



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 2, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Carolina Hurricanes sign Warren Foegele to one-year contract

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes and forward Warren Foegele have agreed on a one-year, \$2.15 million contract, the team said Sunday.

Foegele had a salary arbitration hearing scheduled for Nov. 4 but was able to reach a deal.

“Warren has shown improvement each year of his professional career,” president and general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. “We expect him to continue to develop and enhance his role on our team.”

Foegele, 24, set career highs in goals (13), assists (17), points (30) and average time on ice (13:43) in 68 games last season. He was tied for fifth in the NHL in shorthanded goals (3).

Foegele played in all eight of the Hurricanes’ postseason games, scoring the series-clinching goal in Game 3 of the Qualifying Round against the New York Rangers.

The Canes earlier signed defenseman Haydn Fleury, also avoiding arbitration.

Retired Justin Williams of Hurricanes trying to decide what to do ‘when I grow up’

By Chip Alexander

Justin Williams hasn’t decided on his future but says not to count out hockey.

As if anyone would be doing that.

Williams, the former Carolina Hurricanes captain, said in an interview that will air Friday night on the NHL Network’s “NHL Tonight” that the game had been too good to him for him to leave it. Williams, 39, announced his retirement from the NHL earlier in October, and it’s probable he will have some role with the Hurricanes in coming seasons.

“If you ask my wife, I probably have too many hobbies, but I think that’s good, I keep my mind occupied,” Williams said in the interview. “I’m coaching both my son and daughter’s hockey teams. I’m trying to sharpen up my golf game; I’m playing a lot of tennis. I’m seeing what I want to do when I grow up, and I think I’ve got some time to do that right now and just chill out and see what comes my way.

“Listen, I’m sure I’ll be involved in the game of hockey. That’s all I know and everything I have is because I played hockey. It’s been a great run.”

The “NHL Tonight” interview with Williams will air at 6 p.m. on the NHL Network. Those also interviewed include former Canes teammate Bret Hedican and former Canes president and general manager Jim Rutherford, now with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Williams, in the interview, said he was proud of his accomplishments with the Hurricanes. The winger was a big

part of Carolina’s 2006 Stanley Cup championship, then won two Cups with the Los Angeles Kings.

Williams returned as a free agent to the Washington Capitals for two seasons before signing with the Canes as a free agent in July 2017. His goal: make the Canes relevant in the NHL again, he said at the time. And he did.

Named captain by new head coach Rod Brind’Amour in 2018-19, Williams led the Canes back to the playoffs for the first time since 2009. The Canes returned to the playoffs this season after the extended pause caused by the pandemic. Williams had come out of semi-retirement in January to rejoin the team.

“We have to be honest with ourselves. We know we’re always going to be the little brother, we’re not a big market, we’re in Carolina here,” Williams said in the “NHL Tonight” interview. “So we have to take that with a grain of salt. We do a little bit more in Carolina, just to become relevant, to become a team to talk about, and not just what we did there with the ‘Storm Surge,’ it’s everything that encapsulates us.

“We’re little-old Carolina here, we’re obviously not always going to be talked about with teams in the Northeast. But we’re doing our thing here and we want people to not come through Carolina and be like, ‘Oh, OK, just a stop in Carolina. Two points and let’s get out of here.’ It’s, ‘Oh, no, we have to go through Carolina, we’ve got to go through the Tampa Bays, we’ve got to go through those types of teams.’ That’s where we want to get to, and I think we’re on our way.”



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Dundon's option to sell Hurricanes isn't news. But it is worth keeping an eye on.

By Luke DeCock

One of the persistently frustrating things about the hockey world paying little attention to the Carolina Hurricanes is the hubbub when old news gets repackaged as new news by talking heads who should know better.

A prominent national hockey analyst who shall remain nameless made a splash on social media Wednesday when, during a radio interview in Canada, he *revealed* that Tom Dundon has an option to throw the Hurricanes back to Peter Karmanos in January.

Readers of this newspaper will already have read about that in some detail. [Almost three years ago. In 2018.](#)

Additionally, we landed on the moon. (No way! That's great!)

But it has been known — around here, anyway — that Dundon demanded a put option in the deal that allows him to sell his majority share of the team back to Karmanos after three years for an unknown but specified price. Which, given Karmanos' financial status, would likely put the team back on the NHL dole awaiting a sale.

Dundon said at the end of the 2017-18 season the option had turned out to be "unnecessary" but the coronavirus is the wild card here: Only Dundon knows how much that alters the equation.

"Obviously it changes the economics," Dundon said Thursday, "but it really doesn't change anything. I'm still going to own the team and all that. I don't think anything is going to change. I don't have any intention of not owning the team."

In Dundon's world, the option was a standard safety valve in any acquisition, even if it's uncommon in pro sports franchise sales. It was there in case he hated owning a pro sports team (he doesn't) or there were issues with the arena (one of

the last hurdles in front of the new lease extension was cleared Thursday when the arena authority approved its new funding agreement with Raleigh and Wake County) or there was something completely unexpected and unprecedented ... like a global pandemic that throws the NHL's business model out the window.

Which may explain why Dundon isn't quite speaking in absolutes.

Dundon has been deeply invested in the emotional swings and technical details of owning and running a hockey team — for better or for worse — but if he decides the economics don't work he does have an escape hatch coming open in the next few months.

So perhaps it was merely coincidence, perhaps it was an olive branch, perhaps it was something else when Dundon invited Karmanos to join the brain trust in the locker room for the first round of the draft earlier this month. Notably, they put him somewhere he wouldn't show up on the television feed.

Karmanos hasn't been around much if at all since he sold the team to Dundon — not that he was ever around that much when he owned the team — but he's still a minority partner. He's not out of the picture. Not yet, anyway: Dundon has another option to buy Karmanos out entirely.

Given the amount of time, effort and emotion Dundon has put into running the team, he has every reason to stick it out. He's also not speaking in absolutes, either. Nor, probably, would that be prudent, given the circumstances. A lot could change about the NHL as we know it over the next few months.

But nothing has changed with Dundon's option. It was there in 2018 and it's still hanging out there now.

Hurricanes sign defenseman Haydn Fleury to two-year contract

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes and defenseman Haydn Fleury have agreed on a new contract, the team announced Tuesday.

Fleury, a former first-round draft pick by Carolina, signed a two-year deal that will pay him an average annual value (AAV) of \$1.3 million per season through 2021-22.

Fleury 24, was a restricted free agent who had filed for salary arbitration, and a hearing had been scheduled for next month.

"Haydn made a huge leap in his development last season and established himself as an everyday NHL defenseman," Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said in a

statement. "He was very dependable late in the regular season and in the playoffs, and we look forward to him continuing his development into an elite NHL defenseman."

Fleury, 24, had 14 points (4 goals, 10 assists) in 45 games with the Hurricanes last season career highs in goals, assists and points. He scored his first career NHL goal in the Oct. 18, 2019 game at Anaheim.

Fleury was the seventh overall pick in the 2014 NHL Draft and has registered 23 points (4 goals, 19 assists) in 132 career NHL games. He also helped the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL to the 2019 Calder Cup championship.

The Canes still have an arbitration hearing set with forward Warren Foegele for Nov. 4. Contract negotiations continue.



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Gold: Hurricanes offseason notebook

By Adam Gold

One year ago tonight (November 1, 2019) the Carolina Hurricanes pasted the Detroit Red Wings, 7-3, at PNC Arena for their 3rd straight win and the ninth in their first 12 games. Sebastian Aho scored two goals and added an assist. Dougie Hamilton and Jaccob Slavin each had three helpers and six different Canes found the back of the net. I bring this up only as a way of getting to the fact that we still have no clue when training camp is going to begin even as some of the players will start making their way back into town.

The National Hockey League wants to start on January 1st, but every day we get closer to December without official word makes that less and less of a reality. The players are going to need at least 3-4 weeks of training camp with a few exhibition matches to get ready, and because this is the most international of leagues and we're still dealing with a raging pandemic in the United States and Europe, there are a multitude of complicating factors. Heck, the NHL still might have to completely reconfigure what the schedule is going to look like if Canada won't allow cross-border travel without periods of quarantine.

Meanwhile, the league canceled the Winter Classic, set for New Year's Day at Target Field in Minneapolis, and the All Star Weekend in Florida. And, I'm taking bets on the start of the 2021 season being after January 15, not before. There's also the matter of deciding on whether the league will start without a significant number of fans in the stands. While there are some governors willing to allow stadiums at full capacity, including Florida's Ron DeSantis, there are exactly zero state Department's of Health that concur, and it is likely the latter which will help shape the National Hockey League's policy towards attendance. Stay tuned, for this is a moving target.

With that in the distance, here's the latest news that came ashore with the Hurricanes...

Fleury finally bloomed into a NHL defenseman

Get it? Nevermind...

Tuesday night the club announced that Haydn Fleury agreed to a 2-year contract worth \$2.6 million (\$1.3 million AAV). Fleury, who had struggled to find consistent ice time under head coach Rod Brind'Amour, enjoyed a very solid third NHL campaign. He scored his first NHL goal on October 18 in Anaheim and ended the year with four goals and 14 points. More importantly, six years after being the 7th overall pick in the entry draft, he proved that he could play at this level.

Three years ago Fleury played 67 games as a rookie. He wasn't great, but he also wasn't a disaster. But, with the additions of Hamilton and Calvin de Haan, plus veteran stars

like Slavin, Brett Pesce and Justin Faulk, there was little time for Fleury barring injury. So, other than 20 games with the big club, Fleury's 2018-19 season was spent helping the Charlotte Checkers to the Calder Cup title. That, along with some playoff experience with the Canes put him in position to carve out a role with the team heading into last year. "Going into the season I thought I was ready to contribute," Fleury said on the Canes Corner Podcast. "We had so many good players on defense that it didn't happen off the start. But, I thought if I had a chance, I would be ready."

