a defensive-zone steal from Wennberg, who skated up the ice and fed his fellow countryman with a pass.

"I'm happy for him because he's gone through a lot of hell here with me . . . as far as losing ice time, being benched," Tortorella said. "All that. He's shown a tremendous amount of mental toughness here. He's basically saying, 'I don't want to talk any more. I just want to show you I can play.'"

Wennberg agreed with Tortorella's assessment.

"There's no point to talk about last year," he said. "I don't see any point in it at all, to be honest. It's a new season right now. New opportunities. New linemates."

6. Korpisalo sparkles again

Monday marked the first time I've covered a Blue Jackets' game this season and what stood out was how calm Joonas Korpisalo looked in goal. He played a quiet game against a quality opponent.

He wasn't overworked in the contest's second half, but he gave the Blue Jackets terrific play early as the Maple Leafs used their speed and capitalized on Columbus' mistakes.

KORPISALO IMPRESSIVE EARLY AGAINST TORONTO'S PP. #CBJ PIC.TWITTER.COM/UDRAUOEHXQ

— ALISON (@ALISONL) OCTOBER 21, 2019

Tortorella was asked how Korpisalo has handled critics who think the Blue Jackets are bound to a significant step back without Sergei Bobrovsky.

"He's a guy who doesn't pay attention to what the pundits are saying," Tortorella said. "The whole team is that way. We're supposed to suck this year. We're going to worry about our own business and just take it a day at a time."

Korpisalo is 4-2-1 in his first seven starts.

7. Anderson helps with identity

Josh Anderson returned to the lineup after missing the previous six games with what's believed to be a shoulder injury.

The wide-bodied winger, a native of Burlington, Ontario, wasn't at his best in front of 45 family members and friends, but that was to be expected given the layoff.

Anderson, playing on a line with Boone Jenner and Alexandre Texier, didn't register a shot on goal and missed the net with two other bids.

But his size and willingness to use it fits nicely with the way Tortorella wants his team to play. Anderson's work along the wall and relentless forechecking are even more imperative in the post-Artemi Panarin era.

"We have to take time and space (away)," the coach said. "When you're concentrating on taking time and space, body comes into play. So, we're still talking about that. We still want to bang. It's just you can't go out there looking for things and overrun a guy, with the quickness that's on the blue line now — where they just beat you up the ice and cause the odd-man rushes."

Defenseman Ryan Murray (upper body) also returned to the lineup after a one-game absence. He had three shots.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

8. Back in three-on-three win column

The Blue Jackets required extra time for a third consecutive game. Every win is important, but stopping a two-game slide in three-on-three play has some added significance.

The club misses Panarin in many facets. He's a dynamic performer, and rarely was his arsenal of weapons better displayed than in overtime. If he wasn't scoring goals, he was creating more space for teammates as defenders reflexively were drawn to him.

The Blue Jackets won eight of 14 games that went past regulation last season and two others in shootouts. Those additional 10 points played a big part in qualifying for the postseason.

In losses to the Blackhawks and the Islanders, it was hard not to recall Panarin always being on the ice for the first shift — and usually overextending it.

The Blue Jackets earned the extra point Monday night, outplaying the Leafs and outshooting them 4-0 in the 1:57 of OT. It should provide a boost of confidence for the next round of three-on-three play.

Analytically speaking

The Athletic's hockey data dynamo Alison Lukan provided these insights into the Blue Jackets' overtime win:

These kinds of games are always interesting to look at by the numbers. Toronto controlled the pace of play and, when adjusted for score and venue, generated more shots than the Blue Jackets (50.86 percent). But when the visiting team got opportunity, it made more of it in terms of quality. Columbus earned 55.78 percent of five-on-five scoring chances.

The Blue Jackets also gained the edge in terms of shot quality. According to MoneyPuck.com, Columbus had a 3.14-to-2.2 advantage in expected-goal totals. The player with the biggest individual contribution? Alexander Wennberg. His solo expected-goal total was .97, and the shot he took off Werenski's rebound had an 87.1 percent chance of becoming a goal.

Wennberg and his line also spent the most time matched up against the line of Auston Matthews, William Nylander and Andreas Johnsson. Wennberg's trio was able to maintain an overall shot advantage (plus-2) and a slight scoring chance advantage (plus-1).

It was a good game for Nick Foligno. The captain had the highest game score of any player from either team (2.88), and in addition to the stats on the scoresheet (four takeaways, two assists), he was also tied with Nyquist for the lead among all Columbus skaters in shot share (60.87 percent), and helped drive the Jackets to their best shot quality advantage (81.54 percent of expected goals) when on the ice.

After missing one game, Ryan Murray had a strong outing against Toronto. He led the team in five-on-five ice time (17:00) and also led in individual shot attempts (6), and scoring chances (4).

Data via MoneyPuck.com, Evolving-Hockey.com, NaturalStatTrick.com, and reflects score and venue adjusted 5-on-5 play unless otherwise stated.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158065 Chicago Blackhawks

3 takeaways from the Blackhawks' 5-3 loss to the Capitals, including a 'deflating' miscue on the power play

By PHIL THOMPSON CHICAGO TRIBUNE | OCT 21, 2019 | 9:13 AM

The Blackhawks were both proud and frustrated after a 5-3 loss Sunday to the Capitals. They got off 44 shots against a team that allows the fifth-fewest per game but couldn't quite connect on multiple opportunities.

"I always felt like it was a matter of time before we came through and finished," coach Jeremy Colliton said. "We have some guys who can put the puck in the net. They've got some guys who can finish too. They don't need much. They didn't need much."

Here are three takeaways from the loss.

1. Top prospect Kirby Dach held his own.

At 18 years and 272 days, the No. 3 pick in the 2019 draft became the youngest Blackhawk to make his debut since Steve McCarthy on Oct. 4, 1999 (18 years, 243 days). Dach centered the first line Sunday with Patrick Kane — who made his Hawks debut in 2007 at 18 years, 319 days — and Dylan Strome.

"It was pretty cool," Dach said. "Obviously grew up watching Kaner play and how successful he's been in his career, and Strome is coming into his own way and how good of a player he is. They made it easy to play with those guys."

Kane said, "There's some chemistry to be built there, so I think we can even be better."

Colliton wouldn't say if Dach would get another look Tuesday against the Golden Knights: "That's something we'll talk about. He didn't hurt himself tonight."

However, Colliton liked the look of his centers with Dach plugged in and Strome playing wing.

"Dach can do a really good job for us," he said. "Maybe it frees up Strome to have a little more pressure on the puck up ice, make a few plays. Last year he had a stretch with (Artem) Anisimov where he kind of shared the center role, and I thought that helped him at times. It's an option."

Still, the Hawks have to weigh whether the positive domino effect on the lines merits playing Dach more than nine games and burning a year on his entry-level contract.

2. The bottom six had some top-notch moments.

Colliton singled out the third line of Dominik Kubalik, David Kampf and Brandon Saad, who had a team-leading Corsi percentage of 71%.

"Turned the game for us," Colliton said. "We were playing well, but they just took it to another level. Not only did they score (on Kubalik's third-period goal off a rebound), but it was an explosive shift there."

Kane agreed: "I thought that Kampf line was really good again. They had a lot of chances, a lot of sustained

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

pressure. A lot of the other lines — well, at least our top two lines — can take a lot from that,” such as doing a better job tracking down pucks.

Colliton moved Drake Caggiula to the fourth line with Ryan Carpenter and Alex Nylander.

“They gave us a lot of positive shifts,” Colliton said. “Scored a big goal (in the second) for us; two big goals, really. Very valuable.”

Kubalik had 10 shots on goal, and Nylander assisted on two goals, perhaps making the case for more ice time.

“You can say that for a lot of guys,” Colliton said. “Nylander has been excellent. Kubalik’s been excellent, Carpenter (who got his third assist of the season on Caggiula’s goal) up and down. Now Dach steps in and is really good.

“That is really good for our team, competition, and there’s nothing wrong with everyone probably deserving a little bit more (time) because that means we have depth and we’re going to be hard to play against.”

3. The power play and ‘bad bounces’ have been a problem.

The Hawks, 22nd in power-play percentage (16.7%), came up empty on their five man-advantages.

During a second-period power play, Alex DeBrincat’s stick snapped on a would-be goal, and soon afterward Kane fumbled a cross-ice pass and the Capitals’ Carl Hagelin took the gift, raced down the ice and set up Nic Dowd for a short-handed goal.

“Would’ve been nice to cash in on the power play; obviously bad break on the first one,” Kane said. “DeBrincat probably buries that if his stick doesn’t break, and then of course we catch a bad bounce and they score, but I think the power play can be better for us.”

Caggiula added: “You try not to let it, but anytime you give up a short-handed goal, it can be deflating. We had a few mental lapses today which cost us in the end and gave up some goals, but overall we played a pretty good 60-minute game and this was probably the best game we’ve played all year so far.”

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1158066 Chicago Blackhawks

Connor Murphy settles in as Duncan Keith’s partner on Blackhawks’ top pair

Murphy and Keith have been together for four games now, with very solid results.

By Ben Pope Oct 21, 2019, 6:55am CDT

Connor Murphy and Duncan Keith have emerged as the Blackhawks’ clear top-pairing defensemen this season.

Defensemen Connor Murphy and Duncan Keith had played just one career game together — in February 2018 — before

coach Jeremy Colliton elevated them to the top pairing a week ago.

Thanks to an eternity as locker-room and bench-seating partners, however, the pair has meshed seamlessly.

“I like to just mess with Duncs from time to time when I can, and he’s good at getting on me for things,” Murphy said. “When you sit next to each other, you end up talking a lot during the game about each period, and we’ll just go back and forth and small talk.”

Murphy and Keith, 10 years his elder, were first united this season against the Jets and have stuck together in the four games since.

They’ve produced the best results of the three defensive pairs.

The slowpoke duo of Brent Seabrook and Olli Maatta owns horrific possession numbers, while the makeshift third pairing of Erik Gustafsson and Calvin de Haan lacks a clear identity. But Murphy and Keith actually have lived up to their top-pairing status. They’ve been on the ice for more Hawks shot attempts than opponent shot attempts, something not many players on this team can claim.

“They’ve been good, really good,” Colliton said. “They’ve found a way to get out of ‘D’ zone, which has really helped our group, because typically they’re playing against the other team’s top line.

“They’ve been under control with the puck — that’s the biggest thing. It’s fine to defend well, but then you’ve got to make a play to get out of the ‘D’ zone. Otherwise, you’re going to end up defending all night.”

Perhaps most impressive is that Murphy has played at least 22:56 in each of his first three games with Keith, something he did only twice in 52 appearances last season. He essentially leapt right from a short stint on injured reserve, which cost him the second half of training camp, into the most taxing role he ever has occupied.

That’s because Murphy’s defensive reliability and occasional physicality are more valued than ever before.

Whereas Gustafsson flourished offensively (but made some mistakes in his own end) alongside Keith on the top pairing much of last season, Murphy is a more natural fit now given the dialed-up focus on scoring-chance prevention.

“[I’m] thankful for . . . being able to play certain special teams and certain matchups,” Murphy said. “That’s what you want, especially as more of a defensive guy.”

His leadership skills also are receiving extra attention now.

“He’s got a lot of maturity about him, and you can tell he wants to get better, he wants to improve, and for everybody, that’s important,” Keith said. “He works hard off the ice every year and he’s committed to getting better, so I think that’s a big thing. He brings a lot of leadership, for a young guy especially.”

Murphy and Keith’s mutual admiration and strong rapport make for more than good quotes.

Colliton’s man-zone hybrid defensive system requires a tremendous amount of on-ice communication. And this pairing has it down pat.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

"There's not really a whole lot that needs to be said, but if there's the odd little play that he likes to make, then he'll tell me that tendency that he wants," Murphy said. "You can just have small little comments, and it goes a long way when the game's happening fast."

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158067 Chicago Blackhawks

Vegas Golden Knights take on the Chicago Blackhawks

By Associated Press

Vegas Golden Knights (6-4-0, third in the Pacific Division) vs. Chicago Blackhawks (2-3-1, sixth in the Central Division)

Chicago; Tuesday, 8:30 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: The Chicago Blackhawks host the Vegas Golden Knights.

Chicago finished 36-34-12 overall and 20-21-9 in Western Conference action during the 2018-19 season. The Blackhawks scored 267 total goals last season while collecting 463 assists.

Vegas went 43-32-7 overall and 28-19-3 in Western Conference action during the 2018-19 season. The Golden Knights averaged 3.2 penalties and 7.1 penalty minutes per game.

The matchup Tuesday is the first meeting of the season between the two teams.

Blackhawks Injuries: None listed.

Golden Knights Injuries: None listed.

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Daily Herald Times LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158068 Chicago Blackhawks

New Blackhawks center Carpenter ready to take on his Vegas 'brothers'

John Dietz

If there's one thing Ryan Carpenter hates, it's losing to his brother.

Doesn't matter if it's racquetball, tennis, golf or cards -- it stings, and it stings bad.

And that's why Tuesday's game against the Vegas Golden Knights is so important to the new Blackhawks forward.

"We better win," said Carpenter, who signed a three-year deal with the Hawks July 1 after spending most of the last two seasons playing for Vegas. "I have a little brother and I can't stand when I lose to him in anything.

