



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • November 7, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Five observations from the Canes' 4-1 road loss to the Flyers

By Chip Alexander

Here are five observations from the Carolina Hurricanes' 4-1 road loss Tuesday to the Philadelphia Flyers:

1. Canes need more ugly goals

Forget "cute." Think "grind." That's the message Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour sent out after the loss. The Canes, he said, were playing well Tuesday but added, "I'll be blunt. We've changed our group this year a little bit and we're talented but that doesn't win if you don't get to the net, be first and grind out the goals first -- that mentality."

The Canes' goal had some artistry to it, Martin Necas using his speed to get to the puck in the offensive zone, making a nice cross-ice pass to Trevor van Riemsdyk, who set up Lucas Wallmark for the score. But as Brind'Amour said, the Canes need more ugly ones.

Added Wallmark: "We need to play our game and it's not fancy every time and I think first of all we need to shoot more."

2. Numbers don't decide the game

Those looking only at the analytics of the game probably would have thought the Canes came away with the win. The Canes had more scoring chances (21-18) and high-danger chances (12-7), according to the Natural Stat Trick analytics site. They had the better of the Corsi and Fenwick stats, with 61 total shot attempts to the Flyers' 43.

But statistics lie and the numbers don't decide the game. Flyers goalie Carter Hart, up and down this season, was up Tuesday, stopping 33 of 34 shots. Canes goalie Petr Mrazek allowed four goals on 28 shots -- three on 13 shots in the third period.

3. Missing Erik Haula

The Canes aren't the same team without center Erik Haula in the lineup and his availability -- in practices

and games -- moving forward is an immediate concern.

Brind'Amour said Wednesday that Haula, who underwent major surgery on his right knee last season, was experiencing some issues with the knee and his status is "day to day." Brind'Amour said there was no structural damage to the knee that would require further surgery but that he did not know when Haula, who leads the Canes this season with eight goals, could return.

4. Canes still developing as a road team

A big part of the Canes becoming a playoff team last season was winning on the road, finishing 22-16-3 in the 41 games. It helped having that wise old head, Justin Williams, in the lineup and in the room, and the Canes became a very tough out.

The Canes are 3-3-1 on the road through the first seven games this season and don't have Williams. But also to remember: they were 3-3-1 after the first seven a year ago and developed into a strong road team.

5. More ice time, less production

Dressing 11 forwards and seven defensemen resulted in center Sebastian Aho getting 22:21 of ice time and winger Teuvo Teravainen getting 22:04. Brind'Amour had two of his best players on the ice more but the production wasn't there, only 22 minutes of wear and tear.

Forward Jordan Martinook, who has missed the past 11 games with a core muscle injury, has been skating and might be able to rejoin practice soon. The Canes need that extra forward and more specifically need Martinook.

For now, Eetu Luostarinen will get a look. The Finnish forward, signed to an entry-level contract in May, was recalled Wednesday from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL and should make his NHL debut Thursday against the New York Rangers.



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Preview: Rangers vs. Hurricanes

Canes looking to rebound in divisional match-up

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes return home for a Metropolitan Division match-up against the New York Rangers.

After posting a 3-1-0 record during a four-game homestand, the Hurricanes were bested, 4-1, by the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday.

"[Points] are crucial at any point in the season. It's always big in division games, as well," Jordan Staal said on Tuesday. "We're going to have to get back to our style and our play and start taking it to teams, playing the way we want to play."

Back on Track

The Hurricanes left Philadelphia on Tuesday thinking they deserved better for their effort.

But, they know they also need to get back to their game in order to be successful.

"I thought we were playing well and deserved a little more," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game. "It's a frustrating game for me because I think had we just stuck to it a little bit more, maybe things would have been different. Their goalie was good, and they capitalized." November 5, 2019

The Canes and Flyers entered the third period even at one until Philadelphia scored three unanswered goals to take the W in the first of four meetings between the two divisional opponents.

"We want to keep creating chances and shots," Staal said. "I didn't think we stuck with what we wanted to do and the way we wanted to play, and it showed."