That chance came in January when Hamilton suffered his leg injury in Columbus. From that point on, Fleury was a regular in the line up, though it was really what happened after the pause -- in the bubble -- that took him to a different place. "I honestly didn't think I was going to play," Fleury said of when the Canes were preparing for their qualifying series against the Rangers. "So, I just decided to let it all go in the exhibition game against Washington and I thought I played well. Then the Rangers series was pretty physical and it was just good hockey and I thought I was pretty solid."

I think he's right. Fleury was probably Carolina's 2nd or 3rd best defenseman in the bubble. And while that might say more about how well the Canes' strength performed in Toronto than anything, there is no question that Haydn proved to himself, the critics and most importantly his head coach that he could play important minutes in the NHL.

Warren warrants new deal

Sunday night, Warren Foegele, the last remaining NHL-level player who was a restricted free agent, agreed to a 1-year deal worth \$2.15. Foegele is coming off a 13-goal, 30-point sophomore season that was this close to being worthy of calling a breakthrough. In the wake of his stellar post season performance a year ago -- specifically against the Capitals in the opening round -- much was expected in year two. At times, he delivered the goods. But, too often, Foegele was invisible and he is the type of player who should never just fade into the background.

Two training camps ago, Foegele made the team in a surprise performance that had Brind'Amour saying "that's what being a Hurricane is all about." Foegele was all effort, determination and relentless energy. In year two, maybe due to his post-season success, it kind of came and went with Warren. And, I say this with the full understanding that he was on pace for a 40-point season before the pandemic shut everything down.

Foegele, like Jordan Martinook, is the kind of player whose value should remain constant regardless of offensive production. Because if he plays the right way, the way his size, speed and skills dictate, the production will follow. From



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the start of November to just before the new year, Foegele was at his offensive best, scoring 8 goals, registering 16 points and posting a plus-minus rating of +11. He just didn't sustain a level of play that was conducive to maintaining that pace.

The Canes would have much rather done a multi-year deal, though likely for a little bit less money annually. I think they were targeting more along the lines of 2 years at between \$3.5-\$4 million in total, so this really has the feel of a compromise contract. Foegele will have the opportunity to prove his worth and the Hurricanes will reap the benefits should Warren's wager on himself pay off.

But, it's way more about process with Foegele than production.

Out the front office door

Lost in the flurry of contract signings, however, the Canes front office took another hit in Hockey Operations. Paul Krepelka, who had been one of the club's Vice Presidents, left to become an assistant General Manager with the Florida Panthers. A month and a half earlier, Rick Dudley also left the Canes to join Florida's front office. Dudley was a senior executive vice president for the Hurricanes, but will hold the title of senior advisor to new Panthers GM Bill Zito.

Krepelka, a Boston, Massachusetts native, who spent 20 years as a player agent, including 13 as a founding partner in the Orr Hockey Groupe, will join Zito's team, "I'm taking my talents to South Beach", he joked in a farewell text message. While most people wouldn't know who Paul is, this is the kind of person who makes organizations better. Considering how many different points of view he could provide (former player, agent, evaluator, etc), his presence within the team's decision-making process will be missed. It will be interesting to see how Carolina replaces Krepelka.

THE ATHLETIC

Hurricanes ownership questions, respect for Jordan Martinook: Bag of Jerks

By Sara Civian

Happy November, folks.

I hope everyone had a happy and safe Halloween. We've officially made it to our bizarre 2020 NHL offseason.

As of last night, with Warren Foegele avoiding arbitration with a one-year, \$2.15 million contract, the Hurricanes have signed all their restricted free agents with just under \$1,000,000 left to spare (\$932,261). Are they done? If so, how are they shaping up?

Let's get to it.

Questions were edited for style.

Hi Sara, I hope you're doing well! Do we know if the Canes were one of the 10 teams that had Miller marked as DND? Thank you! — Hal H.

First of all, Hal, thank you for asking this important question. According to a front office source: "We would not have drafted him."

That settles that.

What is it about Tom Dundon do you think makes him an easy target for "hockey media"? It seems like everything from his Canes tracksuits and hat to his ownership agreement makes news and ruffles hockey culture's feathers. Tom's recent interview with Tripp was great

and showed how much he cares and really wants the best for the team and Canes fans. — Jessi T.

You basically nailed it on your own there, Jessi. Hockey culture is a very tradition-based, uniform, "team first," don't draw attention to yourself type thing. That isn't a completely negative, but at the same time, anyone straying from the norm is going to be automatically judged to some degree. Add that to the fact that Dundon doesn't have a background in hockey, the small-market Hurricanes are often the target of Canadian media scrutiny no matter what they do, and Dundon has done some unconventional things. People aren't going to be itching to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Speaking of the ownership situation, it is pretty annoying when every few months a national media member discovers something about the Hurricanes and thinks it's new news, haha. Local media has been reporting on this since Dundon bought the team — yes, there's a clause in Dundon's contract that says Dundon has an option to "give the team back," per se, to former majority owner Peter Karmanos in January. This isn't some secret. Dundon had this clause in his contract when he bought the team in case it ended up not going well. Two back-to-back playoff runs and going from an irrelevant small-market franchise to one of the most talked-about teams in the league, I think it's safe to say it's going well.

In normal circumstances, it'd be highly unlikely Dundon would sell the team, and it's still highly unlikely, but obviously economic uncertainty due to COVID-19 complicates everything about owning an NHL team. It's a situation to



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keep tabs on for sure, but it's not something I'd worry about. Like you said, Dundon's recent appearance on color commentator Tripp Tracy's podcast is a must-listen.

Losing your contract guy while trying to get Svech and Dougie extended is not ideal. Do you think that losing Paul Krepelka might delay those extensions? Also, do you feel that either extension gets done before the season begins? — Shlomo R.

Here's the thing: The Hurricanes aren't really actively trying to get Andrei Svechnikov or Dougie Hamilton extended in a rush at this exact moment. There's too much going on and too much of the aforementioned economic uncertainty to rush blockbuster contracts right now coming from both sides of the matter. There is absolutely no doubt that the Hurricanes will get Svechnikov signed long-term eventually and I wouldn't waste time worrying about that. Hamilton will be a bit trickier, I know both sides are scoping out the new normal star defenseman market before rushing into a contract there. I don't think either extension will get done before the season begins, but I also don't really think it's fair to expect either to get done quickly these days.

Of course losing Paul Krepelka, whose main duty was designing the contracts, will throw a wrench in whatever has already been done, but not much has been done. It'll be interesting to see how the Canes replace him.

Is Martin Necas an NHL center? Is he strong enough on the puck and responsible enough defensively to play that role? — Shlomo R.

Not yet, but call me in two years. I think it's reminiscent of a Tyler Seguin situation — start him at wing and allow him to grow that NHL confidence (and grow physically). The Canes designed their roster and added Vincent Trocheck to ensure there was no rush with Necas, and it's been working out.

I know the next season is up in the air, but what are things you're excited to see (whenever it happens)? — Owyn C.

Hmm. How about actually getting to write about the game of hockey? I miss the day-to-day connection to the sport and the people. I miss being able to tell you guys the stupid, fun stuff like Sebastian Aho's thoughts on Halloween and Joel Edmundson's lucky stick. I'm excited to see the creative things the league will do to keep the season alive — I was blown away by how they pulled off the playoffs. I'm excited to see Andrei Svechnikov in a contract year. I'm excited to see what Jordan Staal has done with his flow. Heck, I'm even excited to tweet the lines.

Sara, any chance the Canes sign Mike Hoffman? — Charlie H.

I know they entertained the thought, but after they sign RFA Warren Foegele they'll only have an upside of \$1.5 million left in cap space. I'm sure they want to hold on to that for wiggle room in any potential trades that loom. There are so many teams in on Hoffman at this point that he's probably out of the Hurricanes' budget regardless.

Welp, seconds before I submitted this mailbag the Canes signed Foegele to a one-year, \$2.15 million contract. Now they've got around \$1 million left in cap space and this is definitely off the table.

OK, when do the Canes go after Marc-Andre Fleury? — Bob S.

I'm all for it.

How many games do you think Jake Bean will play this year or could you see him being dealt? — Jamie M.

Both are possibilities and then there's the expansion draft. This is pure speculation on my part, but I believe the strategy of keeping one million defensemen with NHL potential around has to do with the expansion draft. It gives the Canes flexibility to make a trade and potentially still not lose an asset to their team, but of course there's also the element of uncertainty in the expansion draft. At this point, though, Bean could be traded in a package or something for an NHL player the Canes might have more of a need for. I understand Bean's offensive upside might be higher than Fleury's, but Brind'Amour has shown he's more likely to give defensemen he trusts the big NHL minutes — and he finally trusts Fleury. There might be an NHL coach out there with a less luxurious blue line that Bean could grow into himself on, then everyone wins.

Sara ... we know that management is pretty comfortable with the team makeup for next season. My concern is that they have not improved the team for the playoffs. To advance in the playoffs it has been proven that in addition to skill you need a lot of grit and toughness, two qualities mostly missing from this team. Your thoughts please. — CMS

CMS ... This is one of my concerns, to some degree as well. I did like what I saw from Haydn Fleury as for toughness in the playoffs last season — and he did the same exact thing when the Checkers won the Calder Cup. I do think the Jesper Fast signing added some under-the-radar grit, especially because it allows the Jordan Staal line to be a true checking line.

The thing about power forwards and tough veterans, though, is there's almost always a dozen of them available at the trade deadline every season. If I'm the Hurricanes that's when I'm assessing how much more "grit" the team needs and at what cost. If it's still clearly lacking at that point and they do nothing, that's when I'd worry.

How come reporters always ask Jordan Martinook to talk about Andrei Svechnikov but nobody ever asks Svech about Marty? Would love to hear his perspective on what Marty's meant to him or taught him, or his thoughts on the pregame ritual ... any chance you could remedy this next season? — Tom B.

LOL, once we were in Canada and Hamilton joked to a group of reporters that he talks about Svechnikov more than he talks about himself at this point. Also one of my favorite things I've ever witnessed in an NHL dressing room: One time a TV reporter who never covers the team came in



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during the playoffs and interviewed Martinook then had the audacity to ask him what number he was (meaning the guy didn't know who Martinook was). Martinook did not say 48. Justice was served that day.