"It's like I have a bunch of brothers on that team. So there's no friends on the ice when the puck drops."

2nd chance in Sin City

Carpenter's winding path to the most successful expansion franchise in pro sports history began when his older cousins got him interested in roller hockey at 5. Two years later, the ECHL's Orlando Solar Bears built a rink near Carpenter's home and the 7-year-old found himself on skates for the first time.

After two seasons in juniors, Carpenter attended Bowling Green State University and was eventually signed by the San Jose Sharks as an undrafted free agent.

He was 23 at the time, though, and spent most of the next three seasons playing for the Sharks' minor league team, racking up 44 goals and 84 assists in 194 AHL games.

Carpenter's big break came when he made the Sharks out of training camp in 2017. He had 1 assist in 16 games and was put on waivers in December.

A nerve-racking 24 hours followed for Carpenter and his wife, but their prayers were answered when Vegas GM George McPhee decided to put in a claim.

"We just prayed," Carpenter said. "God surprised us because we didn't know what was going to happen. I thought my chance in the NHL was done if I got sent to the minors. I don't know if I would have gotten called up again."

Suddenly, Carpenter was with the hottest and most surprising team in the league.

His first game with Vegas came in a 5-4 victory over the Blackhawks at the United Center Jan. 5, 2018. A month later he became a staple in the lineup, thanks to a red-hot stretch that included 9 goals in 20 games.

"The one thing that was good for me is no one was that established there," Carpenter said. "They got there in September and I got there in December, so everyone was just super welcoming.

"It was kind of a second chance opportunity for me. And that was the identity of the team -- everyone was getting a second chance."

Then came the playoffs.

And what a ride that was as Vegas eliminated the Kings, Sharks and Jets in an improbable and thrilling run to the Stanley Cup Final. The fairy tale ended when Washington lifted the Cup after five games, but it was an experience Carpenter will never forget.

"It's crazy when you get that close and lose," he said. "Any time you're on a winning team there's just a special bond with the guys when you win like that. It's a lot of fun."

Chicago bound

Carpenter scored 5 goals in 68 games with Vegas last season and was a healthy scratch during a first-round playoff series against San Jose that the Sharks claimed in seven games.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

When the off-season rolled around, the 28-year-old father of two young boys was faced with the most important decision of his career. He ended up getting an offer from the Hawks -- a team that desperately needed a gritty forward who could win key faceoffs to help its putrid penalty kill -- and opted to sign a three-year, \$3 million contract.

"(You) want to pick an organization that you think has a good chance to win and does things the right way," Carpenter said. "That's what Chicago was for me."

It's only been six games, but Carpenter has already impressed in his role as a fourth-line center.

In addition to being responsible defensively, the 6-foot, 200-pound forward has flashed offensive ability on a couple of occasions. The most impressive move came when he stared down Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck on a 2-on-1, then threw a no-look pass to Brandon Saad that Saad buried for a short-handed goal in a 3-2 overtime loss last week.

Carpenter also registered assists in a win over the Oilers and during Sunday's 5-3 loss to Washington.

"A lot of guys at this level can make plays," Carpenter said when asked if he possesses a little more offensive ability than he's given credit for. "I mean when you develop in the minors you become a point guy and an offensive power play guy."

"Your role maybe changes in the NHL, but it's kind of a balance. You don't want to be too loose, but at the same time just be confident and willing to make plays and be aggressive. Don't be hesitant."

Winning pedigree

Carpenter's always played for winners as a pro.

All three of his AHL teams made the playoffs, with the 2016-17 San Jose Barracuda advancing to the Western Conference finals. Vegas, of course, went to the Cup Final in 2018 and lost that heartbreaking series to San Jose last April.

That's a five-year run of postseason hockey -- and Carpenter doesn't want it to end in 2020.

"Excited to be part of that kind of tradition and the high expectations in this organization," he said.

"Guys have tasted that success and been on the other side that I haven't been on. So hoping to get back in the playoffs and chase that Cup."

Ryan Carpenter's pro stats since 2014

2014-15, Worcester Sharks: 74 games, 12 goals, 22 assists, 34 points

2015-16, San Jose Barracuda: 66 games, 18-37--55

2015-16, San Jose Sharks: 1 game, 0-0--0

2016-17, San Jose Barracuda: 54 games, 14-25--39

2016-17, San Jose Sharks: 11 games, 2-2--4

2017-18, San Jose Sharks: 16 games, 0-1--1

2017-18, Vegas Golden Knights: 36 games, 9-5--14

2018-19, Vegas Golden Knights: 68 games, 5-13--18

2019-20, CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS: 6 games, 0-3--3

NHL totals: 138 games, 16-24--40

NOTE: Worcester and San Jose Barracuda were American Hockey League affiliates of San Jose

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158069 Chicago Blackhawks

Patrick Kane believes there's 'chemistry to be built' with Kirby Dach and Dylan Strome

By Charlie Roumeliotis October 21, 2019 1:30 PM

All eyes were on No. 3 overall pick Kirby Dach during Sunday's game as he made his NHL debut with the Blackhawks, but the story leading up to puck drop was where he was going to slot into the lineup.

Would he be broken in as a winger or were the Blackhawks going to slide him into his natural position at center? And if so, where? The answer to the first question was the latter and the second drew excitement among the fanbase when the team ran through line rushes during warmups.

Dach lined up as the second-line center with Patrick Kane at right wing and Dylan Strome moved over to left wing. That's a No. 3 overall pick (Dach) alongside another No. 3 overall pick (Strome) and a No. 1 overall pick (Kane), who's a three-time Stanley Cup champion and Hart Trophy winner.

When the three of them were on the ice together at 5-on-5 against Washington, they had eight shot attempts for and nine against and four scoring chances for and five against in 12:27 of ice time, according to Natural Stat Trick. Not great, but not terrible.

On paper, the trio has some real potential and it's enough for Kane to feel like this could be a line that sticks going forward.

"I thought he played well," Kane said of Dach's debut. "Did some noticeable things where he's hanging onto the puck, big body, he's obviously still a young kid. Pretty raw, but for his first game against a really good team, one of the better teams in the league, I thought he was noticeable, had some good shifts. I think there's some chemistry to be built there. I think we can even be better. Better with him, myself and Strome, we can be better for him."

Dach said after morning skate that he wasn't sure where he was going to fit into the lineup. But he found out shortly after and spoke after the game about what it was like playing with Kane and Strome.

"It was pretty cool," Dach said. "Obviously grew up watching Kane play and how successful he's been in his career and Strome is coming into his own way and how good of a player he is. They made it easy to play with those guys. It was fun. I enjoyed playing with them."

The Blackhawks return to action on Tuesday against the Vegas Golden Knights, one of the top teams in the Western

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Conference, and expect the Strome-Dach-Kane line to get another crack together as they look to strengthen their on-ice rapport.

"I look at his game, he's pretty responsible," coach Jeremy Colliton said of Dach. "He doesn't look like a centerman who is going to struggle in his own end. He looks like he knows what he's doing down there. It's not going to be perfect, but there's the opportunity for him to get a lot better really quickly. We'll see how it plays out."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158060 Calgary Flames

Flames' Rasmus Andersson talks a good game too

Wes Gilbertson

Rasmus Andersson insists that most of his trash-talking opponents should have an edge.

"It's my second language, right?"

The Calgary Flames' sophomore defenceman is getting plenty of practice.

Over the past year and change, Andersson has ascended from prospect to primetime. Now with 100 NHL games on his resume, one way you can tell the 22-year-old is feeling more and more comfortable at the big-league level is by how often you see his gums flapping.

This guy loves to chirp.

He won't deny it.

"If you're not really feeling it, you try to get into the game in another way. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't," Andersson reasoned. "And it's a fun thing to do, too. When someone gets mad at you or something like that, it's a fun thing. And it's part of the game, so I like to chirp and I like getting chirped. Because then I know, if they're chirping back, they're upset at me. The worst is when they don't say anything at all and they just look at you. It's fun when they start chirping you back a little bit."

It wasn't the biggest talking point on a night that teammate Milan Lucic was hitting the 900-game plateau, but Andersson marked a milestone of his own in Sunday's 2-1 victory against the Ducks in Anaheim, climbing into triple digits in games played on hockey's biggest stage.

It's fitting that No. 4 was skating alongside captain Mark Giordano for the special occasion, a top-pairing post that will sooner or later belong full-time to the young right-hander.

If Andersson remains in that slot for Tuesday's meeting with the Washington Capitals at the Saddledome (7 p.m., Sportsnet Flames/Sportsnet 960 The Fan), he'll be seeing a whole lot of left-winger Alex Ovechkin, one of the most prolific marksmen in league history.

"It's gone quick," Andersson said prior to logging his 100th career appearance in Sunday's road date with the Ducks at Honda Center. "It's one of those things, you're

proud of it and hopefully I can play a lot more games in this league.

"It's 82 games in a season and, honestly, it feels like you just play every night. You have to enjoy it and you have to have fun with it, and that's what I'm trying to do. When I get on the ice, I'm trying to play my game and play my game as best as possible."

His game, dating back to his days as an energetic and emotional young whipper-snapper in Malmo, Sweden, has typically included a willingness to exchange insults, an eagerness to fill the ear of one of his foes.

En route to emerging as a major building block at the Saddledome, Andersson immediately impressed with his puck-poise and calm-under-pressure demeanor.

As he's established himself, you're seeing his competitive edge on a more consistent basis.

In the late stages of Saturday's Hockey Night in Canada clash with the Los Angeles Kings, he had an animated conversation with veteran forward Kyle Clifford in the penalty box.

A few evenings earlier, he barely seemed to take a breath as he followed Philadelphia Flyers centre Scott Laughton back toward the benches after a closely-contested icing.

A hundred games is just a starting point for Andersson, who has so far notched three goals and 18 assists, served 33 penalty minutes and been credited with 58 hits in NHL action.

You're going to see a lot more of this guy.

Opponents are going to hear a lot more from him.

Bring on the banter.

"If you're going to chirp, you just have to be able to handle it back," said Andersson, who is second among Flames' back-enders with 21 shots on goal this season. "I just keep hearing the same stuff, so it's whatever. And when you know you have someone, it's the best thing. When you know they're really upset with you and the next shift, they just try to kill you and they take a stupid penalty . . . I love that.

"It's a way for me to get more engaged in the game. But it's a fine line, too. You don't really want to chirp a guy who's sleeping that night and wake him up type of thing. So some guys, you just have to leave.

"You just have to know who you can chirp and who you can't."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158061 Calgary Flames

Game Day: Capitals at Flames

Kristen Anderson, Postmedia

TUESDAY

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Washington Capitals (6-2-2) at Calgary Flames (5-4-1)

7 p.m. MT, Scotiabank Saddledome, Sportsnet Flames, Sportsnet 960 The Fan

THE BIG MATCHUP

Flames LW Matthew Tkachuk vs. Capitals RW Tom Wilson

This feels like a natural clashing of two difference-makers. Matthew Tkachuk is a fire-starter for the Flames and so is Tom Wilson for the Capitals. Both play with passion. Both play with a bit of a snarky edge. Both are on a collision course to clash against each other.

FIVE STORYLINES FOR THE GAME

STAY OUTTA THE BOX

The Flames currently lead the league with 50 penalties taken this year and take an average of 12:11 penalty minutes per game. That is not a statistic that Bill Peters is proud of. "A lot of stick fouls," the Flames head coach said after his team took another three infractions in Monday's 2-1 win over the Anaheim Ducks. "That means you're not moving your feet, or you don't have body positioning, or you lose body positioning and you're not able or willing or confident enough to just put your stick down and put your head down and move your legs and get back. So we have to get that cleaned up."

LINEUP CHANGES?

With some uncertainty surrounding the availability of Sam Bennett, Tuesday's lines are up in the air. Flames head coach Bill Peters said that he expected LW Andrew Mangiapane to return to the lineup when the Flames return to Calgary. Mangiapane missed the last two games with an upper-body injury after he collided into the boards during their game against Detroit. In the wake of those injuries, Calgary recalled Alan Quine on Sunday, who drew into the Flames' 2-1 win over the Ducks. To facilitate the call-up — and to stay compliant within the NHL's cap — the Flames dispatched Oliver Kylington to the minors as a temporary move.

ABOUT THE CAPITALS

Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin netted his 729th career NHL goal on Sunday in Washington's 5-3 win over the Chicago Blackhawks. With the marker, the 34-year-old passed Teemu Selanne (728) to move into 11th on the NHL's all-time goalscorers list . . . On Monday, D John Carlson was named the NHL's second star of the week ending Oct. 20. Carlson is off to a torrid pace with three goals and 15 assists through 10 games. He is two points away from becoming the fourth d-man in NHL history to register 20 points in the month of October. He would join Paul Coffey (1981, seven goals and 13 assists in 13 games), Al MacInnis (1988, eight goals and 17 assists in 13 games) and Brian Leetch (1990, five goals and 16 assists in 14 games). Carlson is on a seven-game point streak.

HATHAWAY RETURNS

It'll be a reunion of sorts as Garnet Hathaway returns to the Scotiabank Saddledome to face his former team for the first time since joining the Capitals as a free agent this past summer. The depth winger, sandpaper forward and superb penalty killer inked a four-year deal with the 2018 Stanley Cup champions that sees him paid \$1.5-million per season. Hathaway has two goals and three assists through 10

games this season. The Kennebunkport, Maine, native has logged 185 NHL games — and 175 have them were with the Flames, who inked him out of Brown University in 2014.