Haula & Staal Miss Practice

Both Erik Haula and Jordan Staal did not skate with the Hurricanes on Wednesday. A night after logging nearly 20 minutes of ice time, the captain was given the day off the ice.

"The way he plays, those are always heavy minutes," Brind'Amour said. "He certainly never takes a shift off." November 6, 2019

Haula, meanwhile, is dealing with a lower-body concern that caused him to miss his first game of the season on Tuesday.

"He's day-to-day. He's got some lingering effects. It's his knee that's bothering him, so we're just kind of precautionary, really, making sure he feels good before we get him back out there," Brind'Amour said. "Nothing structural, which is good."

Luostarinen Set for Debut

After dressing 11 forwards and seven defensemen in Philadelphia, the Hurricanes are set to return to the more conventional lineup of 12 forwards and six defensemen.

Forward Eetu Luostarinen was recalled from Charlotte on Wednesday afternoon. The 21-year-old Finnish forward has notched five goals and seven points in 10 games with the Checkers this season and is expected to make his NHL debut.

The Opposition

The Rangers defeated the Detroit Red Wings, 5-1, on Thursday night in Manhattan to improve to 6-6-1 on the season. Just four of New York's 13 games have been played on the road, where they have a 2-2-0 record. Artemi Panarin leads the team in scoring with 14 points (7g, 7a) in 13 games.

AT THE RINK

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Super 16: Islanders, Blues jump into top four of weekly power rankings

Bruins stay No. 1; Lightning fall out for first time this season

by Dan Rosen

The St. Louis Blues and New York Islanders each made a big move in the weekly Super 16 power rankings.

The Blues, who won their sixth game in a row on Wednesday, moved up six spots to No. 3. The Islanders, winners of 10 straight, moved up four spots to No. 4.

The Boston Bruins and Washington Capitals remained in No. 1 and No. 2 for the second straight week.

The Edmonton Oilers moved up five spots to No. 6, and the Vancouver Canucks made the biggest jump from last week, moving seven spots to No. 8.

The Buffalo Sabres and Carolina Hurricanes each dropped four spots to Nos. 9 and 10. The Colorado Avalanche plummeted nine spots to No. 12.

The Tampa Bay Lightning fell out of the rankings for the first time this season.

To create the power rankings, each of the 13 participating staff members puts together his or her version of what the Super 16 should look like. Those are submitted, and a point total is assigned to each.

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

Here is the latest Super 16:

1. Boston Bruins (11-2-2)

Total points: 202

Last week: No. 1

Hit: David Pastrnak's 13-game point streak (15 goals, 15 assists) is the longest by a Bruins player since Phil Kessel had points in 18 straight games (14 goals, 14 assists) from Nov. 13-Dec. 21, 2008. The top-line right wing is the third player in Bruins history to reach 30 points in 15 or fewer games, joining Hall of Famers Phil Esposito (31 points in 13 games in 1973-74) and Bobby Orr (30 points in 14 games in 1974-75).

Miss: The forward depth is being tested because of injuries to Par Lindholm (upper body), David Backes (upper body), Joakim Nordstrom (infection) and Karson Kuhlman (fractured tibia). Kuhlman has missed seven straight games. Nordstrom has missed five straight games and seven of the past eight. Lindholm has missed four in a row, and Backes has sat for the past two.

2. Washington Capitals (11-2-3)

Total points: 193

Last week: No. 2

Hit: The Capitals are 8-0-1 since Oct. 16, and forward Jakub Vrana has nine points (six goals, three



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assists) in a five-game point streak, including five goals in the past two. He had a hat trick in a 4-2 win against the Calgary Flames on Sunday.

Miss: They've been better defensively of late, allowing three goals in their past two games, but the Capitals are still one of the 16 teams in the NHL allowing more than three goals per game (3.06).

3. St. Louis Blues (11-3-3)

Total points: 179

Last week: No. 9

Hit: Jordan Binnington was 6-1-0 with a 1.99 goals-against average and .933 save percentage in his past seven starts.

Miss: Nothing other than forward Vladimir Tarasenko, who is out at least five months because of shoulder surgery he had last week.