And honestly, I think it's because Svechnikov is such a humble kid that the best way to learn more about him is through those closest to him. I love asking Rod Brind'Amour about Martinook because he always goes off — you can tell the level of respect Brind'Amour has for Martinook, and if

someone like Brind'Amour has that much respect for you, you know you're doing something right.

I will absolutely write a story about Martinook for you, Tom B. I'm also assuming this is Tom Brady, closet Jordan Martinook fan.

Would you consider playing adult/beer league hockey?
— Pat C.

Drop the time and place.

Hurricanes prospect tiers: Players to watch for the 2020-21 season

By Sara Civian

Want the good news or the bad news?

We'll rip off the Band-Aid, I suppose. The Hurricanes don't have their usual gigantic list of prospects who could potentially jump onto the roster out of training camp and knock our collective socks off.

This is because of the good news. Firstly, many of those once-enticing prospects have either become NHL mainstays or were traded to improve the team.

Secondly, the Hurricanes have so much to work with at the NHL level already that there aren't many open spots.

Folks, this is what's *suggested* to happen.

Still, the cupboard isn't completely empty. Between the past two drafts, recent free-agent signings and in-house prospects taking steps, who might we see make the roster out of camp? Who will get called up in the event of Dave Ayres night 2.0? Who should you keep an eye on for the years to come?

Tier I: Most likely on the Hurricanes roster next season

Morgan Geekie, F: At what point does Geekie's roster spot become a given? We're right on the cusp after he followed up his legendary NHL debut with a strong fourth-line presence in the postseason. I'd count on him to make the roster out of camp despite its crowdedness. He made the cut on my post-Jesper Fast signing depth chart.

Tier II: Competing for spots in camp

Ryan Suzuki, F: Suzuki is arguably the best forward prospect the Hurricanes have not currently in the NHL, but roster space and development become an issue for his cracking the 2020-21 squad. The 19-year-old had a slow start to the 2019-20 OHL season in Barrie, sustained an eye injury, returned, and was traded to Saginaw where he tore it up. You hate to see an injury derail an important year for a top prospect, but the way Suzuki came back was impressive. He started the season with five goals and 23 points in 21 games for the Colts, then put up 13 goals and 35 points in 23 games for the Spirit.

I doubt he makes the roster this season because there's no rush, but he might enjoy an extended stay at training camp due to the OHL's projected Feb. 4 start.

Jake Bean, D: Is this the year the Hurricanes 13th-overall pick in 2016 gets some real NHL minutes? We'll see. The blue line is stacked once again but Trevor van Riemsdyk is gone, UFA Sami Vatanen isn't expected to re-sign and a couple of Hurricanes defensemen could be involved in future trades. Depending on what the roster rules are for the season (it's 2020, who knows?), maybe the Canes will give him a chance to join the roster and prove himself. His training camp performance will likely hold the most weight of any of the Hurricanes prospects.

Tier III: Most likely to be called up at some point

Clark Bishop, F: The Hurricanes re-signed Bishop to a one-year contract, paying \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$100,000 at the AHL level. They trust him as one of the first depth call ups when a bottom-six player gets injured.

Steven Lorentz, F: Lorentz is in an interesting spot as a perhaps over-performing 24-year-old prospect. The seventh-round pick had a breakout year in Charlotte last season with 23 goals and 46 points in 61 games. The Canes rewarded him with an invitation to return-to-play training camp and a two-year, two-way contract. The organization is keeping a closer eye on him these days.

Joakim Ryan, D: The Canes signed Ryan to a one-year, two-way deal paying \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$150,000 at the AHL level for depth purposes. He's played in 141 NHL games between the Kings and Sharks and 20 NHL playoff games. I bet the Canes wish they had someone like Ryan around when Dougie Hamilton and Brett Pesce both went down. I see this as a preventative signing for a team that thrives on a strong defense.

Joey Keane, D: Keane is capable of joining an NHL roster if needed and, again, we all know by now the Hurricanes love having a few guys like this in their arsenal. But he's more than just one of those guys — he still has NHL potential at 21 years old. He's a solid puck-mover who can put up points and he's translated well to the pro level. If the injury bug hits the blue line and/or all of the aforementioned options don't quite pan out, you'd expect Keane to get a look or two.

Jeremy Bracco, F: The Canes signed Bracco, who was once considered a top Maple Leafs prospect, to a one-year, two-way deal in free agency. The Leafs didn't qualify the 23-year-old winger who has yet to make his NHL debut, but the Hurricanes seem to have a way with the chip-on-the-



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shoulder types. Bracco ranked second in the AHL in points (79) and assists (57) in 2018-19, then tallied four goals and 30 assists in 44 AHL games in 2019-20. He won't be expected to make the already stacked NHL forward rotation, but why not give him a shot if the opportunity presents itself?

Alex Nedeljkovic, G: Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci once heralded him as their "goalie of the future." Have they given up on him? No, but it would be foolish for a Cup contender to place those expectations on someone who has appeared in six NHL games (306:16) over the past two seasons. It'll be interesting to see how the Canes use him in the last year of his contract until restricted free agency. I wouldn't totally rule out a few looks at the NHL level considering the unpredictability of the goalie position.

Tier IV: On the radar

Dominik Bokk, F: An enticing part of the Justin Faulk return, the 20-year-old's progression in the SHL will be something to keep an eye on. He's a super talented playmaker but after a slow start last year, he'll be working on his consistency this season. Once he establishes that you might see him in North America next season with the Wolves.

Stelio Mattheos, F: I can't wait to see what Mattheos does this season after missing most of last season being treated for testicular cancer. He didn't miss a beat upon his return in January. He's a solid all-around player who still has time to develop some NHL potential.

Seth Jarvis, F: The Hurricanes first-rounder (13th overall) in 2020 just got invited to Canada's world junior camp along with Suzuki and Jamieson Rees, which is always a good sign. Last season he registered 98 points (42 goals, 56 assists) in 58 games with the WHL's Portland Winterhawks.

Hurricanes RFAs: Projecting Warren Foegele and Haydn Fleury's contracts

By Sara Civian

The Hurricanes had a relatively quiet start to 2020 free agency, and it's doubtful we'll see any more out-of-house moves until they deal with the rest of the in-house stuff.

Namely, it's time to sign restricted free agents Warren Foegele and Haydn Fleury. After signing Jesper Fast to a three-year, \$6 million contract, the Canes have roughly \$5,082,261 in projected cap space. That'll be enough to sign both Foegele and Fleury. But how much should they make? What should the term look like? And what will the Canes have left to play with?

We'll find out by Nov. 4 and Nov. 8 — Foegele and Fleury's respective arbitration dates — just keep in mind they could still arrive at a deal with the Canes before it comes to that. The Canes can at least take solace that Foegele and Fleury are relatively cheap RFA contracts as the front office navigates cap troubles and economic uncertainty. Both players are important for the success of the Hurricanes in the next 3-4 years, so there's a sense the Canes will push hard to get deals done before the arbitration hearings. But amidst

His coach spoke to *The Athletic* recently about his player, who improved his production by 59 points last season.

David Cotton, F: We also caught up with Cotton, who improved in each of his four years at Boston College, right after he signed with the Canes. I think he'll develop into a solid bottom-six player.

Jack Drury, F: Drury's game has translated pretty well in the SHL so far after leaving Harvard as one of the top players in the ECAC. He's got five assists in 11 games

Pyotr Kochetkov, G: I'd like to see Kochetkov pull a full, solid season together in the KHL before we make any grand declaration of his potential, but I'll definitely be keeping a close eye on that this season. He's got all the tools, he just needs to use them consistently.

Patrik Puustola, F: Puustola struggled a bit to translate his creative style of play at Finland's top-level (Liiga) last season, and he bounced around. I'd like to see a full season of success in Liiga to feel good about his NHL potential.

Jamieson Rees, F: Rees, drafted 44th overall in 2019, posted 61 points (18 goals, 43 assists) in 39 games with the OHL's Sarnia Sting in 2019-20. He was one of the top points-per-game players in the OHL last season, so expectations are high coming into 2020-21. He also snagged an invite to Canada's world junior camp.

Anttoni Honka, D: If Honka can improve his game in his own end he'll be a really fun NHL player. He's got one goal and three assists through the first 10 games of the Liiga season.

Your favorite prospect I didn't include: He's gonna make it!

the aforementioned economic uncertainty, who could blame Fleury and Foegele for squeezing everything they can out of their deals?

Evolving-Hockey has a brilliant contract projection tool that predicts Foegele will have a \$2.149 million cap hit and a 41 percent probability of a two-year term. The tool projects Fleury signs at a \$1.272 million cap hit with a 40 percent probability of a two-year contract.

This seems more or less fair, but I'd say Fleury deserves a little bit more after his strong finish to the season. Let's dive deeper ...

Warren Foegele

Foegele has been interesting since his NHL debut point streak — constant effort, heavy forecheck, elite penalty drawing, streaky scoring. He finished seventh in scoring on the Canes in the 2019-20 regular season with 13 goals and 30 points — that's two more goals than Nino Niederreiter (\$5.25 million AAV) and five more goals than Ryan Dzingel (\$3.375 million AAV). That said, he was virtually invisible in the postseason with one goal in eight games.



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You can expect contracts these days to be slightly cheaper and/or shorter, though, so recent signings around the league could be more relevant than in-house comparables. The Stars locked down breakout forward Denis Gurianov (nine goals and 17 points in 27 games in his postseason debut) at two years, \$2.55 million AAV. Vancouver's Jake Virtanen got the same exact deal with 18 goals and 36 points in 69 regular season games.

Foegele shows real flashes of potential and can play anywhere in the lineup, but with all the talent on the roster, he'll likely be in a bottom-six role next season. Under the current circumstances, it makes sense for the 24-year-old to sign a two-year contract in the \$2 million AAV range. I'd consider Foegele signing for anything less than \$2 million AAV a win for the Canes and anything more than \$2.2 million pushing it.