THIS N' THAT

The Flames have a two-game homestand this week, starting with Tuesday's clash. Next, it's the Florida Panthers on Thursday (7 p.m. MT, Sportsnet West, Sportsnet 960 The Fan). Then it's a string of five road games for the Flames, who head to Regina for the 2019 Heritage Classic at Mosaic Stadium against the Winnipeg Jets . . . Part of that road trip is a stop in Washington on Nov. 3 . . . Last year, the Capitals beat the Flames in both meetings — a 4-3 shootout win on Oct. 27, 2018 at Scotiabank Saddledome and a 4-3 win on Washington on Feb. 1 . . . the Flames have a 3-1-0 record at home.

FLAMES LINEUP

Forwards

Johnny Gaudreau — Sean Monahan — Elias Lindholm

Matthew Tkachuk — Mikael Backlund — Michael Frolik

Milan Lucic — Derek Ryan — Tobias Rieder

Andrew Mangiapane — Mark Jankowski — Austin Czarnik

Defence

Mark Giordano — Rasmus Andersson

Noah Hanifin — Travis Hamonic

TJ Brodie — Michael Stone

Goaltenders

David Rittich

Cam Talbot

CAPITALS LINEUP

Forwards

Alexander Ovechkin — Nicklas Backstrom — T.J. Oshie

Carl Hagelin — Evgeny Kuznetsov — Tom Wilson

Jakub Vrana — Lars Eller — Garnet Hathaway

Brendan Leipsic — Nic Dowd — Chandler Stephenson

Defence

Michal Kempny — John Carlson

Dimitry Orlov — Nick Jensen

Jonas Siegenthaler — Radko Gudas

Goaltenders

Braden Holtby

Ilya Samsonov

INJURIES

Capitals — RW Richard Panik (upper body)

Flames — LW Sam Bennett (undisclosed), D Juuso Valimaki (knee)

SPECIAL TEAMS (before Monday's action)

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Power play

Capitals: 27% (10-for-37, 8th)

Flames: 15.6% (five-for-32, 23rd)

Penalty kill

Capitals: 85.7% (T-22nd)

Flames: 87.5% (27th)

— Kristen Anderson

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158062 Calgary Flames

8 changes the scuffling Calgary Flames need to consider right now

By Darren Haynes Oct 21, 2019

Pressure off. Temporarily.

Amazing how a rare win in the unfriendly confines of the Honda Center can make you forget about all your worries. At least for one night.

Dating back to April 2004, Sunday night's 2-1 victory was just the second time in the last 30 visits to SoCal that the Flames have snatched two points from Anaheim.

World's happiest place? Pfft. That's never been the case for this organization, whose road record against the Ducks going back to March 1999 — when they were the Mighty Ducks — is 3-27-10. Oof.

But while fists were pumping after handing the upstart Ducks their first home-ice loss of the season, the reason fists were clenched in the first place was the shoddy showing 24 hours earlier in Los Angeles when Calgary was embarrassed by the Kings.

Saturday night's could-have-been-much-worse 4-1 drubbing came exactly one week after another dud of a road effort in getting run out of the rink 6-2 by Vegas.

Look past the latest reapplication of lipstick and on the whole, this season has not been pretty. Ten games in and there's plenty to be concerned about.

It's not that a 5-4-1 start is going to lead to their demise — there's still 72 games remaining. Plenty of times over the Flames' 40 years of underachieving in Calgary, that type of record would have been graciously accepted.

But mediocrity — and that's what it is when you have as many losses as wins — is not nearly good enough for a team that last year won the Pacific Division, won the Western Conference and was runner-up to the Tampa Bay Lightning for the Presidents' Trophy.

For a club that spent all summer, and all September, saying all the right things — about having learned a lesson last spring when the Colorado Avalanche kicked them out of the NHL's postseason dance about 30 seconds into Stairway to

Heaven — we've yet to see proof that the Flames are better equipped to handle and thrive in the rigours of the postseason.

As the scuffling continues, maybe some shuffling is needed. Here are eight changes to consider:

1. Escape salary-cap jail

Priority No. 1 for general manager Brad Treliving has to be finding a way to shave some money off the payroll, because playing with a shortened roster this early in the season is not good.

This team is operating so tight to the salary cap that when Andrew Mangiapane didn't accompany the team on the weekend road trip after being shaken up on Thursday, the club travelled with just 12 forwards. Calling up an extra from the minors is typically automatic in these situations. Well, not when you're dealing with an empty piggy bank.

Then they lose Sam Bennett to an injury on Saturday and in order to replace him and still dress 12 forwards, the Flames had to temporarily ship defenceman Oliver Kyllington to the minors, the 22-year-old Swede carrying the distinction of being the only player Calgary could send down without clearing waivers. Of course, now the team is left with only six defencemen, which is equally bad.

As there are more injuries, it's hard to imagine this kind of roster juggling being sustainable. How soon before they'll have to resort to playing a body or two short like Darryl Sutter had to do several years ago? Will there be pressure on injured players to play anyway? That's a huge risk with well over five months of regular season still to go.

Three candidates to go:

Mark Jankowski (\$1.675M): Thought to be part of the nixed Nazem Kadri deal in the summer, the 2012 first-rounder's ability to play on the penalty kill, along with his physical attributes, should garner interest. He'll be an RFA on July 1.

Michael Frolik (\$4.3M): Nobody bounces between the top six and the bottom six more often than Frolik. As a second liner, nicely complementing Mikael Backlund and Matthew Tkachuk, he's an important piece. When he's on the fourth line, he's an easy guy to move and replace with a far cheaper option. He'll be a UFA on July 1.

TJ Brodie (\$4.65M): His best years behind him, similar to Frolik, he finds himself bouncing between the top pairing and the third pairing regularly. His skating and offensive abilities are alluring, but his penchant for giving away the puck or getting beat to the outside has been costly. He'll be a UFA on July 1.

If you're moving Jankowski, it would be the whole contract. With Frolik or Brodie, Treliving should be open to retaining up to half of their AAV as teams are permitted to do, if it means a better return (e.g., slightly higher draft pick) and/or increasing the number of teams who can fit them into their own salary cap situation.

Make no mistake, Frolik and Brodie are established veterans who make your team better. But if their presence is hurting your team in other areas by limiting call-ups, etc., that changes the dynamics.

2. Infuse fresh blood into the lineup

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

One constant with the Flames year after year has been at least one rookie in the lineup — some wide-eyed, fuzzy-cheeked youngster, soaking up his first season in the NHL. From the new arenas and new experiences to travelling on the charter, there's a youthful exuberance that comes with first-time NHLers, and when you talk to veteran players, they'll tell you that it can be infectious and can rub off on their own game.

For the first time in a long time, there are no rookies in the lineup this season. None. Look back over the last seven years and you can see how unusual that is.

Games played by rookies

2019-20 — 0

2018-19 — 214 (Andersson 79, Mangiapane 44, Kylington 38)

2017-18 — 136 (Jankowski 72, Rittich 21)

2016-17 — 134 (Tkachuk 76, Hathaway 26)

2015-16 — 139 (Bennett 77)

2014-15 — 235 (Gaudreau 80, Jooris 60, Granlund 48, Ferland 26)

2013-14 — 273 (Colborne 80, Monahan 75, Baertschi 26)

If that's the spark that the team is missing, the good news is they have a player in Stockton (AHL) who fits the bill in Dillon Dube — and he's legit. Dube started last season in the NHL at age 20, but eventually got demoted to get more ice time; he is still classified as a rookie. After being held off the scoresheet in his first two games with the Heat, he's had six assists in the last four games.

The other injection of energy into a lineup can come from older players, toiling in the minors, who have played in the NHL and feel they still should be in the NHL. Enter Alan Quine, who began this season with 97 NHL games and 251 games in the minors. There's no complacency with him, and Sunday night was a great example. Quine drew in, played on the fourth line with Mark Jankowski and Tobias Rieder, and they were effective. Zac Rinaldo, with 351 career NHL games, is another call-up candidate you know would bring high energy and a thick dose of physicality if he got the chance.

3. Promote Matthew Tkachuk to the top line

Elevating Matthew Tkachuk to the No. 1 line is something Peters had spent much time this summer contemplating. He alluded to his desire to try such an experiment during training camp. But with Tkachuk's late signing, it was too late in the preseason to be trying something so radical when the focus was on being ready to start the season.

But 10 games have passed, and the Michael Stone goal on Sunday, set up Johnny Gaudreau, is the only even-strength goal Calgary's No. 1 line has produced in the last four games (and just the third in the last seven games). Maybe it's time for that experiment to begin — and not just for one period.

After a decent start, Sean Monahan and Gaudreau, in particular, have struggled. It's looked like shades of last April against the Avs. What Tkachuk does when he's on the ice with you is drag you into battle, like it or not, and perhaps that forced emotional investment is what they need. With

Tkachuk's under-appreciated abilities as a playmaker and goal scorer, it's not like you're compromising skill in removing Lindholm from that unit.

Monahan was as surly as I've ever seen him on Sunday, and perhaps that was just a dress rehearsal of what's soon to come.

4. Move Elias Lindholm to centre

The next question, after you slide Tkachuk into Lindholm's spot, is where does that leave the 24-year Swede, who leads the club with five goals? Well, there are plenty of options. He's got a skill set that would fit nicely on a shut-down line, or he could help formulate a second scoring line. Again, going back to the well of ideas Peters has mentioned he'd like to try, maybe this is the opportunity to slot Lindholm at centre.

What a different look it would be — and what depth it would boast — if Calgary's top three centres were Monahan, Backlund and Lindholm. In this scenario, rather than a top six/bottom six, you'd view the Flames forward group as top line, middle six, and fourth line. With that second and third line, in whatever order you want to number them, you're basically load-balancing them. Backlund centering one line, Lindholm the other. Potential configurations could be:

Gaudreau – Monahan – Tkachuk

Mangiapane – Backlund – Ryan

Bennett – Lindholm – Frolik

Lucic – Jankowski – Czarnik

Or better yet, building on point No. 2 above, call up Dube and insert him straight onto the third line to form a trio of Dube – Lindholm – Bennett.

5. Play Cam Talbot more

Here's what we need to get past — and by we, I mean the media, the fans and the player himself: It's not an indictment on David Rittich if he gets a night off or an extra day of rest. That's just smart managing of a goalie, whose workload is on pace to be a career high. He already made a big jump last year going from 16 NHL starts to 42 last year. This year he's on pace for 66 starts.

You've got a guy in Talbot who, as witnessed on Sunday night in his 29-save performance against Anaheim, is more than capable of providing the Flames with solid goaltending.

After how last Saturday went, when it came to a road building for the third start in five games, I was actually surprised Peters went right back to Rittich again this Saturday with the team facing a back-to-back. Give Rittich the extra day. Sticking your backup goalie with the more tired lineup might be one of the dumbest unwritten rules/traditions in hockey.

Seven times in his career, Rittich has played three games in five days. While there are lots of variables involved — including calibre of opponent — for what it's worth, that third game has resulted in a significant drop-off in performance.

Feb. 17, 2018 — After splitting games in Boston and Nashville, stopping 64 of 71 shots, he started at home versus Florida and gave up 4 goals on 15 shots and was pulled early in the second period. He took the loss.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Nov. 21, 2018 — After back-to-back wins versus Edmonton and Vegas, stopping 44 of 48 shots, he played at home versus Winnipeg and stopped 37 of 40 in a win.

Dec. 18, 2018 — After back-to-back (on consecutive nights) wins in Minnesota and St. Louis, stopping 60 of 63 shots, he played in Dallas two nights later and stopped 26 of 28 in a loss.

Dec. 31, 2018 — After a win and OT loss in Winnipeg and Vancouver, turning aside 59 of 63 shots, he played versus San Jose and won, despite giving up five goals on 33 shots.

Jan. 9, 2019 — After wins on the road in Philadelphia and Chicago, in which he kicked out 64 of 69 shots, he returned home and stopped 32 of 35 in a win over Colorado.

Oct. 12, 2019 — After stopping 70 of 76 in games versus LA and Detroit, he stopped 24 of 30 shots versus Vegas in a 6-2 loss.

Oct. 19, 2019 — After stopping 48 of 50 in back-to-back home games, he gave up 4 goals on 28 shots at LA. He took the loss.

Add it all up and he owns a .930 save percentage in the first two games of a three-starts-in-five-games stretch. In that third game, his save percentage plummets to .871.

You have a capable goaltender in Cam Talbot who is only a couple years removed from when he started 67 games for the Edmonton Oilers. Use him.

6. Overhaul the second power-play unit

Imagine being on the power play for an entire period and not scoring. Well, that's essentially what has happened with the Flames' second power play. T.J. Brodie, Rasmus Andersson and Milan Lucic have all accumulated 20-plus minutes of time on the man advantage with nothing to show for it. Sam Bennett and Mikael Backlund have been the two next most commonly used players, with Derek Ryan and Austin Czarnik factoring in also.

Time to try something different — and by different, maybe that's what's been working for the first power play, which is a configuration of one defenceman and four forwards. Currently, PP2 has two defencemen and three forwards.