4. New York Islanders (11-3-0)

Total points: 169

Last week: No. 8

Hit: The Islanders' 10-game winning streak is the second longest in their history behind the 15 in a row they won in the 1981-82 season.

Miss: Forward Jordan Eberle has missed nine straight games with a lower-body injury, and forward Leo Komarov has been out for seven straight because of an illness.

5. Nashville Predators (9-4-2)

Total points: 154

Last week: No. 4

Hit: Pekka Rinne (8-0-2) is the first goalie 36 or older in NHL history to have a season-opening point streak of at least 10 games.

Miss: Forward Mikael Granlund has no points in 10 straight games.

6. Edmonton Oilers (10-5-2)

Total points: 123

Last week: No. 11

Hit: Leon Draisaitl has at least one point in 15 of Edmonton's 17 games. The forward, who lead the Oilers with 29 points (13 goals, 16 assists), has at least two points in nine of the games.

Miss: The Oilers are 3-for-26 (8.7 percent) on the power play in their past 10 games.

7. Vegas Golden Knights (9-5-2)

Total points: 113

Last week: No. 7

Hit: Vegas leads the League with 24 goals in the first period and is tied with Boston for best first-period goal

differential (plus-9).

Miss: They have been outscored 18-11 in the second period.

8. Vancouver Canucks (9-3-3)

Total points: 100

Last week: No. 15

Hit: Elias Pettersson has 14 points (four goals, 10 assists) in the past eight games. The center leads the Canucks with 20 points (six goals, 14 assists).

Miss: Micheal Ferland has missed three straight games. The forward is in the NHL concussion protocol.

9. Buffalo Sabres (9-4-2)

Total points: 89

Last week: No. 5

Hit: Carter Hutton has allowed three goals on 65 shots in two starts since allowing six goals on 24 shots in a 6-2 loss at the New York Rangers on Oct. 24.

Miss: The Sabres haven't scored more than two goals in a game in five straight games (1-3-1).

10. Carolina Hurricanes (9-5-1)

Total points: 82

Last week: No. 6

Hit: Sebastian Aho has seven points (three goals, four assists) in the past six games. The center had three points (two goals, one assist) in Carolina's first nine games.

Miss: The Hurricanes have allowed 12 goals in the past three games, including nine in losing their past two.

11. Arizona Coyotes (9-4-2)

Total points: 76

Last week: No. 13

Hit: The Coyotes are 16-for-17 on the penalty kill (94.1 percent) in six home games this season, third in the NHL.

Miss: They are 21-for-29 (72.4 percent) on the PK in nine road games, tied for 26th in the League.

12. Colorado Avalanche (8-5-2)

Total points: 71

Last week: No. 3

Hit: Nathan MacKinnon has a total of 30 shots on goal in the past four games. The center has at least two shots on goal in every game this season and a streak of 166 consecutive games with at least one shot on goal. He has 72 shots on goal this season, second in the League behind Capitals forward Alex



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Ovechkin (76).

Miss: The Avalanche are winless in their past five games (0-4-1). They have been outscored 18-7 in those games.

13. Toronto Maple Leafs (8-5-3)

Total points: 70

Last week: No. 12

Hit: The Maple Leafs have outscored the opposition 3-1 in the third period of their past two games, both wins (4-3 in a shootout against the Philadelphia Flyers and 3-1 against the Los Angeles Kings).

Miss: They are 2-for-27 on the power play (7.4 percent) in their past nine games.

14. Florida Panthers (7-3-4)

Total points: 41

Last week: No. 16

Hit: The Panthers have scored four or more goals in seven of nine games since Oct. 14. They are 6-1-2 in that stretch.

Miss: Center Vincent Trocheck will miss his seventh straight game with a lower-body injury when the Panthers play the Capitals on Thursday.

15. Calgary Flames (9-7-2)

Total points: 31

Last week: NR

Hit: Matthew Tkachuk has eight points (five goals, three assists) in a four-game point streak.

Miss: The Flames have trailed going into the third period in 10 of their 18 games this season, the most of any team in the Western Conference. They are 3-6-1 in those games.