Haydn Fleury

Fleury was starting to live up to his No. 7 overall hype last season — he flourished when injuries to Dougie Hamilton and Brett Pesce forced head coach Rod Brind'Amour to play him more. He kicked it into an entirely new gear in the playoffs and was one of the best Hurricanes skaters of the postseason, including two goals on an offense-starved team. Especially with his good friend Trevor van Riemsdyk off to

Washington and Sami Vatanen not expected back, Fleury's role with the Canes is going to expand.

Still, he's likely a third-pairing defenseman on a blue line stacked with talent and almost unbelievably cheap contracts, and it seems like the best is truly yet to come for the 24-year-old finally getting his shot. It'd make sense for Fleury to bet on himself on a shorter contract as it is. Two years in the \$1.5-2 million AAV range? I'd consider anything less than \$1.5 million AAV a win for the Canes and anything more than \$1.7 million AAV a win for Fleury.

Where will this leave the Canes?

Let's assume nothing crazy happens and both Foegele and Fleury get contracts in the discussed ranges.

Best case scenario, Foegele and Fleury both sign contracts with around \$1.5 million AAVs and the Canes are left with close to \$2 million in 2020-21 before any trades.

Worst case scenario, Foegele and Fleury both sign contracts with slightly more than \$2 million AAVs and the Canes are right at the cap before any trades.

In the most realistic scenario, the Canes will probably be left with around \$1.5 million. If they don't make any trades, I'd assume the roster is set after that and they'd keep the leftovers for some breathing room.

SportScan

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

The Athletic / LeBrun: Kraken already eyeing leverage in NHL expansion draft

By Pierre LeBrun Oct 31, 2020 99

We're not going to overthink it this time.

That was the prevailing thought from so many NHL front offices in the three years between the Vegas expansion extortion, er, draft, and the one that's coming next summer for Seattle.

The most common refrain in NHL circles was that teams would keep it as simple as possible this time around. They would lose whichever player they lost in the Seattle expansion draft, but they wouldn't lose two or three players just to protect one.

Lesson learned, so many have said.

Which from the outset appeared to make this a more daunting task for the Kraken, the expansion cousins in Vegas having put the rest of the NHL through a crash course on the modern-day expansion draft. Part of it was the more favourable rules Vegas received (imagine the 1992-93 Ottawa Senators comparing notes!), but let's also credit some shrewd thinking and maneuvering by Vegas management.

They had teams over a barrel and they took full advantage of it. Seattle gets the same expansion draft rules, but this time teams it seemed would be smarter with their asset management ahead of the 2021 expansion draft.

Seattle would have it tougher. That was the narrative.

Or so we thought ...

That was before COVID-19 descended and made the 2020 calendar one to burn and forget.

More to the point in the hockey world, it also forcibly has already changed the plans of many NHL front offices thanks to a flat salary cap and unreal financial pressures to where one NHL GM recently mused to me that Seattle, it turns out, might have teams eating out of its hands. This despite the best-laid plans from front offices hoping to avoid the Vegas extortion experience of 2017.

I mean, I can think of a few teams in salary cap hell right now that might beg Seattle to take on certain contractual obligations and sweeten the pot in a side deal with a first-round pick or a top prospect or a Shea Theodore-esque young NHL player to make it happen.

So despite all this talk of NHL teams wanting to keep it simple this time around and avoid making side deals favouring the league's 32nd franchise, the realities of the new world might actually provide



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opportunities and leverage points for Seattle, after all, heading into next summer's expansion draft.

"Well, I think certainly, that's what we're hoping," Kraken GM Ron Francis told The Athletic over the phone Friday.

"But I think there are pros and cons, right? Obviously, the cap being flat should be a benefit to us. But I think you saw a lot of teams doing some maneuvering this summer, whether it was buyouts, moving players for picks and stuff, to help alleviate some of their situations."

And, well, because there are so many unknowns with next season, that will also have an impact on things.

"There's so much yet to be determined as to the season, will it be 82 games or less than 82 games, are people allowed in the building or not allowed in the building, so there's a lot of things that will influence things over the next few months for sure," Francis said.

On the flip side, while Seattle might gain leverage on some teams in their expansion draft talks, the COVID effect might prove a detriment to the Kraken when it comes to scouting both on the amateur and pro side.

They're going to have fewer games to watch, which shortens their information window in preparation for both the expansion draft and their first amateur NHL Draft next summer.

So as Francis said, there are pros and cons to this topsy-turvy year as Seattle prepares to enter the picture for real.

In normal times, the Kraken a year from now would be entering their second month of the 2021-22 season. Now, well, who knows when exactly next season starts.

"Does it start on time or close to on time as possible because of the Olympics in 2022? Does it start later because the previous season went longer?" Francis said. "There's a lot of questions in that regard. The schedule for '20-21 is obviously going to impact the timing of the expansion draft and the amateur draft I would assume as well, too. So unfortunately right now, there's just a lot more questions than there are answers. But I think in our mind, we have to be prepared to start on time and if things change, we adjust."

"Rather than planning on being delayed and getting caught off-guard, we'll plan on starting on time and if we have to adjust, we'll adjust."

So they will continue to have mock expansion drafts internally, which they began doing a year ago.

"We did some last year for sure, and I prefaced it by saying, 'I guarantee you things will be totally different by the time we get to this point next year,'" Francis said. "And certainly that's the case. But that's part of the process. You look at things every step of the way, when teams go through the trade deadline, OK now what do things look like? When teams go through free agency, now what do things look like? That's a key part of the process, trying to assess where teams' lineups are and what they might do, and who might not be available, and adjust accordingly."

The offseason moves over the past month have answered some questions that way. In other words, you can now pencil in Braden Holtby and Jake Allen as Seattle Kraken goalies for next season, right?

To which Francis responded with a healthy laugh over the phone.

"Can't comment on other team's players, you know that Pierre," Francis chuckled.

I'm joking, of course, I have no idea whom Seattle will pick for its goalies. Although Holtby and Allen will both be available, one would think, and would make a pretty strong duo to start out.

Will Tyler Johnson be part of things in Seattle? We've speculated this before, but I would think the native of Spokane, Wash., would be open to that. Which is why his potential landing spot, once cap-challenged Tampa Bay figures that out, will be intriguing.

Francis would never comment on this on or off the record, but I guarantee you at least one team thinking of trading for Johnson (and whatever other asset Tampa sweetens the deal with) would have called Seattle by now wondering if Johnson would be of interest if left unprotected in the expansion draft next summer. That would make taking his contract that has four more years at a \$5 million cap hit more palatable.

Thing is, what is Francis supposed to tell that team? How could he possibly guarantee taking Johnson this far out when it might be that there's a more appealing player of interest to the Kraken next summer from that organization.

The fact is, Seattle can't start making trades until it pays off its \$650 million expansion fee. It was the same for Vegas. The Golden Knights were allowed to start making trades as of March 2017 when the last expansion fee payment was received.

"We're not officially part of the league until we make our last payment, which will happen next year," Francis said. "We can't make any transactions until that starts happening. That doesn't preclude us from talking to teams and teams from talking to us if either side wanted to."

But it really becomes a theoretical discussion at this point when teams call. Francis can't promise anything to anyone yet.

"Well I think it is at this point, all the teams and all the GMs are in the same boat. They're waiting to see where this goes and what kind of season they're going to have, the length of the season and fans in the building, that affects a lot of things for everybody," Francis said.

In the meantime, it's been a busy week for Francis, announcing 19 hires in two separate announcements, seven on Wednesday led by Gary Roberts,

And on Friday, the Kraken announced 12 amateur scouting hires:

Robert Kron, Director of Amateur Scouting

Jeff Crisp, Amateur Scout

Mike Dawson, Amateur Scout

Pelle Eklund, European Scout

Marcus Fingal, European Scout

Sasu Hovi, European Scout

Tony MacDonald, Amateur Scout

Tom O'Connor, Amateur Scout

Thomas Plante, Amateur Scout

Aleksandr Plyushev, European Scout

Trevor Stienburg, Amateur Scout

Darren Yopyk, Amateur Scout

"I worked with Robert in Carolina," Francis said of Kron. "A lot of times I'm on the road with him and watching games with him, talking hockey with him, felt real comfortable that Robert knows a good hockey player when he sees one. He has a good eye for talent."

And you can imagine how many people from around the NHL and the hockey world at large sent in job applications to fill out the Kraken amateur scouting department.

"We had no shortage of applications for jobs. Honestly, the tough part is that there's so many good, qualified people for not enough jobs," Francis said. "But the guys we picked, we picked for a reason. They have experience, they've been in key roles."

What the Kraken haven't filled out yet is a rather important job. They've decided to wait on a head coach for now.

"We don't know yet the kind of team we may be able to draft so we're comfortable kind of sitting back and waiting right now and watching what



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happens here," Francis said. "There's still, hopefully, a 2020-21 season getting up and running and playing. Are there guys that end up losing their jobs or looking for other things elsewhere? I just think we have time on this. We're not in a race to make that decision at this point."

Have the Kraken interviewed any coaching candidates yet?

"You know I won't tell you that," Francis said, laughing.

Hey, I tried.

I think he had a conversation with Gerard Gallant a few months ago, for example, and though I suspect Francis will end up interviewing a long list of candidates, no question in my mind my pick would be Gallant. I wouldn't overthink this one if I were Seattle given the unbelievable success Gallant had out of the gates in Vegas.

Speaking of the Golden Knights, it will be intriguing to see how Seattle approaches its vision for the first few years. Will it be win-now like Vegas or a bit more of a long-term approach with a more youthful roster? What will be the overriding philosophy fuelling their roster construction?

Depends who's available, of course.

"I think we're getting closer to having an idea now that we've gotten through a little bit of the free agency," Francis said. "There could still be moves before the NHL hopefully gets up and running. Things become a little bit clearer as far as what you think may or may not be available, and then you start having those discussions with teams and try to get an indication on what may or may not be available. So I think once you get more into that process a little bit more, we'll have a better indication (of their roster approach/philosophy)."

Let's not kid ourselves, there will be pressure to win.

"You always want to win now," Francis said. "But we'll have to judge the landscape and see where things are and make the decisions that are right both short term and long term."