In such a scenario, I keep Andersson as the quarterback. He's got a heavy shot and is a good puck mover. He may not have the same speed as Brodie as he heads up ice, but you can't have everything. You gladly take the other two qualities, and transitioning the puck up-ice will be a responsibility that falls upon a couple of the forwards.

Bennett can stay; I'd suggest it's the optimal game situation to use Czarnik and his skill. Andrew Mangiapane needs to be on this unit, too. Derek Ryan would be my other option. That gives you two righties and two lefties up front. Then Andersson with a right-shot at the blueline.

The net front presence role of Milan Lucic is something I'd still try on occasion, just to provide another different look, but I'm not sure he has the hands to be a regular power-play contributor at this point.

For Andersson, it's a reward and a deserved one, too. He is one of the few guys who's been visibly angry that things are going so poorly. More Andersson is the answer, not less.

7. Increase Andrew Mangiapane's role

Not an option this weekend due to his injury Thursday night against Detroit, but good things seem to happen when Mangiapane is on the ice, so he needs to be on the ice more.

Opening night, he begins on the fourth line. He gets promoted to the third line and they produce a goal. Game 3 versus LA, he starts out on the third line, but after a dismal first period, Peters hits puree on the blender and when it stops, Mangiapane has been promoted to the second line. With him on the wing, that line scores twice in the second, and they were instrumental in the Flames overcoming a 3-0 deficit to get an overtime loss.

On Tuesday versus Philadelphia, Peters tries Mangiapane, Ryan and Bennett for the first time and they produce two great chances in succession early in the first; Mangiapane is robbed on the first one. On his next shift, he converts.

As mentioned, it's time to fast-forward the development process and get him on the power play, too. Typically there is this thing, like we saw with Andersson last year, where guys need to earn their PP stripes when they first come up from the minors. I'm not arguing the merits of that as a general best practice, but another best practice is putting guys in situations in which they can best succeed. That's always been an offensive role for Mangiapane.

It's why when he turned pro, they didn't go down the traditional path of taking the twice 100-point scorer in the OHL and using him in a checking role in the AHL. Instead, assistant GM Brad Pascall, who oversees Stockton's operations, brought in some solid offensive AHL veterans in Linden Vey and Matt Frattin and that's how Ryan Huska deployed him from the outset, on a scoring line, because that's what the club projected him to be, if he was to be in the NHL. Well, he's here now, so it's time for him to log some power-play minutes, too. He's like a dog on a bone in puck battles along the boards, and those puck retrieval skills will serve him well in that manpower situation.

8. Stop looking at the out-of-town scoreboard

Whether anyone in the organization will admit it or not, there's no doubt the hot start by Edmonton is magnifying the pressure on the Flames.

I mean, how can it not be. Not only is this your longtime provincial rival, not only is this a team that finished 28 points behind Calgary a year ago, it's also a team being led in part by two castoffs from last year's Flames in right winger James Neal (tied for the league lead with 9 goals) and goaltender Mike Smith (3-1-1 record, .930 save percentage).

Don't get hung up on what the Oilers are doing. It's just distracting noise at this point. You have five games to come with Edmonton, the first of which is still over two months away. The four-point gap between the two clubs could be long gone by then if you can find your own game. That's where the focus must be.

More than any other factor, the Flames' fortunes will turn around if they can make Sunday's effort in Anaheim the gold standard moving forward.

Duplicate that level of engagement, commitment and resolve — Monahan, as feisty as I've ever seen him, being the poster child for this — and the pieces are in place for this club to get on a roll.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Time to walk the talk and start racking up victories. The bar of expectations has been raised by fans. Time for the club to do the same.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158186 Websites

The Athletic / DGB weekend power rankings: Every slow starter wants to be this year's Blues. What if you're already worse?

By Sean McIndoe Oct 21, 2019

When can we look at the standings and say, with some reasonable degree of confidence, that a given team is going to be good or bad? Or more specifically, that their 2019-20 season is going to be good or bad, regardless of what their true talent might look like?

When it comes to the good side of the spectrum, we run into some obvious problems. Injuries, for one. Take any team in the modern salary cap era, then have an injury take their starting goaltender away. They'll get worse very quickly, and probably a lot worse. The same is often true for their best skater. With maybe a handful of exceptions, even the very best teams are a torn ACL away from seeing it all crumble.

And of course, we know that even the most uninspiring teams can get hot for a few weeks – remember last year's Sabres, or the 2016-17 Flyers, both of whom won ten straight during the season. Were they good? For a few weeks, sure, but not beyond that. When it comes to definitively slapping an "elite" label on a team, we can all agree that we need to see more than a few weeks. Sorry, Oilers, Sabres and Ducks.

But what about the bad teams? If a team looks terrible right out of the gate, how long before we can write them off? October? November?

It's tempting to say that the answer is "never," or at least, "not until the second half," and we all know why. Last year's Blues won the Stanley Cup despite an awful start. In fact, as you've no doubt read roughly a hundred times by now, they were dead last in the entire league last January. If they can come all the way back from that, anyone can, right?

Well, maybe. But here's the dirty little secret of last year's Blues that rarely gets talked about. (Lowers voice and looks around nervously for the narrative police.) They weren't that bad.

I mean, they were bad. I had them pegged as one of the league's five worst teams in this very column, more than once. But after they turned things around, emerged as contenders and eventually won the Cup, just the tiniest bit of revisionist history has kicked in over just how bad the Blues' first half really was. For example, that stat about them being dead last? It's true – they were indeed dead last on the morning of January 3. But only in total points, with 34, and largely because they'd played just 37 games. That same

day, the Kings had 35 points in 41 games. So did the Senators. The Hawks had 36 points in 42, the Flyers had 35 in 39, the Coyotes had 36 in 40 and the Wings had 37 in 42. In terms of points percentage, the Blues were ahead of all of them. Even at their lowest point, the Blues were arguably better than six other teams, based purely on their record.

Let's look at it another way. Because this stupid league has a stupid rule that gives out a stupid loser point for overtime and shootout losses, we can't just rely on wins and losses anymore. So let's look at points percentage. Guess how many games below .500 last year's Blues got at their very worst. The answer: four. They were 8-12-3 in late November and 9-13-4 in early December. That was it. As much as you've heard about the terrible first-half, the Blues were never more than a four-game win streak from getting back to .500. That's still a decent gap, and .500 doesn't even get you into the playoffs, but at least you can tell yourself that you're just one good week away from being back on even ground.

Meanwhile, the Dallas Stars and Minnesota Wild have both been five games or more under .500 already, not even three weeks into the season. So if you're pointing at the Blues and saying "you never know" because you're a fan and/or the coach of one of those teams, well, know that you've already dug yourself into a hole that's deeper than the Blues' lowest point last year. Just three weeks in. (And the Senators could join them tonight.)

Does that mean we can write those teams off? No. We've seen teams get off to truly terrible starts and still have time to recover. But it's rare – in terms of a truly awful first few weeks that were followed by a strong recovery, it's basically the 2015-16 Ducks and then you have to go back to the pre-Cup era. The Stars and Wild and Senators aren't done yet, or even any time soon. But they're closer than you might think.

Well, that was depressing. Let's brighten the mood by talking about the good teams.

Road to the Cup

The five teams that look like they're headed towards a summer of keg stands and fountain pool parties.

Worth reading if you missed it over the weekend: The story of Erik and Melinda Karlsson welcoming their newborn daughter into the world.

5. Carolina Hurricanes (6-3-0, +4 true goals differential*) – They've come back to earth a bit, losing three of four and putting up some uninspiring performances during their west coast trip. They've got nearly a week off to get right; we won't seem them again until Thursday.

In the meantime, check out this interesting interview with Hurricanes' VP of Strategy Eric Tulsy.

4. Vegas Golden Knights (6-3-0, +10) – They've won four of five, including an impressive road shutout over the red-hot Penguins on Saturday. Now about all that cheating ...

Also, this was cool:

MARC-ANDRE FLEURY HAVING FUN WITH ALL HIS OLD PENGUINS FRIENDS IN WARMUPS
PIC.TWITTER.COM/E6JWSFFEYI

— BRADY TRETTENERO (@BRADYTRETT) OCTOBER 20, 2019

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

3. Boston Bruins (5-1-2, +5) – They dropped an overtime decision to the Leafs on Saturday in what was the first of a home-and-home ... kind of. The Bruins get a few days off before hosting the Leafs tomorrow, while Toronto makes a stopover in Columbus for a game tonight. That's not really how this is supposed to work, but Boston will take it. After the Leafs, it's a few more days off before the Blues arrive for a Stanley Cup rematch on Saturday.

2. Colorado Avalanche (7-0-1, +14) – Random observation: This year's early schedule really seems to enjoy giving teams games against the reigning President Trophy-winning Lightning and reigning Stanley Cup champion Blues in the same week, even though they're in different conferences. We've seen it with Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal so far, and now it's the Avalanche's turn. They started well, smoking Tampa on Saturday, and they get the Blues tonight. If they flex again in that one, it's going to be tough to keep them out of the top spot. I'm guessing their fans think they should be there already.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (4-3-1, +1) – I'm sticking with them, but just barely. Again, to repeat the point we keep hammering away at every Monday, these rankings are meant as a long-term view, not just a snapshot of who's playing well right this second. That's why a team like the Avs can beat Tampa, but not take over their spot. Put simply, I still think the Lightning are the league's most likely 2020 Cup winner.

I'm not alone on that – Dom is with me, as well as several oddsmakers. But others have already bailed. Maybe you have too.

Either way, there can't be much argument about how the Lightning have played this year. They've been fine, with good games and bad games. They haven't been one of the five most impressive teams in the league based purely on their eight games so far. They're getting outshot, their penalty killing is bad and the goaltending has been shaky. They're also shooting the lights out, which means they have a PDO of 102.7, which isn't really what you want to see from a team that feels like it's underachieving. Put aside the narratives about whether they have to be different to win April; on a lot of nights, they haven't been playing well enough to win now.

But still ... they're the Lightning, right? They're stacked with offensive talent, so we should expect them to be shooting well, and I'm willing to bet that last year's Vezina winner gets back on track soon. As mediocre as their start has been, they already have a tight win over the Bruins and a blowout over the Maple Leafs. We should still be putting more stock in what we've seen from this team over the last few years than what's happened over a few weeks. But that won't last forever.

They've got a light week coming up, but one that features two stiff tests in the Penguins and Predators, before hitting a stretch of the schedule that looks easier than their start. Maybe that's when the turnaround starts and they justify this ranking. It would be nice because right now other teams aren't just knocking at the door, they're thinking about kicking it down.

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: St. Louis Blues – After two weeks, the Blues drop out of the top five for the first time this season.

If you're a Blues fan, you could make a reasonable objection to that: If we just finished saying that the Lightning get the benefit of the doubt when they've looked just OK, why shouldn't the Cup champs get the same courtesy? Both teams have nine points through eight games, so what's the deal?

It's a fair point. My answer would be twofold. First, I think the Lightning are a better team than the Blues, despite last year's playoff results. And second, while Tampa has looked mediocre, the Blues have been downright bad at times. They've lost four straight. Their underlying numbers suggest that their record might actually be flattering them. Their coach is saying ominous things about a lack of buy-in.

Obviously, these are the Blues and nobody is going to panic about a bad start after what happened last year. And it's not like they're plummeting down the rankings – if this were a top ten, they'd have a spot for sure. But right now, a handful of teams have a better claim to top-five status. That might change as early as tonight when the Blues host the Avalanche in what feels like a statement game for both teams.

Meanwhile, surprise teams like the Sabres, Oilers and Ducks keep building their case. They're not there yet, but they've at least reached the point where we don't chalk their record up to a fluky couple of games. Here's an in-depth look at whether the Oilers are for real.

The bottom five

The five teams that are headed towards the best lottery odds and lots of Alexis Lafreniere junior highlight reels.

Some good news for a good guy: We'll get to see Brian Boyle back in the NHL, as he signed a one-year deal with the Panthers yesterday. Florida isn't in our bottom five, but one of Boyle's former teams is ...

5. New Jersey Devils (2-4-2, -10) – A two-game win streak arrived just in time for a team that seemed like they were headed for disaster (and maybe a coaching change). They get a break now, without a game until Friday and while that's probably not ideal in terms of maintaining momentum, it means that a young team will go at least 11 days without having to deal with the sting of a loss.

Saturday's showdown between the Hughes brothers was a fun storyline, even if the game didn't especially deliver. We did get to see Jack Hughes finally get his first goal and Quinn can at least send him this clip every day until their next meeting in three weeks.

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YOU TOO BRO. 🍀 PIC.TWITTER.COM/113AIEWSUC

&MDASH; VANCOUVER CANUCKS (@CANUCKS)
OCTOBER 19, 2019

4. Detroit Red Wings (3-5-0, -9) – After a promising start, they've lost four straight in regulation, being outscored 17 to 5 in the process. They're home for four of the next five, starting tomorrow against the Canucks.

3. Los Angeles Kings (3-5-0, -8) – The Kings are bad, which everyone expected. Here's a mild surprise, though: They're

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

fun. After years of embracing their Sutter-inspired reputation as a shutdown defensive squad that was happy to beat you 1-0, the Kings are playing high-event hockey at both ends of the ice. We'll see how long it lasts, but it's a nice development for their fans. Winning Cups with stifling defense is great, but if you're going to be bad, at least be worth watching.