16. Pittsburgh Penguins (8-6-1)

Total points: 30

Last week: No. 10

Hit: Bryan Rust has four points (two goals, two assists) in a four-game point streak since the forward made his season debut Oct. 26. He missed the first 11 games with an upper-body injury.

Miss: The Penguins are 0-for-20 on the power play in nine games since Oct. 16. They have had one or zero power play opportunities in four of those games.

Others receiving points: Tampa Bay Lightning 18, Montreal Canadiens 15, Dallas Stars 8, Anaheim Ducks 3, Philadelphia Flyers 1

Dropped out: Lightning (No. 14)

HERE'S HOW WE RANKED 'EM

AMALIE BENJAMIN

1. Boston Bruins; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. St. Louis

Blues; 4. Nashville Predators; 5. New York Islanders; 6. Edmonton Oilers; 7. Vegas Golden Knights; 8. Buffalo Sabres; 9. Colorado Avalanche; 10. Vancouver Canucks; 11. Carolina Hurricanes; 12. Toronto Maple Leafs; 13. Arizona Coyotes; 14. Florida Panthers; 15. Anaheim Ducks; 16. Pittsburgh Penguins

TIM CAMPBELL

1. Boston Bruins; 2. St. Louis Blues; 3. Washington Capitals; 4. Nashville Predators; 5. Toronto Maple Leafs; 6. Arizona Coyotes; 7. New York Islanders; 8. Vegas Golden Knights; 9. Edmonton Oilers; 10. Vancouver Canucks; 11. Buffalo Sabres; 12. Calgary Flames; 13. Carolina Hurricanes; 14. Tampa Bay Lightning; 15. Colorado Avalanche; 16. Anaheim Ducks

BRIAN COMPTON

1. Washington Capitals; 2. New York Islanders; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. Boston Bruins; 5. Vancouver Canucks; 6. Edmonton Oilers; 7. Arizona Coyotes; 8. Nashville Predators; 9. Vegas Golden Knights; 10. Florida Panthers; 11. Toronto Maple Leafs; 12. Calgary Flames; 13. Montreal Canadiens; 14. Pittsburgh Penguins; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. Carolina Hurricanes

NICHOLAS J. COTSONIKA

1. Boston Bruins; 2. New York Islanders; 3. Washington Capitals; 4. St. Louis Blues; 5. Vancouver Canucks; 6. Edmonton Oilers; 7. Nashville Predators; 8. Arizona Coyotes; 9. Buffalo Sabres; 10. Florida Panthers; 11. Carolina Hurricanes; 12. Vegas Golden Knights; 13. Colorado Avalanche; 14. Montreal Canadiens; 15. Toronto Maple Leafs; 16. Philadelphia Flyers

TOM GULITTI

1. Boston Bruins; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. New York Islanders; 5. Nashville Predators; 6. Vancouver Canucks; 7. Edmonton Oilers; 8. Colorado Avalanche; 9. Carolina Hurricanes; 10. Vegas Golden Knights; 11. Buffalo Sabres; 12. Arizona Coyotes; 13. Toronto Maple Leafs; 14. Florida Panthers; 15. Pittsburgh Penguins; 16. Tampa Bay Lightning

ADAM KIMELMAN

1. Boston Bruins; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. Nashville Predators; 5. New York Islanders; 6. Edmonton Oilers; 7. Vegas Golden Knights; 8. Carolina Hurricanes; 9. Toronto Maple Leafs; 10. Buffalo Sabres; 11. Colorado Avalanche; 12. Arizona Coyotes; 13. Montreal Canadiens; 14. Pittsburgh Penguins; 15. Florida Panthers; 16. Calgary Flames

ROBERT LAFLAMME

1. Boston Bruins; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. Buffalo Sabres; 5. Nashville Predators; 6. Colorado Avalanche; 7. New York Islanders; 8.