The Athletic / TSN's Ray Ferraro on world juniors broadcast, life between the benches

By Lisa Dillman Oct 30, 2020

Ray Ferraro returned home to Vancouver from a road trip on March 13 and was greeted by a clever piece of artwork, a sign from his 10-year-old son, Reese.

Welcome home for a month dad, yay

One month turned into two and then three and is now seven and counting. Ferraro stepped off the fast-moving professional treadmill and, like so many in the sports world, is biding his time and waiting to get back on.

This isn't to say he has been idle. Far from it. The former NHLer and TSN analyst has been podcasting (Ray and Dregs) and is a fixture on TSN Overdrive 1050 and frequently heard on TSN 1040 in Vancouver. He and his wife, Cammi Granato, have two active boys. Granato was hired more than a year ago as a pro scout for the expansion Seattle Kraken.

Ferraro does have this in common with some current NHLers. He used the long pause to address a chronic health issue and underwent knee replacement surgery in September.

It was a byproduct of wear and tear from a career spanning 18 NHL seasons and 1,258 games. Ferraro guessed that he had between eight and 10 knee surgeries previously.

He took time before a rehabilitation appointment recently to speak with The Athletic about the upcoming world juniors, what life is like broadcasting between the benches and trips down broadcasting memory lane. There's a baseball bonus story about him playing in the Little League World Series.

(Note: The conversation has been edited for clarity.)

So how are you faring after knee surgery?

I'm walking around. Not fast. But I can get where I need to go. The problem had become ... I was still getting around and doing everything. But every couple of months, it was getting a little worse and a little worse. They said, "Look, there's nothing else surgically we can do." You either put up with it for however long you can put up with it, or let's just get it done. And I'm like, "I don't need a great knee when I'm 82. I need one now."

If we could go back to March: What was life like for you when everything came to a halt?

What we all expected? I don't know. None of us expected it to be this. I didn't know what to expect other than this is going to take a long time. What I've found is how important work is to me, giving me a sense of direction and a sense of purpose.

But, in the meantime, because there's no other choice, it's slowed down my brain in a lot of different ways. With the help of Cammi, I'm looking around at my life and what to be grateful for and what to be encouraged by, and what to improve upon. It's been a pretty self-reflective journey because for months we didn't leave the house. We left the house to go to the grocery store.

I checked my credit card. I filled up my gas tank in February, and the next time I filled it up was May 4.

What have you been watching lately?

The first week I was home (after surgery) was the day Major League Baseball had eight playoff games. And I think I watched north of 60 innings. What else am I gonna do? I couldn't go anywhere. The games were just rolling over from one to the other. And all of a sudden it was dark.

Speaking of baseball, I thought I knew a lot about you. But I didn't realize you competed in the Little League World Series in 1976, playing second base for Trail (British Columbia)

I've had some really cool, great experiences, right? My dream was to play in the NHL, and I played for 18 years. And then I get to broadcast and I've been in some of the most amazing places because of hockey. But one of the greatest memories of my life is that trip in 1976. We had 19 kids try out for a team of 14 players. When we made it to the World Series, and it was just amazing.

Baseball has been a love of mine my whole life. Baseball and hockey were side by side. I was a Canadian, and I love hockey. But I played baseball until I turned pro.

Did you have a team you followed when you were a kid and beyond?

The Red Sox. I was 11 and just starting to get into baseball. The Red Sox had these two rookies, Jim Rice and Fred Lynn. And Jim Rice was my all-time favorite player. In 1986, I was standing on a piano bench in a restaurant bar in Hartford after a game and the Sox needed one out to win (the World Series) ... and they lose to the Mets (in Game 6). I was a Red Sox fan for 30 years before they won in '04.

Leaving baseball and moving back to hockey and your broadcasting career, you went from playing in the NHL to the booth almost immediately.

I retired in May of 2002 and started broadcasting (full-time) in October of 2002. Cammi and I had gone to a game in October. It must have been the Canucks home opener. It was the first time I was in a building as a fan, and the Canucks came out and the ceremony and the pageantry or whatever. The music's playing and I started to cry. It hit me there that I



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would never do that again. Cammi's career had ended because she had been cut just prior to that. So here the two of us are — the dreams of our professional lives were gone at the same time. That was a tough time.

I was so lucky to be able to get right into broadcasting. Always thought I would get back to coach or to get into management. Then time went on and went on, and here I am.

Where do you think you have improved the most in broadcasting?

Improvement comes through repetition. Saying less to make your point. I have the tendency, even now, to talk too much. It's like on the road and you can see the exit ramp. You got to get off, but you're in the wrong lane. I never found evaluating the players particularly difficult. I decided early that I was gonna be fair and honest but also remember how hard the game is to play. I hope that comes across.

Being critical just to be critical, I don't like that. One thing you will never hear me say is Player X has to do better with the puck there. Well, he passed it to the other team and they scored. It's my job to say why he could have made a different play.

I work hard at it. I watch myself, which is not always very comfortable. I try to be better all the time. And I do remember that we're not doing brain surgery here.

We almost take it for granted that there is going to be the presence of an analyst between the benches. Back in the beginning, what was it like for you?

When I came to TSN, that was a position that they had established. I said, "Look, I'm not really comfortable going down between the benches. I don't think it's my place." And they said, "No, that's where we broadcast the games from." I did about two games and I called my boss and said, "I don't want to broadcast from anywhere else."

Why was that the case with you?

Oh, you can hear. You can see the puck spinning. You can get a few interactions with the players that are kind of funny. I just love it there. I feel like I'm connected to the game.

How often are there things you hear between the benches that aren't, say, network-friendly?

Less than you would think. Some people will tell you, they can hear everything down there. I don't know how they do. We've got a headset on. But once you get past two or three players, it's just noise. You hear a lot of "F you," and of course, you're not reporting that.

I always tell this story because I think it was really funny. So Steve Ott was playing for St. Louis and I was doing the game between the benches. There was a scrum. In the scrum, he punches this guy in the face. Instead of going straight back to St. Louis' bench, he skates in front of the other bench. And he says to them, "Hey, guys, you can thank me later, I punched him in the face. I all know you want to do it, but I got it for you." Their bench cracked up, and he cracked up. It was a good line. It was sharp.

Your next big assignment will be the world juniors in Edmonton. Given the age of the players, how differently do you approach that particular assignment?

I have more understanding of the mistakes that might be made. I have a teenager now, and I've had two kids that have already gone through their teenage years. The emotions of a teenager and how much that matters to these kids playing these high-pressure games. For the most part, these kids will never play bigger games. So I'm mindful of that. One of the toughest things I had to make a comment about was when Lias Andersson threw his medal into the stands.

Because it was wrong. And he shouldn't have done it. And he's a teenager. I found that very difficult. Had that been an adult there would have been no leeway. You should know better. You don't like it, just leave it on, take it off, whatever. But this is a 19-year-old kid. And he shouldn't have thrown it. But I understood that the emotion was too big, and this is what happened.

Interestingly, you brought that up. The Kings traded for Andersson earlier this month, and it certainly hasn't been forgotten by hockey fans.

Here's the thing. Lias is 22. OK, so it happened three or four years ago. I'd like to think most of us would react to almost any situation in our life different than we would three years ago. Why wouldn't he be given that same leeway?

The Athletic / Duhatschek notebook: Offseason injury guessing games, 2012 draft revisited

By Eric Duhatschek Oct 30, 2020

Players have offseason surgery all the time, that's an annual fact of NHL life. The price a player pays to play a body contact sport can be high — for some greater than others. Probably no one has had a tougher run of injuries lately than Tampa Bay Lightning captain Steven Stamkos, who underwent surgery again after the Lightning won the 2020 Stanley Cup, this time to correct the core abdominal issues that required an operation earlier in the season and limited him to less than three minutes of action in the playoffs.

When the Lightning announced details of the surgery, they made it clear they hoped that Stamkos would be healthy when the NHL gets back to playing again, whenever that might be.

But that uncertainty — over when the NHL may return, or even if it will return at some point in the 2020-21 season — may provide one small blessing in disguise.

For any player that's been trying to manage an injury, without ever dealing with it head-on, the current guessing games over when play resumes have allowed a number of them to focus on their health and use the time off to get their issues treated so they can move on with their careers when the opportunity eventually presents itself.

So, for example, this offseason:

- Two-thirds of the Boston Bruins' top line — Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak — underwent surgery to correct injuries that will require time to properly heal. Marchand's surgery was to repair a sports hernia; the forecast was he'd need four months to recover. Pastrnak needed a labral tear repair in his right hip and the Bruins pegged his convalescence at five months.

- In Dallas, the Stars unveiled a long injury list at the end of their run to the Stanley Cup Final, primarily headed up by forward Tyler Seguin and goaltender Ben Bishop. According to general manager Jim Nill's post-playoff injury rundown, Seguin suffered a torn labrum in his right hip and was using October to assess his options. A decision about whether to go forward with surgery was expected sometime early next week.

In Bishop's case, he underwent knee surgery back in May, during the NHL pause, but hardly played in the playoffs. According to Nill: "In the end, it just didn't have enough time to heal."

- In Edmonton, there's still no official word if Oscar Klefbom, who was been bothered by repeated shoulder issues since he was a junior, is going forward with surgery to deal with arthritis which reportedly has developed. The Oilers and Klefbom are taking their time in making a decision and seeking a variety of medical opinions before settling on a course of action. If surgery is the answer for Klefbom, it could keep him out of the Oilers' line-up for six-to-eight months and likely means he'll miss all of the 2020-21 season. One reason the Oilers were so aggressive in signing Tyson Barrie as a free agent is the likely scenario that Barrie will fill Klefbom's role on the Oilers' power play for all of next season.



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For many, the original news of Klefbom's chronic shoulder woes almost seemed like a bolt out of the blue because of how much Klefbom played for the Oilers in the playoff bubble. Even though Edmonton lost in four games to the Chicago Blackhawks in the play-in round, Klefbom led the team in average time on ice (24:13). This, after Klefbom managed to get into 62 of the Oilers' 71 regular-season games and played 25:25 a night, almost two minutes more than the next highest player, Darnell Nurse at 23:27. Whatever issues Klefbom might have been dealing with, it looked as if he WAS dealing with them and was managing them OK.