Also fun: the Doughty vs. Tkachuk rivalry, especially when it inspires Mark Giordano to fly through the air like he's jumping from the top rope.

DREW DOUGHTY UPENDS MATTHEW TKACHUK AND A DOGPILE ENSUES PIC.TWITTER.COM/SBUROM0YHP

&Mdash; BRADY TRETTENERO (@BRADYTRETT)
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2. Minnesota Wild (2-6-0, -14) – They picked up their first win this week, which is progress. But the biggest story was the comments from veteran Jason Zucker, who called out his coach by name after a 4-0 loss in Montreal on Thursday.

"It's going to be each individual guy ... from Bruce on down. Bruce has got to be better," Zucker said, shortly after captain Mikko Koivu had chewed out the team during a postgame meeting.

To be clear, Zucker wasn't just going after Bruce Boudreau; his comments were aimed at everyone, as he made clear by adding "We've got to be better. Everybody's got to be better. That's it." Still, it's rare for a player to publicly point the finger at a coach, let alone by name. Boudreau is already on the hot seat, with an underachieving veteran roster and a brand new GM who didn't hire him. Comments from a respected veteran certainly won't help.

To his credit, Zucker clarified and largely walked back the comments over the weekend and also reportedly apologized personally to Boudreau. That won't kill the story, but it will help keep it from turning into even more of a mess for a team that doesn't need it. A few more wins like yesterday's comeback over the Habs would go a long way to putting all of this in the rearview mirror; the Wild host the Oilers tomorrow.

1. Ottawa Senators (1-5-1, -10) – They're seven games into the season and already on their second three-game losing streak, which seems bad. Three weeks in, their only win on the year has come against (checks notes) the top-ranked Lightning, because the hockey gods hate me and want everyone to laugh at my rankings.

Not ranked: Dallas Stars – Our bottom five features the same five teams as last week, which means I couldn't find room for the Stars. Saturday's win over the Flyers helped in that regard. But make no mistake about it, the Stars are a mess. They can't score, the goaltending has been iffy, they're getting badly outshot and the powerplay is shooting blanks. Plus, like we said up above, they've already dug a big enough hole that they can't even play the "but the Blues" card. There isn't much good news here.

Why aren't they in the bottom five? Maybe I'm an optimist, but I don't think they're this bad. I don't think Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin are going to have the 50-point seasons they're on pace for, and I'm positive that Joe Pavelski and John Klingberg will eventually get going. I'm not as sure about Ben Bishop – you Puck Soup listeners will know where that's coming from – but overall I think this is closer to

being a decent team that's underachieving than one that's actually bad.

That's enough to keep them out of the bottom five. But for Stars fans who were sold on this team being a potential Cup contender, that's not much consolation. There's a lot of the season left, but this team has a long way to go.

The only other team making a push for the bottom five is the Rangers, who haven't played much but have looked awful lately after winning their first two. They're at home the rest of the month, which might determine whether they head into November looking like they're already an afterthought.

The Athletic LOADED: 10.22.2019

1158187 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Mike Babcock calls out young Maple Leafs' sloppy mistakes: 'Own it'

Luke Fox | October 22, 2019, 12:03 AM

TORONTO – Mike Babcock had a sharp point to drill home, and he wanted to make himself crystal clear. So, the head coach referred to the lists in his pocket, which he pulled out and read aloud like a riot act from his post-loss podium.

"Let's look right here," he said, unfolding his paper and taking a breath. "All right. Slashing, tripping, hooking, tripping, tripping, [hooking]."

"You put your stick on the guy's hands, you go to the box. So, when you go box that many times..."

You allow your opponent to tie the game on an unnecessary power play and win the thing on a penalty shot resulting from a Mitch Marner hook of a breakaway player, Gustav Nyquist, at the tail end of a greedy and gassed 3-on-3 shift.

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Babcock didn't stop at Monday's 4-3, blown-lead overtime loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets, though.

Fed up with a weeklong trend, the heated coach reached back in his suit pants to pull out the Leafs' penalty summary from Saturday's OT win over Boston, in which the Bruins went 1-for-3 on the power play to Toronto's 0-for-0: "Holding, tripping, hooking."

And Wednesday's 4-3 loss in Washington, in which the Capitals went 1-for-5 to Toronto's 0-for-1: "Let's have a quick look: tripping, tripping, interference, slashing."

"Put your stick on puck, not stick on hands."

The argument the coach was building is not that the Leafs are being victimized by biased officiating, as the more partisan corners of the Twittersphere and the local crowd

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

that serenaded Monday's sudden defeat with spitty chants of "Ref! You! Suck!" would have you believe.

But rather than basics such as stick discipline, responsible shift length and learning from your mistakes should be a given if you fancy yourself a contender.

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The Leafs lead the Atlantic Division and rank fourth league-wide in minor penalties, racking up 37 already.

"So, after a while, it's nobody else. It's own it and get on with it," said Babcock, talking to reporters but really his skaters. "You gotta mature and grow up as a group for that to happen."

It would not be a stretch to assume the Leafs' players had heard a similar speech directly from the adult in the room before boarding a charter to Boston.

Auston Matthews scored his eighth of the year, but he also stayed on the ice too long to effectively backcheck on the game's deciding shift and lost his man on Pierre-Luc Dubois's second goal of the game.

"That's my fault there," Matthews said.

Marner committed two hooking infractions and, despite his team-high 11 points, was a minus player for the seventh time in 10 outings.

Slouched and serious, the winger resembled a child who'd just been scolded.

Marner took ownership of Riley Nash's opening goal and Gustav's winner away from goalie Frederik Andersen and onto himself.

"The goals that went in on him, they weren't his fault," Marner said. "We had our sticks in their hands. We had our sticks in their feet. Stuff happens."

And his explanation for not making a line change and wearing the brunt of a risk-reward 3-on-3?

"Probably should've changed. Had seconds to do it. Probably should've got off, but I stayed out there," Marner admitted.

Incredibly, in each of Toronto's five losses this season, they held a lead at some point.

Stomping the throat has long been an issue, and the chief symptom is a lack of detail that, perhaps, comes with being the fourth-youngest club in the NHL — but isn't to be condoned when you aspire to greatness.

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Jake Muzzin is the only man in the room other than Babcock with a Stanley Cup ring. The defenceman, a plus-2 with a pair of assists on the night, held his head high and spoke with conviction postgame.

"No offence to [Columbus], but we did turnovers, we were spread out, we weren't tight, we allowed them to get their

forecheck going, and they got momentum and chances from it," Muzzin said.

"We took penalties. It's a recipe for giving goals up when you take penalties and turn over pucks and play in your zone. You can't win like that."

And then, with an eye toward Boston, where the winless Michael Hutchinson will start Tuesday, Muzzin made a promise.

He spoke the club's objective aloud, at least hoping, maybe believing, it can be reality.

"We're gonna play better defensively. We have to," Muzzin said. "No matter what. No matter who's in net. No matter what team we're playing."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 10.22.2019

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Sam Gagner committed to stick in NHL as career comes full circle

Mark Spector | October 21, 2019, 7:25 PM

ST. PAUL, Minn. — When young Sam Gagner arrived in Edmonton back in 2007, the Oilers were rebuilding.

"Attention Toronto Maple Leafs," advised this reporter, in a March 2008 piece in the National Post. "If you must rebuild, then this is the way to do it."

"You feel it in the room," gushed head coach Craig MacTavish. "I feel it and sense it, and normally if the coach feels it, you're the last guy to feel the optimism of improvement."

General manager Kevin Lowe, awash in money in the NHL's new economy, issued a seven-year, \$50 million Group 2 offer sheet to Buffalo's Tomas Vanek that summer. When the Sabres matched it, the money still burning a hole in Lowe's pocket, he settled on UFA defenceman Sheldon Souray at \$27 million over five years.

"We're building that foundation for the future: a great group of core guys," a young Gagner said that autumn. "We're getting better as a team and enjoying every moment."

For Gagner, as for the Oilers, the future did not unfold quite as it seemed it would that fall. The sixth overall selection in the 2007 draft, Gagner would become the first of the rushed-into-the-rebuild Oilers first-rounders, playing 79 fairly productive NHL games as an 18-year-old.

"When it happened originally, I didn't feel rushed," he said on Sunday, freshly called up from the minor leagues by the 2019 Oilers, a team he had circled back to after stops in Arizona, Philadelphia, Columbus and Vancouver. "I had a good first season (13 goals, 49 points), but when you go through some of the struggles, some of the losing, it affects everybody. Especially if you care."

That's the thing about Gagner, says 2007 teammate, Andrew Cogliano. He cares.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Lots of guys say they care, that they love the game. But with certain guys — like Gagner, whose father Dave played 946 NHL games — there's another level.

"We're still really good friends," begins Cogliano. "What I see around the league that is needed, and he has, is very strong character and care. That strong passion and desire to play.

"It's not that other guys don't," Cogliano explains. "Guys play the game, and they love it. But Gags, what he has is so important for a team. When you see a guy who is fully committed every single day, no matter what's going on. Winning or losing... He's committed, man."

As it turns out, Gagner, who was farmed out to AHL Bakersfield at the end of training camp and called up by Edmonton on the weekend, is going to need every ounce of that commitment if he is to revive his NHL career. He has been in the minors in three of the past four seasons, an assignment that never gets easier.

"No. No it doesn't," he admits. "But, you've just got to take the punches as they come, and keep trying to get better."

Cogliano came into the league as a scoring centre, but transitioned to his role as a speedy, penalty-killing depth guy upon being traded to Anaheim four seasons later.

Today, at age 30, Gagner has reached that spot in his career that many a top-six forward has stared down. He once had eight points in a game for the Oilers, but today Gagner doesn't skate well enough to play top-six, offensive minutes.

He is no longer a centre, and now Gagner is trying to extend his career by playing a steady defensive game as a third- or fourth-line winger.

Seriously, who re-invents themselves at this age?

"Why not?" Gagner asks. "I think you can always add different layers to your game."

Like what?

"I was talking to the (Bakersfield) coaching staff about penalty killing, got a few reps there. I hadn't penalty killed at the NHL level since Ralph Krueger was our coach. The penalty kill is a huge part of having a successful team, and any way you can help the team, chances are you're going to be in the lineup more often than not."

When GM Ken Holland sent Gagner down, he advised him to keep his eyes open in Bakersfield. Watch how player development works. See how a minor league operation is run.

Basically, he was telling Gagner that the next career may not be far away. So use his time wisely.

"There are a lot of guys who have trouble when their career ends, not having a vision for what they want to do next," said Gagner, who will make an excellent front office type one day. "But at the same time, I'm 30 years old. I have a lot of good hockey left, and I feel like it's going to be in the NHL.

"When you go through these ups and downs, it's easy to get down on yourself. You just have to keep pushing forward. There are a lot of examples of guys who spend time in the minors, make their way back, and have another few years at the NHL level.

"I still feel like I can be a really important part of things here, and help this team grow. Things are going really well here. I want to come in and help that out."

The circle is complete for Gagner, who may or may not get into the lineup Tuesday night in St. Paul versus the Wild, depending on injuries. The rebuild he was so high on back in 2007 may have finally — finally — taken hold. Now, he's just looking for a seat on the bus.

He won't earn that seat as a first line centre, the way he once did. Today, grinded by 47 AHL games in the past 13 months, he'll make the Oilers as fourth-line winger.

Maybe.

"I think I'm a lot calmer than I was earlier in my career," he said. "I understand that it's not always going to be an easy road."

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Sportsnet.ca / New guys Kadri, Makar giving Colorado Avalanche a big boost

Ryan Dixon | October 21, 2019, 10:56 AM

The two-year anniversary of the Colorado Avalanche's about-face is just a couple weeks away and the talent-laden club may just celebrate by winning every game it has between now and then.

Remember what we all (yes, all!) thought of the Avs about 24 months ago? That was right before Matt Duchene was finally traded by GM Joe Sakic, who hadn't really done anything on the job to that point to make us believe there was going to be some great second act to his hockey career.

Colorado was coming off a 2016-17 season in which it posted a .293 winning percentage, Nathan MacKinnon appeared to be settling into life as a 55-point player and Jared Bednar was — by some distance — the guy you were most likely to forget was an NHL coach.

Then, on Nov. 5, 2017, Sakic grand-slammed the Duchene deal and the good news basically hasn't stopped since. The latest development is some indication even the bottom-six supporting cast might be ready to take a step forward, which should absolutely terrify the rest of the league. The story of Colorado's second Florida victory of the weekend — they beat the Panthers on Friday and downed the Lightning in what might actually be the betting favourite for a Cup preview on Saturday — was Tyson Jost's three-goal showing.

Jost is a third-line player with first-round pedigree in his third full season. The 10th overall pick from 2016 had only one goal before potting the hat trick versus Tampa and if he's just now starting to scratch his potential, it would further solidify a forward crew that added high-end help last summer in the form of Nazem Kadri and Joonas Donskoi. In fact, the Avalanche's entire second line — Kadri between Donskoi and Andre Burakovsky — were all wearing different uniforms last year. Throw super rookie Cale Makar into the mix and

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

you have four guys who were not on the scene during the regular season last year and are now playing important-to-vital roles in Colorado.