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Edmonton Oilers; 9. Carolina Hurricanes; 10. Vegas Golden Knights; 11. Toronto Maple Leafs; 12. Vancouver Canucks; 13. Pittsburgh Penguins; 14. Tampa Bay Lightning; 15. Florida Panthers; 16. Arizona Coyotes

MIKE G. MORREALE

1. Boston Bruins; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. New York Islanders; 5. Vegas Golden Knights; 6. Nashville Predators; 7. Tampa Bay Lightning; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. Vancouver Canucks; 10. Carolina Hurricanes; 11. Calgary Flames; 12. Arizona Coyotes; 13. Buffalo Sabres; 14. Colorado Avalanche; 15. Toronto Maple Leafs; 16. Edmonton Oilers

TRACEY MYERS

1. Washington Capitals; 2. Boston Bruins; 3. New York Islanders; 4. St. Louis Blues; 5. Edmonton Oilers; 6. Nashville Predators; 7. Buffalo Sabres; 8. Vancouver Canucks; 9. Vegas Golden Knights; 10. Carolina Hurricanes; 11. Arizona Coyotes; 12. Toronto Maple Leafs; 13. Colorado Avalanche; 14. Calgary Flames; 15. Florida Panthers; 16. Montreal Canadiens

BILL PRICE

1. Boston Bruins; 2. New York Islanders; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. Washington Capitals; 5. Colorado Avalanche; 6. Nashville Predators; 7. Edmonton Oilers; 8. Buffalo Sabres; 9. Toronto Maple Leafs; 10. Vegas Golden Knights; 11. Arizona Coyotes; 12.

Carolina Hurricanes; 13. Calgary Flames; 14. Florida Panthers; 15. Pittsburgh Penguins; 16. Vancouver Canucks

SHAWN P. ROARKE

1. Boston Bruins; 2. Washington Capitals; 3. Nashville Predators; 4. St. Louis Blues; 5. New York Islanders; 6. Vegas Golden Knights; 7. Carolina Hurricanes; 8. Vancouver Canucks; 9. Edmonton Oilers; 10. Calgary Flames; 11. Colorado Avalanche; 12. Dallas Stars; 13. Pittsburgh Penguins; 14. Arizona Coyotes; 15. Buffalo Sabres; 16. Florida Panthers

DAN ROSEN

1. New York Islanders; 2. Boston Bruins; 3. Washington Capitals; 4. St. Louis Blues; 5. Nashville Predators; 6. Vegas Golden Knights; 7. Edmonton Oilers; 8. Vancouver Canucks; 9. Buffalo Sabres; 10. Arizona Coyotes; 11. Carolina Hurricanes; 12. Florida Panthers; 13. Colorado Avalanche; 14. Toronto Maple Leafs; 15. Pittsburgh Penguins; 16. Dallas Stars

MIKE ZEISBERGER

1. Washington Capitals; 2. Boston Bruins; 3. St. Louis Blues; 4. Nashville Predators; 5. New York Islanders; 6. Edmonton Oilers; 7. Vancouver Canucks; 8. Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. Vegas Golden Knights; 10. Buffalo Sabres; 11. Florida Panthers; 12. Carolina Hurricanes; 13. Arizona Coyotes; 14. Montreal Canadiens; 15. Colorado Avalanche; 16. Tampa Bay Lightning



Carolina takes on division rival New York

By The Associated Press

New York Rangers (6-6-1, sixth in the Metropolitan Division) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (9-5-1, third in the Metropolitan Division)

Raleigh, North Carolina; Thursday, 7 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: Carolina hosts New York in a matchup of Metropolitan Division teams.

The Hurricanes are 2-3-1 against the rest of their division. Carolina has scored 11 power-play goals, converting on 22.4% of chances.

The Rangers are 0-2-0 against the rest of their division. New York averages 11.8 penalty minutes per

game, the third-most in the NHL. Brendan Lemieux leads the team serving 26 total minutes.

The teams square off Thursday for the first time this season.

TOP PERFORMERS: Erik Haula leads the Hurricanes with eight goals and has totaled 11 points. Sebastian Aho has totaled four goals and five assists over the last 10 games for Carolina.

Artemi Panarin leads the Rangers with 14 points, scoring seven goals and adding seven assists. Ryan Strome has collected five goals and seven assists over the last 10 games for New York.