Or it did until the postseason injury reveal.

NHL teams hate to talk about injuries. They're almost always framed vaguely – upper body, lower body (cleverly, sometimes you'll hear about a middle-body injury). In the bubble, a new term emerged – unfit to play – which made things even more opaque.

But Klefbom's case, and the time he's taking before making a decision on treatment, suggest he too understands that, at 27 and with a lot of potential years still left to play in the NHL, there may be value to fully and physically recovering from the year-after-year wear-and-tear he's endured thus far in his career.

Maybe the time off will pay dividends in terms of his career longevity, in the same way Teemu Selanne once did.

A decade and a half ago, Selanne became the poster boy for the power of healing, a player who never made a secret out of the fact the NHL lockout in 2004-05 saved his career. Going into the lockout, Selanne's knees were so beat up that it had significantly affected his skating speed. He had his worst year ever – playing for the Colorado Avalanche, just before the lockout – and had to come to the realization that it might be too difficult and painful to continue.

But then two things occurred. He had the necessary corrective surgery to fix the problem and he had the necessary time to properly heal.

From the time Selanne played his last game before the pause (May 2004) and the time he played his next game in October 2005, he had 17 months to get healthy.

No one, least of all Selanne, knew what it would be like to step back into an NHL lineup, but there was a happily-ever-after element to the story. He scored 40 goals in 80 games for the Ducks in that comeback 05-06 season, helped them win the Cup in 06-07 and ended up playing nine additional seasons in Anaheim before he finally retired.

According to Michael J. Stuart, Professor of Orthopedics and Sports Medicine at the Mayo Clinic and the chief medical and safety officer for USA Hockey, recovery from injury requires a four-step program: 1. An accurate diagnosis; 2. Focused treatment; 3. Time; and 4. Reassessment to determine healing and function (for range of motion, strength, balance, agility, power and psychological readiness).

In an email message, Dr. Stuart said there is clearly a "biology of healing" that requires time, irrespective of variables such as athlete skill level, expertise of the medical providers, motivation to resume playing and pressure from team management. Dr. Stuart also stressed that no two injuries are exactly alike and thus the "art" of sports medicine requires an individualized approach. Ultimately then, it up to an athlete's health-care providers to determine "the appropriate time in order to prevent returning players too soon or keeping them out too long."

In terms of the NHL's current injury cohort, the best opportunity for an extra-long convalescence involves players on the seven bottom-feeders that didn't return to play. So, for example, the Kings' veteran forward Jeff Carter underwent surgery back on June 4 to repair issues with both his hips and it may well be that when NHL play resumes, Carter will be healthier than he's been in a long time.

He clearly wants to play again, which is not always the case for older players, where the health issues may start to become chronic.

Generally speaking, it's the unwillingness to put in the necessary offseason training that wanes over time. Players choosing to retire almost always cite that as a primary factor. They might miss the camaraderie

associated with being part of a team, but they won't miss the work that goes into trying to be the best they can be 82 times a season. Consistency from night to night is what sets NHL players apart from the ones who don't make it, but it can exact a toll, physically and mentally, on a player.

Perhaps no one understands the value of healing more than former NHLer Gary Roberts, who retired from the NHL in 1995 because of neck and upper back issues, but ultimately, got healthy again over a nearly two-year absence, returned to play for Carolina at the start of the 1997-98 season, and similar to Selanne, added a 12-year chapter to a career that at one point, looked as if it was over.

Roberts now works as a fitness trainer in Toronto and has, on his client roster, everyone from Connor McDavid to Stamkos, whom he mentored as a young player and helped teach about the value of fitness, conditioning, nutrition, and generally taking care of himself.

Recently, Roberts was in the news again, hired by Seattle Kraken general manager (and former Carolina teammate Ron Francis) to consult with the newest NHL team as a sports science and performance consultant.

Roberts once told me, when it looked as if his career had come to a premature end, he couldn't even stand to be in the arena watching games.

"At that point in my life, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself," said Roberts, "but I decided, in order to give myself every opportunity to play, I was going to have to change my lifestyle. I started eating better. I started training differently.

"No one really gave me a chance to play. Even I had my doubts. But the choices I made enabled me to play another 12 or 13 years in the NHL, and that's basically what I try to teach today. I try to give this information to young players and hopefully they can avoid some of the challenges I had."

It's the sort of messaging that will presumably resonate with Klefbom, Seguin and every other NHLer facing a career crossroads because of a major medical issue – that time sometimes can and does heal all wounds.

Alex Galchenyuk surfaces

I thought Ottawa overpaid for a number of their newest additions – including goaltender Matt Murray and forward Evgenii Dadonov – but I didn't mind the latest contract, only \$1.05 million that they'll pay for a single season of Alex Galchenyuk, a deal that they completed earlier this week.

Galchenyuk may be one of the most polarizing players in the NHL right now, which is why he is now playing for his fifth team in three years after stops in Montreal, Arizona, Pittsburgh and Minnesota. In every city that was supposed to be a new beginning and a fresh start, things got worse or at most, stayed the same for Galchenyuk. They didn't necessarily get better.

The hope for player and team is that trend gets reversed in Ottawa.

On paper, it should. Presumably, Galchenyuk will get a chance to slot in immediately on the top line, with Dadonov and Brady Tkachuk, largely because who else is going to fit in there? Chris Tierney? Colin White?

Long term, the best of the bunch might be Josh Norris, but it's hard to imagine Norris getting an audition as the team's No. 1 centre this early in his career.

Galchenyuk, meanwhile, is unbelievably, already entering his eighth NHL season, even though he's just 26. As a teenager, in the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season, Galchenyuk scored 27 points in 48 games for Montreal after playing the first half of that season for Sarnia in the OHL (where he was teammates for two years with Nail Yakupov, who went first overall in the same 2012 NHL Draft where Galchenyuk went third overall).



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So much of the conversation during the early, decent years in Montreal focused on where Galchenyuk should play – centre or the wing – but in Ottawa, he will almost certainly have to play in the middle, just because the need there is so great. Galchenyuk is coming off a contract that paid him an annual average salary of \$4.9 million; the fact that he lingered on the free-agent market so long tells you all you need to know about his options and his bargaining power.

The lure of Ottawa was the opportunity to play premium minutes on a team that probably won't be much good in 2020-21 but has recently added enough talent to the organizational depth chart to suggest they will be much improved 24 months or so from now.

That, then, is ultimately Galchenyuk's end game – to establish himself as a fixture in the Senators lineup so he has an important role when the team turns the corner. Opportunities like this don't come around every day – it'll be interesting to see what Galchenyuk makes of it.

2012 draft revisited

Any discussion that includes a reference to both Galchenyuk and Yakupov obliges you to revisit the 2012 NHL Draft, which we can safely label as the worst of the past decade.

For pure value, the best picks were well outside the first round: Jaccob Slavin (120th to Carolina), Colton Parayko and Frederik Andersen, back-to-back, at 86 and 87, to St. Louis and Anaheim respectively.

The best player in the top 10 is easily Toronto's Morgan Reilly.

Griffin Reinhart, chosen at No. 4 overall, was almost as much of a bust as Yakupov and neither Derrick Pouliot, at No. 8, or Slater Koekoek, at No. 10, have set the world on fire either.

In fact, the best sequence of NHL talent came in the second half of the first round when Washington took Tom Wilson at 16. From there, it went Tomas Hertl (17th to San Jose), Teuvo Teravainen (18th to Chicago) and Andrei Vasilevskiy (19th to Tampa), a nice little run of impact players outside the top 15.

In Yakupov's case, you wonder if the root cause of the problem was his place in the draft order, or the way Edmonton handled his development because the two – drafting and development – need to go hand in hand.

If you redid that draft today, eight years after the fact, your top five would probably consist of Slavin, Reilly, Vasilevskiy, Wilson and either Filip Forsberg or Hertl – with honourable mentions to Parayko, Matt Dumba and Jacob Trouba. But a lot more misses than hits.

Unprecedented move by Hall of Fame

The Hockey Hall of Fame took an unprecedented step Friday, announcing it will skip a year and not hold an election to add any new members in June of 2021, as a result of the pandemic.

Instead, the six latest Hall of Famers elected back in June of this year will be enshrined in a ceremony, now tentatively re-scheduled for November 2021.

The decision was made by the HHOF's board of directors in a teleconference meeting held Thursday.

According to Hall of Fame chairman Lanny McDonald, the reason was so that six new honoured members – Marian Hossa, Jarome Iginla, Kevin Lowe, Kim St. Pierre and Doug Wilson in the player category and Ken Holland in the builder category – could enjoy the festivities in the traditional manner, with a ceremony spread out over the course of a four-day weekend.

The alternative – to do the induction virtually – would rob them of one of the most important parts of the honour, the ability to share the moment with a larger group of family, friends and supporters.

"The magic of the induction weekend from the perspective of the new inductees is participating in several days of close interaction with family, friends, former teammates, fellow legends and fans," McDonald said in a statement. "On that premise, the Board felt that this was the right decision to bestow upon the Class of 2020 – the recognition and lifetime

experience they so richly deserve in all ways consistent with past induction classes."

The net effect of the decision is that, when the Hall of Fame selection committee next meets – which will now not take place until June of 2022, it will need to consider a double cohort of candidates, all the players that officially became eligible for selection in both 2021 and 2022.

Under HHOF rules, a player must be retired three full seasons to be considered for selection to the Hall. In 2021, the top first-year eligible players would have included Henrik and Daniel Sedin, Henrik Zetterberg and Rick Nash in the male player category and Caroline Ouellette in the female player category.

Among the players eligible for the first time in 2022 will be Roberto Luongo.

Generally speaking, the more crowded the class of first-year eligible players, the more difficult it becomes for players who've been eligible for a while to get the necessary support to be chosen for the Hall of Fame.

The list of those overlooked players has been debated endlessly, including here at The Athletic but includes Daniel Alfredsson, Rod Brind'Amour, Alex Mogilny and many others.