When you're 7-0-1 and averaging well over four goals a game, it's safe to say things are going your way. Of course, when we're talking about two years' worth of good fortune, that simply means a master plan is coming to fruition.

Other Weekend Takeaways

- If I asked you who the happiest guy in hockey is, would you answer "Marc-Andre Fleury" faster than 'Flower' kicks out his pads? It's so easy to forget how emotional it was for Fleury to leave Pittsburgh two-and-a-half years ago for an expansion franchise we all assumed would be something akin to the awful pre-Crosby Penguins team that drafted the goalie first overall in 2003. The degree to which Fleury embraced being the franchise face in Vegas right from the start is admirable and even if you kind of hate the Golden Knights for never knowing a down period, how can you not smile for the guy who may own the league's signature grin? Like a few teams, Vegas is still struggling to find a backup who can spell its starter for 25-30 games. That said, the way Fleury is playing so far, it feels like a crime to keep him out of the crease at all. The 34-year-old — hard to believe with those still-boyish looks he'll turn 35 in a month — has posted a .934 save percentage in this young season, a higher mark than every goalie with six or more starts save John Gibson. And seriously, how much fun is this guy — who blanked his old buddies 3-0 on Saturday — having?

- Two things it's hard to believe weren't really part of an NHL defenceman's repertoire a relatively short time ago: The high flip out of the defensive zone and the intentional bank off the end boards in the O-zone. St. Louis Blues rearguard Alex Pietrangolo played the carom to perfection against Montreal on Saturday.

Former Red Wings captain Nicklas Lidstrom should collect royalties every time a blue-liner executes this hard bank, one he really pioneered back in Joe Louis Arena.

- I'm not sure a team could be more desperate for an early-season win than the Dallas Stars were in Philly on Saturday after dropping their fifth straight in Pittsburgh on Friday night. Dallas — a sexy pre-season Cup pick in some circles — got its much-needed victory by dropping the Flyers 4-1 despite registering just 15 shots on goal. Trust me, the Stars will take it. That game featured Corey Perry's first marker with the squad, as the veteran also registered two assists in his third game with Dallas. The back-hander he put under the bar is a good reminder that slow feet and achy knees don't make your hands any less soft.

The 2-7-1 Stars now need to make hay while playing six of their next seven at home.

- With his Washington Nationals set to play their first-ever World Series game on Tuesday, pitcher Max Scherzer showed up to the Caps game on Friday to put his own little twist on the ceremonial opening face-off.

At this point, Washington defenceman John Carlson could likely play hockey with a Louisville Slugger and still create offence. With an assist in Sunday's win over Chicago, Carlson has a league-leading 18 points in 10 games. The only other D-men in league history to put up at least 18 points though 10 contests are Paul Coffey and Bobby Orr.

- Jack Hughes buried up his first NHL goal when his Devils downed brother Quinn's Canucks 1-0 in Newark on Saturday. Does that mean 2019's first overall pick had to cover up the tab for the Hughes family dinner?

The Hughes Family pic.twitter.com/4Mof5L1FtC

— Vancouver Canucks (@Canucks) October 20, 2019

Red and White Power Rankings

Edmonton Oilers (7-1-1) — It's one thing to win when 97 leads an offensive onslaught that overwhelms an opponent, but quite another to earn three of a possible four weekend points while allowing just one goal against in 125 minutes of action.

Toronto Maple Leafs (5-3-1) — Dmytro Timashov notched the first goal of his NHL career versus the Bruins on Saturday and Frederik Andersen has a .931 save percentage in his past three outings.

Vancouver Canucks (5-3-0) — It was great to see Jacob Markstrom return to the net for Sunday's win at MSG over the Rangers after a brief trip home to Sweden to tend to difficult personal circumstances he declined to get into. Thatcher Demko was also solid in Markstrom's absence, putting up a .943 save percentage in three games last week.

Montreal Canadiens (4-3-2) — Montreal completed an early-season sweep of the defending-champion Blues on Saturday, but blew a third-period lead 24 hours later in Minnesota, leaving at least one point on the table during its short roadie.

Calgary Flames (5-4-1) — Big win in Anaheim on Sunday night for the Flames, especially coming off a loss to the Kings the night before. Anybody who follows Calgary knows the team doesn't often leave Orange County with points.

Winnipeg Jets (5-5-0) — Stick tap to coach Paul Maurice, who won his 700th game on Sunday when Winnipeg claimed a 1-0 shootout shutout over the Oilers.

Ottawa Senators (1-5-1) — Ottawa finally registered its first power-play goal of the year on Saturday, meaning the Sens are now breaking even on the man advantage after also giving up one shorthy this season.

In Your Ear

Tune into this week's episode of Tape to Tape to hear more about the Avalanche and another strong starter, the Anaheim Ducks. Co-host Rory Boylen and I are going head-to-head in our fantasy league this week, so this podcast might mark the last time we speak to each other for a while.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

Looking Ahead

- Nice Central Division matchup on Monday night as the Avalanche visit the Blues in St. Louis

- The Leafs get in the Halloween spirit by visiting their personal house of horrors on Tuesday with a return match versus the Bruins in Boston.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

- 'Ovie' is tearing through Western Canada this week as the Caps make stops in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

- Outdoor hockey is back! The Heritage Classic between the Jets and Flames goes Saturday in Regina.

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Sportsnet.ca / Andersen sole reason Maple Leafs earn point in back-to-back opener

Chris Johnston | October 21, 2019, 9:59 PM

TORONTO — When given a choice between possibly or certainty, Mike Babcock does the same thing every single time.

He starts Frederik Andersen in the first game of a back-to-back regardless of opponent or venue. He then watches the Toronto Maple Leafs bank points in the standings at an encouraging rate.

That's what happened here Monday at Scotiabank Arena, where the Leafs were outplayed early and late. And yet they still managed to come away with the loser point in dropping a 4-3 overtime game to the Columbus Blue Jackets because Andersen stood tall amid all the stick fouls, defensive lapses and brain cramps.

"I thought the goals that went in on him, he really had no help," said Mitch Marner.

Any criticism of the Leafs goalie deployment strategy conveniently ignores its eye-popping success rate. Babcock has used Andersen as the opener in 47 of the 48 back-to-backs the team has played dating back to 2016-17, and seen Toronto go 34-8-5 in those starts.

That's a .777 points percentage. The NHL average in the first game of a back-to-back over that same timeframe is .556, according to Sportsnet Stats.

Maybe other teams should adopt a more rigid approach to how they handle their goaltenders during the most demanding stretches of schedule.

"Let's take this a little bit farther. Let's just do the math here because you guys ask me about this all the time," said Babcock. "So can you imagine if you lost Game 1 and then you went to Game 2 tired?"

"I don't know, the investment makes no sense to me whatsoever."

As Michael Hutchinson can attest, that makes life pretty difficult on the backup. He'll be playing behind a tired Toronto team during Tuesday's game in Boston, but at least the Leafs are already guaranteed to have something to show for this back-to-back.

That's the norm around here.

The Leafs have only lost games in regulation on consecutive nights twice in the Babcock/Andersen Era: Oct. 29 and Oct. 30, 2016, and Dec. 14 and Dec. 15, 2017.

There's no way to know for certain how differently Monday's game would have turned out if it was Hutchinson rather than Andersen starting in goal. But the Leafs backbone was tested a lot after Toronto dug out of an early 2-0 hole — getting a blocker on Ryan Murray's open look and sliding his left pad across to stop Zach Werenski before swallowing up a Gus Nyquist shot from the hash marks in the second period.

This had all the makings of a regulation loss if not for Steady Freddie.

He allowed Mitch Marner to recover from an early giveaway by setting up Kasperii Kapanen's short-handed goal and gave Auston Matthews the chance to make amends for a blown defensive assignment by tying it 2-2 and setting up William Nylander for the go-ahead goal.

After Alex Wennberg tied it for Columbus on a third-period power play, Andersen denied 41-goal man Cam Atkinson on a clear breakaway before the buzzer. He couldn't even be remotely faulted for the penalty shot goal from Nyquist in overtime that ended it.

"He made a number of really good saves for us to keep us ahead, to keep us tied," said Matthews.

Perhaps the best tip of the cap came from how urgent the mood was around the Leafs after the game. You might have thought they were beaten soundly with the way Babcock read off a disturbingly long list of recent penalties or the way Jake Muzzin spoke about the team's lack of defensive commitment.

"It's a recipe for giving goals up when you take penalties and turn over pucks and play in your zone. You can't win like that," said Muzzin.

"We're gonna play better defensively," he added. "We have to. No matter what. No matter who's in net. No matter what team we're playing."

The 12th point in the standings was basically put there by the soft-spoken Danish goaltender.

The only reason there's been so much focus on Babcock's back-to-back strategy is because Toronto has struggled to find a reliable No. 2 during his tenure in Toronto.

Of the six goaltenders to play behind Andersen over the last three-plus seasons, only Hutchinson and Curtis McElhinney still hold NHL jobs. The Leafs are 19-25-3 in the second half of back-to-backs over that period as a result — a stat that becomes more palatable when you factor in that they've won nearly 75 per cent of the games immediately preceding them.

That's because Andersen has been so money in those situations.

The numbers don't lie.

When he's rested and the team's rested, Toronto has a much better chance for success.

"It's the most important position in the game, we all know that," said Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella. "Goaltending

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

basically determines a lot of the winning and losing of games.”

And it got the Leafs a point they didn't deserve on Monday night.

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Sportsnet.ca / Kyle Bukauskas Notebook: Why Ilya Mikheyev is popular among Leafs teammates

Kyle Bukauskas

Every other Monday, Sportsnet's Kyle Bukauskas will give you a peek behind the curtain and share stories about what he sees and hears in his job as a rink side reporter.

Based in Ottawa, Kyle's notes will sometimes be about the Senators, but he'll also include content from wherever Hockey Night in Canada takes him.

Here's this week's collection:

1. When Mitch Marner came out for our post-game interview after the Leafs beat Boston on Saturday, he made the comment: "I think Mo is the guy you're looking for!"

I, not cluing in, figured Marner was just pumping Morgan Rielly's tires because he thought he played a great game and that Rielly should be doing the interview because of it. Of course, I realized soon after it was because Rielly wound up being credited with the goal in overtime.

I'm always amazed how much players see and dissect in real-time during a game that can be played at such a break-neck pace. While the rest of us were looking for the slowest slow-motion replay available to see if the puck did indeed glance off Rielly's leg, Marner knew right away who had the game winner versus the Bruins.

2. One more on Marner. So, last weekend we're in Detroit and the way it's set up beneath the seats at Little Caesars Arena is there are lounges with glass walls so fans can see the players walking down the hallways to and from the ice.

As the Leafs were heading to the dressing room after their 5-2 win there was a young fan (I'm guessing no more than six years old) pressed up against the glass wall with a Leafs shirt and a sign that said something to the effect of 'hey guys come say hi after the game'.

Marner saw it and immediately asked Bobby Hastings of the equipment staff for a silver Sharpie. While he waited for Hastings, Marner made sure the kid didn't go anywhere before signing his stick and giving it to him, autographing his sign and posing for a picture.

I know Marner has a history with these kinds of gestures, particularly during pre-game warmups. It was a neat moment away from the cameras and bright lights that left a young fan with a look on his face that said, "I can't believe what is happening."

3. While in Detroit that day I spent a few minutes visiting with the legendary Al Sobotka, the long-time building operations manager who became famous for waving the octopus on the ice before Red Wings' home playoff games.

He's now in his 49th season with the Wings — when he first started they were still playing at the Olympia.

"They hired me when I was 17 and it's a good thing they didn't do background checks back then," he joked.

Al turned 66 years young this week and still loves everything the job entails. On a typical game-day he'll get to the rink at 7:30 a.m. and won't leave until well after the game is over.

As Wayne from Letterkenny says, "do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life."

4. Trevor Moore spent two seasons with Tri-City of the USHL where he had a coach named Josh Hauge.

When Moore attended his first camp there, Hauge was just an assistant at the time. Before a practice early that season, Hauge skated over to Moore and told him, "Trevor, you're off to a great start this season. But, I got to tell you, if I was the one picking the team back at camp, you wouldn't have been on it."

A few games later Hauge took over as head coach and, by the end of the season, Moore was his most important forward.

Moore laughed when I asked him about that and admitted, "I certainly wasn't a coach's dream back then. All offence, not much thought into playing without the puck."

He's done a nice job changing that narrative.

5. The popularity of Ilya Mikheyev continues to grow among both the fans and his teammates.

On Saturday, Elliotte Friedman showed the bench reaction to his goal in Washington with Moore and Andreas Johnsson doing the soup-eating gesture.

Moore and Johnsson eating some soup on the bench after Ilya Mikheyev scores pic.twitter.com/OxbDcsq8Wd

— Flintor (@TheFlintor) October 17, 2019

Mikheyev's teammates say, unlike other players who come from overseas and don't know English all that well, Mikheyev is not afraid to try to engage in conversations and be part of team dinners and other outings on the road.

He even participates in the Leafs' weekly NFL pick'em pool. So my question was, does a Russian who's still new to North America have any idea what he's doing when he's making his picks?

"No," one teammate laughed. "But neither does anyone else. There are no experts here."

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

6. I can't help but smile whenever I go into the visitor's dressing room at Scotiabank Arena when the Bruins are in Toronto.

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

The room is configured with stalls along three walls. On either side of the door that leads to the hallway there are two bigger stalls *usually* reserved for the two goalies.

But when Boston visits, Tuukka Rask gets one of them and Zdeno Chara gets the other. Meanwhile, backup Jaroslav Halak is stuffed in the corner.

Chara turns 43 next March and the respect he has among his teammates remains unmatched.

7. It was cool having Bianca Andreescu on our pre-game show after watching her meteoric rise this past summer and everything that came with it.

As we waited to do our interview rink-side, it was impressive to witness the crowd of people quickly start to form around us as fans tried to catch a glimpse of the US Open champ.

I wondered if any of this has started to feel normal to her yet.

"Ask me again in a year and I'll have a better answer for you," Andreescu laughed.

Best of luck to her at the WTA Finals in Shenzhen, China next week.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' stalwart penalty kill 'taking pride' in frustrating opponents

Iain MacIntyre | October 21, 2019, 12:20 PM

NEW YORK – Fans love young players. Coaches love reliable ones. Occasionally, those categories seem mutually exclusive.

In the final eight minutes of the Vancouver Canucks' frantic 3-2 win against the New York Rangers on Sunday, for example, coach Travis Green did not play young stars Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser. They were the only Canucks forwards who did not get a shift as Vancouver clung desperately to its one-goal lead.

There were four faceoffs during that frenetic time, three of them in the Canucks' end. Pettersson, 20, and Boeser, 22, were not going to be sent out for a defensive-zone draw, and Green chose to use captain Bo Horvat with wingers Tanner Pearson and Jake Virtanen for the only offensive-zone faceoff, which occurred with 3:30 remaining.

Horvat, Brandon Sutter and J.T. Miller each played four shifts in the last eight minutes.

Pettersson and Boeser played none. Rookie defenceman Quinn Hughes, 20, played two.

The longest shift went involuntarily to the fourth line of Jay Beagle, Tim Schaller and Tyler Motte, who were trapped mostly in their own zone during a 2½-minute Rangers siege that was interrupted only by a Vancouver icing.

Lacking oxygen after their survivor shift, the Canucks' fourth-liners did not get back on the ice in the last 3½ minutes. But during the siege, the Rangers actually got only two pucks on net. Motte blocked two shots, while Schaller and Beagle each blocked one.

It looked a lot like Vancouver's penalty kill, which prominently features Beagle, Schaller and Motte and is one of the best in the NHL. It has allowed just two goals all season and was ranked third in the league at 92.6 per cent as the Canucks travelled Monday to Detroit to finish their four-game road trip against the Red Wings on Tuesday.

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Another young player, second-year pro Adam Gaudette, can't get into the Canucks lineup these days and could soon be sent to the AHL for vital playing time. Gaudette has been a healthy scratch since Motte returned from injury four games ago. Traditionally a turnstyle into and out of an NHL lineup, the fourth line has been impenetrable – reliable at even-strength and outstanding on the penalty kill.

"We've got five guys who can really kill penalties," Beagle said, referring to forwards and including Sutter and Pearson. "You've got to have guys who love to kill, and I think all five of us love to kill. It shows. There's a lot of pride in it. It helps you win hockey games.

"I remember it was (my former coach) Bruce Boudreau when I was with Washington, he said he was going to give me a chance on the kill and to make it my job and take pride in it. I think that's something I just held on to always; just that pride in the job and getting it done."

Beagle not only helped blank the Rangers power play on three chances, he scored what became the winning goal on a shorthanded burst to the New York net. So, in 21:28 of shorthanded ice time this season for Beagle, Vancouver has scored as many goals as it has allowed: one.

Schaller has the same shorthanded plus-minus in 17:30 of penalty-kill time, and the opposition power play has yet to score during Motte's nine minutes of shorthanded TOI.

"It's a role that I know I can provide value," Motte said. "I don't think of myself that this (fourth line) is my ceiling by any means. But to have the ability to show I can kill penalties night in and night out is important to my career.

"I think we all feed off each other. Whether you're feeling great one night or not, we can always grab hold of the PK and know that's a way we can contribute."

Schaller said: "Being able to shut down other teams' top lines, we just have so much fun doing it. It frustrates them, not only on the power play but for the next few minutes of the game. The biggest thing is not letting teams set up, and I think we do a great job of forechecking them up ice. When they do get set up, teams are very rarely getting Grade-A opportunities.

"Taking pride in it is exactly what we do. You go out there and do a good job, and when you get back to the bench, guys are patting you on the butt, saying, 'Good job, great block.' So the team feeds off that energy."

Schaller wasn't even expected to make the Canucks this fall after playing so poorly last season that Green healthy-

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

scratched him 35 times. But he earned his spot largely on his ability to kill penalties, and has been a much better player at even-strength this season.

Given little chance to become an NHL regular, Motte has exceeded expectations since being acquired from Columbus in the trade deadline rental of Thomas Vanek two years ago. The only real knock against Beagle is his contract, as the Canucks overpaid two summers ago to lure the free-agent centre from Washington with a four-year, \$12-million offer.

But Green trusts them in their roles. For a hockey player, that's priceless.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs, Blue Jackets jolted by healthy impact wingers

Luke Fox | October 21, 2019, 12:56 PM

TORONTO – The Toronto Maple Leafs and Columbus Blue Jackets delivered welcome news to their respective fan bases Monday morning, each announcing the health of a greasy top winger in advance of their game at Scotiabank Arena.

Toronto's top-line left wing, Andreas Johnsson, is now happy and pain-free after leaving Saturday's 4-3 overtime victory over the Boston Bruins when his left leg took the brunt of a fully cocked Brandon Carlo slap shot.

"I don't know a lot of spots where it wouldn't hurt," Johnsson said Monday. "It was a heavy shot by Carlo.

"It was a big bruise."

Thankfully, a bruise is all it was. Johnsson tried to "run on adrenaline" and return to Saturday's game, but the intense pain forced him to take a precautionary route.

X-rays revealed no break.

So, after taking treatment in lieu of team practice Sunday, Johnsson confirms he's ready to assume his regular spot on Auston Matthews' line.

The 24-year-old Swede is off to an excellent start, registering three goals and five points, and the Maple Leafs' forward depth is already being tested with John Tavares (finger) and Zach Hyman (knee) already sidelined.

"It's kinda funny with hockey — you can play with a lot of injuries," Johnsson said. "This is one of the smallest you can have, so no problem."

No more problems for Josh Anderson.

The Blue Jackets' power forward will return to action after missing the past six games with a reported shoulder injury suffered at Pittsburgh on Oct. 5.

Rookie Jakob Lilja comes out of the lineup to pave the way for Anderson, whose return means a ton to the visitors.

"Damn right, it does. He's one of our best players," said coach John Tortorella, who uses the Burlington, Ont., native on both specialty teams. "He is one hell of a hockey player.

"There was so much there. In my mind, what I can project he can be, he can be something special. The key with Josh is, does it get good to ya, or do you just keep on concentrating on getting better and better? That's the key for Josh — it's upstairs. And he's matured there tremendously."

Columbus (3-3-2), coming off consecutive overtime losses, will start Joonas Korpisalo in net Monday, while the Maple Leafs (5-3-1) stick with Frederik Andersen, meaning backup Michael Hutchinson gets the nod for Tuesday's anticipated rematch in Boston.

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1158194 Websites

TSN.CA / Mike Babcock sticks to goalie guns despite schedule

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Leafs (optional) and Blue Jackets (optional) skated at Scotiabank Arena on Monday morning.

In the Mike Babcock era, the Maple Leafs have consistently started Frederik Andersen in the first game of a back-to-back set with the No. 2 goalie always going on the second night. So, it will be Andersen facing the low-scoring Jackets (2.25 goals per game, 30th in NHL) on Monday while Michael Hutchinson will play in Boston on Tuesday.

This week the Leafs face a challenging schedule with two sets of back-to-back games, including Friday against San Jose and Saturday in Montreal. The second games, both against divisional opponents, would seem to be more important.

"Let's just do the math here," Babcock said of the goalie rotation, "because you guys ask me about this all the time. So, if you can imagine, if you lose game one and then went to game two tired (shrugs) I don't know. So, the investment makes no sense to me whatsoever."

But Babcock's rationale goes beyond just wanting to win that first game.

"Freddie gives us the best opportunity to win," Babcock told TSN during a pre-game interview last week. "I also believe it's important for him to play with our team while it's fresh. I think how he feels is real important for our group."

Down the hallway, that's a sentiment shared by Columbus coach John Tortorella.

"Goaltending basically determines a lot of the winning and losing of games," Tortorella said, "and how tall your team is, how short your team is at certain times ... the mindset of a club, it's worked off of that."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Freddie with the ball  pic.twitter.com/Phd7ghUpJX

— Flintor (@TheFlintor) October 21, 2019

Morgan Rielly passed Toronto's player-of-the-game basketball to Andersen on Saturday night after his 43-save win over Boston.

"He's very calm," observed Rielly. "He's calm with the puck, even his body language is a calming influence on guys. It's nice when he's in a zone and feeling it. He's a leader in that sense."

The Leafs are a young team built on speed and skill. The group is still maturing and breakdowns have been frequent early in the season as a new-look defence builds chemistry.

"When we make our mistakes he's the guy we always look to try and save us," said winger Mitch Marner, "and he does it a whole lot of the time. So, he's always got that swagger in him and when that's going I think our whole team just feels a lot better."

The points against Boston and Montreal this week are important, but perhaps having Andersen in a groove is more important for the greater good of the team.

"Some nights you get out-chanced and you win," noted Babcock. "The other night I'm watching Chicago play Columbus ... [Robin] Lehner there, they had five grade-A [chances] in the first five minutes, unbelievable. I look back, I don't know what I did, I came back a little bit later and the score's 1-0 at that time for Chicago, I'm just (shrugs), they call it hockey, but that was goaltending."

'Do the math': Babcock defends goalie rotation system

Mike Babcock answered the question everyone has been wondering on why he keeps going with Frederik Andersen during the first game of a back-to-back. Ultimately he says his team has a better chance of winning the first game than when they're more tired in the second game.

The problem, however, for the Leafs is they want to rest Andersen beyond just the 13 back-to-back sets this season and to do so they need the back-up option to be reliable. Hutchinson remains an unproven commodity. He played just five games for the Leafs last season and is 0-1-1 with an .886 save percentage so far this season.

This week Hutchinson is projected to face Tuukka Rask and a rested Bruins team on Tuesday night and then Carey Price and a rested Canadiens team on Saturday night. After the loss last week in Washington, Babcock referenced a statistic that a tired team beat a rested team only 29 per cent of the time.

"There's so many factors that are out of your control," Hutchinson said, "but, at the end of the day, my game doesn't change whether you're playing the second game of a back-to-back, my job's just to stop the puck and give the team a chance. So, that's my mindset going into each game."

The cap-strapped Leafs don't have an obvious option should Hutchinson falter. His cap hit is \$700,000 so any replacement would likely need to be in the same range. In the minors, Kasimir Kaskisuo is off to a strong start with the Marlies, but has never played in the NHL.

Babcock has been reluctant to criticize Hutchinson preferring to keep the focus on the team.

"Well, it's an important week for all of us," Babcock said when asked about the significance of these games to his No. 2 goalie. "We're in it together."

The Leafs have been in a position to win both of Hutchinson's starts leading Montreal 4-1 in the third period and then squandering a 2-0 lead in Washington thanks to a disastrous middle frame.

"Our last back-to-back, we had a push in the third, we weren't tired," Babcock pointed out, "so our second period wasn't on back-to-back, it was on us."

Babcock acknowledges that back-to-back sets tend to be tougher early in the season when players aren't quite in a rhythm or in mid-season condition. Toronto has already had two back-to-back sets and now will have two in six days, which is unusual.

Marner is stressing the need to get sleep and stay hydrated.

"It's going to be new for me," he said of the condensed schedule this week. "I'm sure a lot of other people haven't done it in the locker room either. I just think we have to be smart with our decisions on ice and make sure we're playing a safe game and not bring any extra pressure to ourselves with turnovers."

Hutchinson, meanwhile, hopes to benefit from seeing the Bruins up close on Saturday.

"They're a skilled team and they can make plays, but another part of their game is they crash the net really hard," he noted. "You saw Freddie get bumped a couple times last game, so on top of being able to make some skilled plays they also like to throw the puck on and crash the net hard. As a goalie, you just have to be ready for everything."

Hutchinson insists his game's in good shape despite the unsightly numbers.

"I felt good with where my game's at," the 29-year-old said, "I feel like I'm competing well, and trying to make saves to give the team a chance to win. The results haven't been there yet, but I know if I just keep working and doing what I'm doing they will come."

Leafs' Hutchinson not feeling added pressure to get first win

Michael Hutchinson admits he'd love to win every game but ultimately that hasn't been the case for him this season. But getting to see the Bruins on Saturday was great preparation for his start on Tuesday.

Andreas Johnsson left Saturday's game against Boston after taking a Brandon Carlo shot off his leg. The X-rays came back negative, but the gritty left winger missed Sunday's practice.

"It was a big bruise," Johnsson explained after taking a twirl on the ice Monday morning, "got some treatment yesterday and now I'm good to play...It's kind of funny with hockey, you can play with a lot of injuries and this is probably one of the smallest you can have so it's not a problem."