Sportsnet.ca / Five thoughts about what's next for the NHL in 2020–21 and beyond

Justin Bourne October 30, 2020, 12:55 PM

What's next for the NHL?

I'm not asking that in some existential manner; I genuinely think people want an answer to that more literally. To be clear, I don't have hard answers, as literally nobody does. The league is wisely waiting to put any decisions in stone — much as they were wise to wait on naming host cities for the 2019–20 NHL playoffs — which means all anyone can do is sit back and evaluate how the pandemic evolves over the winter months, which will affect the league's available options.

But I do have some guesses about this and a small handful of other topics related to the off-season, and what's to come in 2020–21 and beyond. Here we go:

1. What will the NHL look like in the months to come?

What I think is most likely is that the NHL will play a shortened 2020–21 season that begins sometime in January (maybe 55-60 games?). It will likely start in a variety of hub cities — potentially two in Canada and a handful in the U.S. that are deemed the safest and most amenable to having some fans at the games. And there will almost certainly be a Canadian Division given border issues.

The goal will be to get through the early part of the season as the second wave hopefully subsides, so the league could add more fans for the second part of the season. I say "more fans," because I think there will be an attempt to include at least some right off the bat, with numbers hopefully increasing as the months go on. I believe the league will do everything they can to play as many games as possible with as many paying humans present as is safely (or at least legally) allowable.

2. The potential All-Canadian Division: yay or nay?

I both like it and dislike it. I like the idea of Canadian teams playing Canadian teams. I like that those games should draw more eyeballs, at least north of the border. I like the idea of stoking rivalries between Canadian fans and cities, even if just temporarily.



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But I certainly don't like the idea that Canadian teams, who've long struggled to get anywhere meaningful in the playoffs, are suddenly going to be handed a spot in the Conference Final (assuming a divisional playoff format). Honestly, the worst-case scenario for Canadians, with the long struggle to bring the Cup back north of the border, is that they get it done in some shortened year with a Canadian team cut a clear path to the Conference Final. Of course it wouldn't logically diminish anything – the team that won would still have gotten through the rest of the league – but you just don't want to give non-Canadians the claim of "asterisk" in the year a team finally gets it done.

So in conclusion, I really like the idea of a Canadian division. I just don't like the idea of it giving an out in hockey arguments to haters.

3. Will everything that's transpired in the past several months make teams and players appreciate fans more?

Hard yes, and I think for a good while, too. I had a laugh when I thought back to the time the Toronto Maple Leafs were accused of declining to salute their fans because they didn't like how they were being treated or whatever. Suddenly the salary cap is flat for years and escrow is a billion percent and players are going to see a fraction of the deals they signed for because fans can't attend the games. That reality will certainly earn them added appreciation.

That's the cold aspect of it, though — the warm aspect is the realization of how much value fans add to games, I'd argue more so in hockey than any other sport, as hockey lives and dies with the rising "ooohs" and falling "ahhhs" that come as rushes build and dwindle.

We knew the game would miss the fans. We knew some pocketbooks were going to take on significant damage here. But seeing it play out in reality has really reinforced the show of love the game is inevitably going to give its patrons upon returning.

4. Why won't anyone drop an offer sheet in a year you could clearly land a name player?

I've asked some NHL minds about this, and the general consensus is less "Well, cap space is tight and no one wants to offend anyone" and more "Honestly, I have no idea — I can't believe it hasn't happened yet."

Mike Futa said on Sportsnet that the New Jersey Devils, during his GM interview, asked a lot of questions about offer sheets, as it was a method of rapid improvement they were interested in pursuing. The obvious hang-up here is they don't have their own second-round pick in 2021, which hurts their ability to target players who fall within a pretty significant salary range — though, given what's out there, you wonder if trying to trade back for that pick would be worthwhile (it likely would be!).

In all, it feels less a matter of "teams don't want to do it because X," (which you hear often) and more "each individual team has some limitation" (like the Devils' lack of a second) that's just inhibiting them from doing something they likely want to do.

That it hasn't happened yet means it likely won't. But maybe we'll be surprised yet. Stay tuned, Lightning fans!

5. Will goalie tandems be more valuable next season?

Absolutely. One of the agreed-upon evolutions of the analytics era is that goalies perform significantly worse in the second half of back-to-backs.

Whatever happens next season, the one thing you can bank on is ample back-to-backs as they try to jam as much of the season into as small a timeframe as possible. Organizational goalie depth will be more important than ever.

Sam Cosentino

October 29, 2020, 9:38 PM

Hockey Canada announced a list of 47 players expected to participate in a 51-day evaluation camp en route to the 2021 World Junior Championships in Edmonton. Canada will put its title defence on the line, playing in Group A alongside Germany, Slovakia, Switzerland and Finland.

Canada will open the tournament on Dec. 26 against Germany, with the marquee preliminary round match-up against Finland on New Year's eve.

At first glance, this roster is extremely deep. There are 26 first round picks and seven returnees from last year's gold medal winning team. The list of 26 includes Kirby Dach, whom Hockey Canada learned it was getting on loan from the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday.

Remaining Time -1:06

One notable name not on the list was Alexis Lafreniere, the top pick by the New York Rangers in the 2020 draft. According to Hockey Canada president Tom Renney, talks are ongoing with Rangers general manager Jeff Gorton as to the participation of Lafreniere in either the camp or once Team Canada enters the bubble. We should know more in the next 10 days.

This camp will be challenging in that most of the players haven't played a game since March. Nine players named to the camp from the QMJHL have played a varying number of games, as the only one of three CHL leagues currently on the ice.

In making things as safe as possible, each player and staff member will be tested for COVID-19 prior to leaving for camp, then tested regularly once camp begins. The evaluation camp will start on Nov. 16 in Red Deer, Alta. It is expected that the final roster of 25 players will enter the Edmonton bubble on Dec. 13.

Remaining Time -0:59

The IIHF has made for an allowance of two extra players on the roster due to the pandemic. Canada will be allowed to carry 3 goalies and 22 skaters into the Edmonton bubble.

Discussion is ongoing with U Sports to play six exhibition games — with two pre-tournament games vs. Sweden and Russia — once Canada gets into the bubble.

Synopsis: Goaltending is the biggest concern for this team. The position is wide open with no returnees from last year, as Joel Hofer, Nico Daws and Olivier Rodrigue have all aged-out.

Gauthier is the elder statesman of the group. He's a right-catch tender who is extremely athletic and he's a Hlinka-Gretzky gold medalist. If Gauthier can make the saves he's supposed to make, he should be the starter. Garand has been brilliant for upstart Kamloops. He's a monster competitor, who is technically sound. He is also very good at playing the puck. The third goalie is anyone's guess. Lennox has the size, Brett Brochu has come out of nowhere and Devon Levi is extremely confident and has put up remarkable numbers at every level.

Synopsis: The defence corps provides a nice mix of experience, size and grit. Byram and Drysdale should anchor each of the top-two pairings, with both of them likely to see significant time on the power play.

Schneider, a Rangers' first-rounder, was close to making it last year. He skates well, moves pucks efficiently and has great physical presence. The makeup of this group allows there to be a puck-mover paired with a complimentary or more of a stay-at-home type. O'Rourke, Guhle, and Korczak are all big and nasty, while Spence is a blend of Byram and Drysdale. This group is also split evenly between left and right shots.

Remaining Time -3:36



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Synopsis: The strength of this team is up front. If Dach plays and Lafreniere is added before the Dec. 13 cutoff date, Canada will possess the deepest group of forwards in the tournament.

There's plenty of size down the middle with Dach, Byfield and Cozens. It will be a dogfight for the 4C position. Lafreniere would solidify the top left wing position, while an abundance of options remain, with many natural centres being forced to the wing.

McMichael snipes and Cozens can use his size and speed, while I expect big things from Byfield in an elevated role. Mercer can play anywhere in the lineup. The competition for forward spots will be intense.

Beckman led the WHL in scoring last season. Newhook was one of the best players at camp last year. Wright will not only have earned his way on the team, but he will be able to carry this experience forward. Pelletier is super slick and the long layoff has served him well. There will also be plenty of options for the power forward type in Greig, Holloway and Poulin.

Perfetti used last year's snub as motivation and he's poised to make the team this year. Goncalves had a breakout year in Everett last year, while Krebs spent time in the Vegas bubble. Tomasino has speed to burn and he's a right shot.

Sportsnet.ca / Q&A: Willie O'Ree on NHL career, post-playing days, push for inclusion

Ryan Dixon@dixononsports

October 29, 2020, 11:50 AM

Willie O'Ree broke the NHL's colour barrier on Jan. 18, 1958, but that was far from the beginning of his story. A few seasons prior, he lost sight in his right eye thanks to a teammate's slapshot. And when his decades-long career as a pro player ended, O'Ree toiled for years in numerous jobs — from construction, to car sales, to private security — before being welcomed back into the NHL family.

The past decade in particular has seen the Fredericton, N.B. native feted for his historical accomplishments, which did not make huge waves in the moment.

O'Ree's autobiography, *Willie: The Game-Changing Story of NHL's First Black Player*, details his family's slave origins, how he pushed through prejudice to become one of the most important figures in hockey history, and the long wait to re-join the league he always wanted to be a part of in retirement.

The 85-year-old O'Ree, a longtime San Diego resident, spoke with Sportsnet about his journey.

SPORTSNET: We all know you for breaking hockey's colour barrier, but you write that the first time you really felt skin colour come into play in a sporting context was when you received an overture from a Major League Baseball team in the mid-1950s?

WILLIE O'REE: I was playing baseball in my hometown. I was considered a pretty good ball player. I played shortstop and second base. Two scouts came from the Milwaukee Braves' minor league operation and wanted to offer me a contract to go down to training camp in Waycross, Georgia (roughly 380 kilometres south-east of Atlanta). Right out of the blue I said, "No, I'm not interested. I'm just going to play baseball here." They said, "You're giving up a fantastic opportunity; there are not too many Black players in this area that get this tryout. Why don't you give it some thought? We're going to be in this area for two or three days."