Does it still hurt?

"Ah," he said with a smile, "no."

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

Did he want to stay in the game Saturday?

"Kind of weird," he explained, "a lot of pain in the beginning and when you're still warm you can run on the adrenaline, (but) then I went on the ice and didn't feel as great as I wanted to so better to be safe, it's a long season."

Johnsson good to go after painful shot block

Andreas Johnsson says he's good to go for tonight's matchup against the Blue Jackets after he blocked a shot from Brandon Carlo in their win over the Bruins on Saturday.

Babcock was asked what's allowed undersized players like Dmytro Timashov and Trevor Moore, both 5-foot-10, to have success early in their NHL careers.

"They got big asses," the coach noted to chuckles from some reporters. "You laugh, but it's the truth. You can get under people, you can win retrieval races, you can own lanes, you have good balance."

Moore weighs in at 185 pounds while Timashov is 192.

While Moore played 32 NHL games last season, the 23-year-old Timashov is getting his first taste of the big leagues and has impressed early on scoring his first goal on Saturday.

That first goal feeling. #LeafsForever
pic.twitter.com/QvQy3XDOsU

— Toronto Maple Leafs (@MapleLeafs) October 20, 2019

What stands out to Marner, who was drafted 121 spots ahead of Timashov in 2015?

"His shot. Even in practice and stuff like that his shot has always been a good one. I've been with him since Day 1, really, since after the draft so his shot's always been something and his skill with the puck, both of them together, it's pretty deadly and you saw it the other night."

But the key to staying in the lineup, especially once Zach Hyman returns, is doing the dirty work.

"What I like about him is he's nasty," Babcock said on Saturday night. "He hits everything that moves and he's heavy on the puck, he's on the forecheck all the time."

"He works extremely hard and he's a great forechecker," said Rielly. "When you watch his game that's not what jumps out at you first, but when you go back and watch it again he's hard on their d-men. And obviously he's got a great shot as we all saw. He's been passing the puck great and he's been working hard and really carved out a role for himself, so it's cool to see."

Babcock on success of Timashov, Moore: 'They got big asses'

Mike Babcock was candid when asked about what has made Dmytro Timashov and Trevor Moore so successful this season. Their teammates also talk about the spark they've brought to the team early in the year.

Projected Leafs lines for Monday's game:

Johnsson - Matthews - Marner/Nylander

Mikheyev - Kerfoot - Marner/Nylander

Moore - Spezza - Kapanen

Timashov - Shore - Gauthier

Rielly - Ceci

Muzzin - Barrie

Marincin - Holl

Andersen starts

Hutchinson

Projected Jackets lines for Monday's games:

Foligno - Dubois - Atkinson

Nyquist - Wennberg - Bjorkstrand

Texier - Jenner - Anderson

Milano - Nash - Bemstrom

Werenski - Jones

Murray - Nutivaara

Gavrikov - Savard

Korpisalo starts

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TSN.CA / Fighting stomach cancer, Dale Hawerchuk wants 'to live to tell the story'

Rick Westhead

Hockey Hall of Famer Dale Hawerchuk is undergoing chemotherapy after being diagnosed with stomach cancer in August, saying he is optimistic as he battles "the fight of my life."

The 56-year-old Hawerchuk took a leave of absence from his position as coach of the Ontario Hockey League's Barrie Colts in early September. The team said Hawerchuk was stepping away because of a health issue but wasn't more specific.

"For some reason the Lord put me in this kind of fight and I'm ready to fight it," Hawerchuk said in an interview last weekend with TSN. "I want to live to tell the story."

Hawerchuk, who grew up in Oshawa, Ont., idolizing Bobby Orr, entered the NHL with sky-high expectations after winning two Memorial Cups as a junior player with the Cornwall Royals of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

The Winnipeg Jets took him first overall in the 1981 NHL Entry Draft. When he signed a five-year, \$800,000 contract with the Jets that summer, an armoured car escorted by police drove to the intersection of Portage Avenue and Main Street, the city's main intersection, and dropped off the

CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 22, 2019

bright-eyed, curly-haired 18-year-old. He instantly became Winnipeg's most recognizable sports celebrity.

"Like anything in life, you just got to dig in and go for what your goals are."

Hawerchuk played in the NHL for 16 years before retiring in 1997 with an arthritic hip. He played 1,188 games with Winnipeg, Buffalo, St. Louis and Philadelphia, scoring 518 goals and 1,409 points.

Winner of the Calder Memorial Trophy as the NHL's Rookie of the Year for the 1981-82 season, Hawerchuk also played for Canada in the 1987 and 1991 Canada Cups. Hawerchuk famously won the faceoff that led to Mario Lemieux's iconic goal late in the third period of Game 3 of the 1987 Canada Cup final against the Soviet Union.

He was elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2001.

Hawerchuk said he began suffering from acid reflux symptoms in the summer. While a CT scan failed to show any cancer, doctors found a tumour in his stomach on Aug. 22. He is currently being treated with chemotherapy to shrink the tumour, which should provide doctors with the opportunity to remove it.

"The chemo has hit me pretty hard," he said. "I do it one week and it breaks the body down and then the next week I take a break and build my body up so I can do it again. I have to do that for two months. I really struggle to eat and have a feeding tube, but the last few days I've been able to eat a little bit, too. You've got to keep your nutrition up."

According to the latest annual report from the Canadian Cancer Society, of the 113,000 Canadians who are projected to be diagnosed with the cancer this year, an estimated 2.3 per cent (4,100) will be diagnosed with stomach cancer.

Hawerchuk said he has already talked with stomach cancer survivors who he said are now left eating a half dozen smaller meals per day but for the most part are living "a normal life."

Crystal Hawerchuk, Dale's wife, says her family is rallying around her husband and that he has a mindset to beat the disease.

"He's just so himself and low maintenance and doesn't have a big ego. He's just such a good person," she said. "Dale has always been a very focused person, very determined. He's got mental strength today just like he had in hockey...I want people to know he's helped so many people and so many kids and it's terrible this is happening to him because all he has done is give back to the sport. There's no better person in my life than him. He's a very selfless person."

Dale said his family has been drawn closer together since his cancer diagnosis. His children, Eric, Alexis and Ben, are all staying close to the family home in King City, Ont.

"You don't have anything without your health, your family and your friends and sometimes we underrate that," Hawerchuk said. "An illness like this can definitely put things in perspective. My surgeon told me I've got a hell of a battle on my hands, but I'm young and healthy everywhere else."

"Like anything in life, you just got to dig in and go for what your goals are. It's kind of no different than trying to make the NHL. Who knew if I could make it, right?"

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TSN.CA / Of the teams off to torrid starts, the Colorado Avalanche are most likely to sustain theirs

Travis Yost

Two weeks into the regular season, I think it's fair to assume no one expected the Colorado Avalanche, Buffalo Sabres and Edmonton Oilers to be leading the rest of the National Hockey League field.

We tend to see early-season runs each year from a team or two – last year, the Sabres led the entire NHL through American Thanksgiving, then followed that up by being the worst team in the league through game 82 of the season. So yes, some of these runs can be fleeting.

What's particularly interesting is how many of the teams that we expected to be on the fringe of the playoff cut line (or, worse) are currently sitting atop the standings. We don't want to make sharp judgments based on eight or so games of data, but these teams have already bagged a serious number of points to put daylight between themselves and the competition in the standings. Even if you are bearish on these clubs, the reality is their playoff probabilities have increased in a matter of weeks.

That brings us to the million-dollar question: Which of the surprise teams are real, and which are not? We have to adjust our prior expectations at this point in the season, but how much should we adjust them based on two weeks of win-loss records? This is where more predictive and larger-sample underlying numbers can really be beneficial.

Below, quick thoughts on the three teams:

Colorado Avalanche (7-0-1) Believability: High

Of the four teams hanging around the top of the standings, the least surprising has to be Colorado. The Avalanche made the playoff cut last season by the thinnest of margins, finishing just a handful of points ahead of the Arizona Coyotes. But an impressive playoff run, easily dispatching the Calgary Flames in Round 1 and taking the San Jose Sharks to a Game 7, resonated around the league. Their roster makeup – an impressive combination of developing young talent and a couple of unquestionable superstars – qualitatively makes you believe their hot start is just a continuance of the promise we saw a season ago.

Colorado's season-to-date measures:

EV Corsi%: 50.1 per cent (17th)

EV Expected Goal%: 50.9 per cent (13th)

EV Goal%: 63.4 per cent (Third)

Power Play Expected Goals Per-60 Minutes: 4.6 (27th)

Penalty Kill Expected Goals Against Per-60 Minutes: 5.0 (Fifth)

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It is hard to find a real flaw with this team. They outshoot and out-chance their opponents on a regular basis, have one of the league's better penalty-killing units, and the goaltending tandem of Philipp Grubauer and Pavel Francouz has posted a 92.8 save percentage (seventh in the NHL). Grubauer will shoulder a larger role for the first time in his playing career, but he's been consistently above average when it comes to denying shooters since entering the league back in 2012-13.

The Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen duo has been predictably electric, each with 11 points in just eight games. But the Avalanche are also getting contributions further down the lineup – Andre Burakovsky, Joonas Donskoi, and Nazem Kadri have seamlessly integrated themselves this season, and 20-year-old Cale Makar already appears ahead of schedule on the blueline.

I'm buying all of the stock I can in Colorado.

Buffalo Sabres (7-1-1) Believability: Moderate

This isn't the Sabres of a year ago – a team that rode lofty shooting percentages early in the season, only to watch their huge shot volume disadvantage (along with an inexplicable cratering in performance from the goaltending duo of Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark) ultimately win out. Last year's Sabres team was fatally flawed: they had one ultra-productive line trying to smooth over depth issues in the forward ranks and a ghastly defence that was seemingly incapable of moving the puck.

Buffalo's blueline overhaul may end up being one of the biggest stories of the 2019-20 season. Adding Colin Miller and Henri Jokiharju – two guys with some holes in their off-puck game but incredible puck movers and north-south transitional players – has alleviated a huge defensive burden from their forward class. Jokiharju, in particular, has completely reshaped Buffalo's ability to take the game to their opponents when their best players are on the ice. Paired predominantly with Marco Scandella, the Sabres are getting a whopping 55 per cent of shots with their third unit on the ice.

Buffalo's season-to-date measures are as follows:

EV Corsi%: 51.5 per cent (12th)

EV Expected Goal%: 53.0 per cent (Seventh)

EV Goal%: 67.2 per cent (First)

Power Play Expected Goals Per-60 Minutes: 6.4 (15th)

Penalty Kill Expected Goals Against Per-60 Minutes: (7.7 (27th))

Those aren't the type of numbers we expect to see from teams that are lottery bound. There is surely some puck luck blessing this team on the defensive side, as the Sabres are stopping more than 95 per cent of shots at 5-on-5 and nearly 93 per cent across all situations. Turn your opponent into a team that can only convert on five to seven per cent of their opportunities and you'll have a chance to win on most nights. The only problem is that these stop rates are well outside of our expectations for both the team and the goalies, and we did see this same exact thing happen last season.

But the best way to combat an inevitable save percentage regression is to spend more time in the offensive zone, which serves to both apply pressure on the opposition defensively and ease the pressure on the defensive side of the game. This Sabres team has shown they are capable of doing just that, and that's materially different from what we have seen from other Buffalo teams for most of this decade.

The Sabres still don't seem like a great pick to finish inside of the top three in the division, but they can pass the bar of wild-card calibre. That's quite impressive in a division with the likes of the Tampa Bay Lightning, Toronto Maple Leafs, and Boston Bruins.

Edmonton Oilers (7-1-1) Believability: Low

I will say this much about the Oilers: I don't think the Pacific Division is really impressive outside of the Vegas Golden Knights, so there's a real opportunity for even a depth-challenged team to try and steal one of the two other playoff spots. While I think the lineup is fatally flawed, the Oilers' first line is on a perpetual heater and the goaltending combination of Mikko Koskinen and Mike Smith has held up so far.

If both don't sustain, Edmonton is going to have a hard time staying afloat. Consider their performance numbers through the first nine games with both of those as major positives:

EV Corsi%: 48.6 per cent (21st)

EV Expected Goal%: 47.5 per cent (23rd)

EV Goal%: 55.5 per cent (Ninth)

Power Play Expected Goals Per-60 Minutes: 8.1 (Third)

Penalty Kill Expected Goals Against Per-60 Minutes: 8.7(31st)

I think the Oilers will continue to have one of the best lines in all of hockey – magic is being made anytime one or both of Connor McDavid or Leon Draisaitl is on the ice (they have 37 per cent of the team's goals so far this season). But the Oilers are still only getting about 40 per cent of the goals when those players are shelved at 5-on-5, and at some point, the usage for their big guns may come back to haunt them.

Unlike a team like Buffalo, though, the Oilers are still being broadly outshot and out-chanced, and polarizing power-play performances seem to be something of a wash. The depth issues that everyone feared would lower this team's ceiling haven't left – they've just been masked over by incredible individual efforts, which are quite fleeting historically.

Still, the points are in the bag, and the division doesn't offer up a tremendous amount of competition. That can't be understated enough. The Oilers may be a flawed team – more flawed than the standings would suggest – but the hot start has given them an early leg up on the rest of the field, and they might be able to hang around in the playoff race for quite some time as a result.

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