I told my parents about it and they said, "Oh no, Willie; going down in the deep south, there are so many problems. We wouldn't want you to go." Then I talked to my brother — who was not only my brother and friend, he was my mentor — [and he said], "How do you feel inside?" I said, "I'd really like to go down for the experience." And he said, "If you feel that way, why don't you go?"

So I fled into Atlanta, stepped off the plane, went into the terminal and the first thing I saw was the restrooms with "White Only" and "Coloured Only." I contacted a Black cab driver and explained my situation — I had to stay in Atlanta overnight, could you recommend a hotel? So he took me to an all-Black neighbourhood. I stayed there and the next morning I got on the bus [to] Waycross. I was issued a dorm with eight other players of colour, issued a uniform and started working out the next morning.

My heart really wasn't in it. I said, "God, why did I make this decision to come down?" Going into the third week [I got cut]. They said, "Mr. O'Ree, we were impressed with your play, but we think you need a little more seasoning." Outwardly I was looking like I was real sad about being cut, but inwardly I [thought], "Thank God, I'm going back home," because I had four or five experiences at camp with the racist remarks.

I was on the bus for five days. Blacks in the south had to sit at the back of the bus, which I wasn't used to. As [we travelled] north I started moving up on the bus; when I got to Bangor, Maine, I was sitting right in the front. When I stepped off the bus [in Fredericton] I said, "Willie, forget about baseball; concentrate on hockey."

Your pro hockey career could have been derailed before it really began when, as a member of the Kitchener Canucks, you sustained a devastating eye injury. What happened and how did you make it through?

I'm [standing] in front of the net for the deflection, and Kent Douglas — one of my defencemen who was noted for his heavy slapshot — he slapped the puck and it ricocheted off a stick, and the puck comes up and strikes me in the right eye. It broke my nose. I had a big gash on my eye, cracked my cheek. The puck completely shattered the retina. The doctor said, "Mr. O'Ree, you're going to be blind in your right eye — you'll never play hockey again." I was 19. I slumped back into my hospital bed. The goals and dreams I had set for myself were gone.

Within the next five weeks I was back on the ice practising. The season ends, I go back to my hometown. My parents thought I had recovered because I was back [practising], but I was totally blind. The only person I told was my younger sis. I said, "Sis, don't say anything, because if they find out I'm blind, I won't be able to play pro hockey, and I definitely won't be able to play in the National Hockey League."

[Later in the off-season] I get a call from Punch Imlach, the coach and general manager of the Quebec Aces, inviting me to training camp. I make the team, but I don't tell them I'm blind in my right eye. They didn't [do eye exams], so I just thought, "If you're good enough to make the team with one eye, just don't say anything." I played left wing. I scored [22] goals that year and we won the league. That's when I told myself, "Willie, you can do anything you set your mind to."

The next year I got a nice letter from the Boston Bruins inviting me to their training camp. On January 18 [1958], the Bruins called the Aces and said, "We want O'Ree to meet the Bruins in Montreal to play two games against the Montreal Canadiens." It was a Saturday night in the Montreal Forum. When I stepped on the ice, I became the first Black player to play in the NHL. It didn't dawn on me until the next day. I read it in the paper. I was just so happy about being called up.

Everyone knows about those watershed two games in 1958, but I imagine fewer people are aware you played more than half the 1960–61 season with Boston. You were 25 and it appeared your dream of becoming a full-time NHLer was coming to fruition.

After the season, the Bruins said, "Go home, have a good summer, look forward to coming back to the Bruins." I was overjoyed, told my mom and dad I was going back to the Bruins. I was home about six weeks, the phone rings, my mom hands the phone to me and says, "It's a



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sportswriter." He said, "Well, what do you think about the trade?" I said, "What trade are you referring to?" He said, "You've been traded to the Montreal Canadiens."

I didn't get any notification from the Bruins, but I did get a nice letter from the Montreal Canadiens saying, "You're to report to the Hull-Ottawa Canadiens." I go [there] and I'm having a pretty good season, then I got traded to the Los Angeles Blades of the Western Hockey League. I went out to Los Angeles on Nov. 12, 1961, and played with the Blades for six years.

After playing in L.A., you spent the rest of the '60s and a huge portion of the 1970s playing minor-pro in San Diego. What were your post-playing days like?

After I retired, I had several jobs. But my goal that I had set in the back of my mind was to get back into the National Hockey League in some capacity where I could give back, not only to the sport, but to the community. A door would open and close; open and close. But I felt strongly I was going to get back into hockey.

[Then in 1996], Bryant McBride, who was the newly appointed vice president of the [NHL's] diversity program, was in a meeting with Lou Vairo from USA Hockey. They were planning to open hockey up to every girl and boy and let them know, "Here's a sport — if you want to play it, you have the opportunity." Jackie Robinson's name came up during the meeting and just out of the blue Vairo says, "We have our own Jackie Robinson in hockey," and the room went silent. They said, "Who is it?" Lou said, "Willie O'Ree. I watched him play with the Boston Bruins in the old Madison Square Gardens."

Bryant said, "Well, I'm going to try and get ahold of him." He [couldn't get] my number. He knew a couple FBI agents in the San Diego area, and he called them and explained what he wanted. Within a few hours, the FBI gentleman called back and said, "Mr. O'Ree is working [security at the Hotel del Coronado]."

Bryant called me and introduced himself. I was a little hesitant. I said, "Why are you calling me?" He said, "I'm the new vice president of the NHL's diversity program involving kids playing hockey. I was just wondering if you'd be interested?" I said, "I don't know. I live here in San Diego, and there's no way I could move to New York." Bryant said, "You can live in San Diego and commute from there." So that's how it all started.

You've been in this position more than 20 years now. What have you learned about diversity and inclusion yourself, and do you feel the NHL is moving fast enough today to make hockey a completely inclusive sport?

We still have problems. I've even had racial remarks directed toward me, still today, from people I've never met. Maybe they've met me, but I've never known it. We're working in the right direction. It's not going to stop overnight, unfortunately. You have those people out there who are prejudiced, and they're bigots and racists. But overall I think the National Hockey League has come a long way from 20 or 30 years ago. I really feel we're working in the right direction.

The Black players and players of colour who are in the league now, they're there because they have the skills and the ability to be there; they've worked hard. I'm sure some of them still get racial remarks, [but] I really feel things are getting better. As I mentioned, things are not going to happen overnight [in hockey or the world in general].

It took a long time, but you've finally gotten your proper due, being elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2018, the same year the league established the Willie O'Ree Community Hero Award. What has this chapter of your life been like?

I was invited to Jarome Iginla's hockey school in Calgary [a couple years after beginning work with the NHL]. I met a lot of the kids up there, parents, a lot of the fans. We're on the ice and Jarome took me aside and said, "Willie, I can't imagine what you had to go through to make it possible for players like myself to play in the National Hockey League." When you hear that from [a guy like Iginla], that's a nice feeling.

A lot of people thanked me for the things I've accomplished. I get [phone calls, emails, letters] from boys and girls I met six, seven years ago thanking me for coming to their school and talking about goal-setting, believing in yourself, liking yourself. I feel I'm a much better person [for that]. If these boys and girls take one thing from my presentation and use it in their daily life, I'm a happy camper.

Redrawing the rest of the NHL around an all-Canadian division

By Travis Yost

With free agency slowing down (some might question if it ever picked up), attention has turned towards the National Hockey League's next regular season. We know few details at this time – the raging coronavirus pandemic has predictably created deep uncertainty for the planners within the league.

That said, we can draw reasonable inference as to what the NHL will plan for if we understand the issues at play. The most obvious constraint concerns the international border between Canada and the United States. Should it remain closed, an all-Canadian division would be an option.

Creating that division is easy. The hard part is figuring out how to redraw the remaining divisions, especially if the appetite to enter virus-proof bubbles for a regular season isn't there.

There are a few ways the league can draw these divisions; much of it will depend on whether or not the league considers regional bubbles (or similar controls of that nature) in order to minimize the risk of virus transmission. If we believe that geographic proximity will be something that dictates the redraw of divisions, we can figure out how to segment the remaining 24 teams.

To create this sort of regionality, I grabbed every airport's latitude and longitude and created nautical mile distances between every possible American city pair. The below table shows the estimated time between pairs:

There is a lot of data in there, but this is the launch point for what will end up being our solve – an attempt to create regionality in the most optimal format knowing that seven Canadian teams, spread from coast to coast, will be unable to participate in those divisions.

That is an important restrictor for teams like Buffalo, who in every scenario would be logically paired with their geographic rival in Toronto – a current divisional foe found through a short drive (or a ridiculously short flight) up the QEW.

What we need to do now is strike any possible Canadian team and create only American team versus American opponent scenarios. The table below shows every team's seven closest opponents – their optimal region, so to speak:

For most teams, you can create regional divisions that make all of the sense in the world. In our Buffalo example earlier, losing Toronto as a division rival doesn't mean all that much – there are more than seven possible opponents in and around that region, and a team like Columbus (which currently occupies a slot in the Metropolitan Division) is barely a 40-minute flight away.

This example, of course, hits on another issue: the NHL has a swath of teams in close proximity to one another in the northeastern United States, whereas other teams – think the Minnesota Wild and Dallas Stars – really are standalone franchises. This naturally creates inefficiency in creating the regions. Time to get creative.



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If we break away from the current format of 8-8-8-7 (number of teams respective to each division), we can come up with five regions carrying an average travel time of an hour or less:

Do I anticipate a fully functioning regular season, flush with teams travelling week after week to NHL destination cities? No. But I do think this is the NHL's best opportunity at redrawing divisions that can be managed on the fly.

If the league is reticent to employ a tightly controlled bubble format (in which case you can draw the divisions up however you see fit), something like the above five-division format with an intra-division schedule is probably the most sensible way to bracket the teams.

It allows the league to consider things like "playing weeks" and "rest weeks" as well – a way to not only control the testing and isolation that's going to be required for the regular season (which will be of high importance to the league), while creating real travel and logistical flexibility for the players and support staff.

This is one hypothetical solution of many, and the league is surely exploring all avenues right now. But if I know one thing, it's that the usual boundaries the league has held onto dearly have dissipated into thin air.

Anything goes in 2020. And probably in 2021, too.