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LAST 10 GAMES: Rangers: 4-5-1, averaging 3.1 goals, 5.4 assists, 5.2 penalties and 13 penalty minutes while allowing 3.1 goals per game with a .912 save percentage.

Hurricanes: 4-5-1, averaging 2.8 goals, 4.8 assists, 3.8 penalties and 7.9 penalty minutes while giving up 2.7 goals per game with a .905 save percentage.

Hurricanes Injuries: Erik Haula: day to day (lower-body).

Rangers Injuries: Mika Zibanejad: day to day (upper body).



NHL Power Rankings: 1-31 poll, plus preseason expectations vs. reality

Emily Kaplan

Sometimes life doesn't go as anticipated. Neither does a hockey season. We're one month into the 2019-20 NHL season and already teams are in recalibration mode thanks to surprising starts -- both good and bad (ahem, San Jose).

For this week's ESPN NHL Power Rankings, we assessed how preseason expectations match the reality after the first month.

How we rank: The ESPN hockey editorial staff submits polls ranking teams 1-31, and those results are tabulated to the list featured here. Teams are rated through Tuesday night's games, taking into account overall record, recent success and other factors such as injuries. The previous ranking for each team is their spot in last week's edition.

1. Boston Bruins

Previous ranking: 1

What we thought in the preseason: With core players Brad Marchand, Tuukka Rask, David Krejci, Patrice Bergeron and Zdeno Chara all north of 30, did Boston miss its best chance at another championship with this group?

What we know now: Sike! The veteran leadership on this team is coming through and the Bruins look even more dominant than we could have imagined. The top line is sizzling and the goaltending workload split between Rask and Jaroslav Halak is paying dividends.

2. Washington Capitals

Previous ranking: 2

What we thought in the preseason: Nobody could party harder than the Caps did in 2018, but after a season to reset, Washington could be a dangerous Stanley Cup contender again.

What we know now: Nobody could party harder than the Caps, though the Nationals did come close. Oh, and the Caps look scary good, averaging nearly four goals per game.

3. New York Islanders

Previous ranking: 11

What we thought in the preseason: So they had one magical season where everything went right. Is the structure that strong that they could replicate it -- even with saying goodbye to Vezina Trophy finalist Robin Lehner?

What we know now: OK, so maybe Barry Trotz's system is that good (and the personnel is good enough too). The Isles are giving up the fewest goals in the league, and Semyon Varlamov slid in to Lehner's role in an effective time share with Thomas Greiss.

4. Nashville Predators

Previous ranking: 6

What we thought in the preseason: The Predators finally landed their coveted No. 2 center in Matt Duchene. The offense -- which became stagnant last season -- needed to improve.

What we know now: One month in, the Preds have the best offense in the NHL. They're averaging a league-high goals per game, and don't seem to have seller's remorse for trading away P.K. Subban to clear cap space.



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5. St. Louis Blues

Previous ranking: 13

What we thought in the preseason: The trade for Justin Faulk right before the season signaled that GM Doug Armstrong didn't want to entertain any talk of a Cup hangover; the Blues were going all-in to try to go back-to-back.

What we know now: What's a Blues season without a little adversity? St. Louis is still collecting wins, despite the long-term absence of Vladimir Tarasenko. Now they need to prove it's sustainable.

6. Edmonton Oilers

Previous ranking: 9

What we thought in the preseason: Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl will shoulder the offensive burden, and drag this team as far as they can.

What we know now: OK, so it's still the McDavid and Draisaitl show. But at least they have a third sidekick now in James Neal (11 goals). The trio has accounted for 31 of the team's 45 goals, a whopping 69% of the offense.

7. Carolina Hurricanes

Previous ranking: 4

What we thought in the preseason: Saying goodbye to Faulk felt inevitable, because he was due for a big new contract and this team had a surplus of capable defensemen.

What we know now: The Canes still have too many blueliners, and might be in the market to trade one. What they'd want in return: a top-nine scorer. So, not much has changed.

8. Vegas Golden Knights

Previous ranking: 7

What we thought in the preseason: Now that they have Mark Stone and Max Pacioretty acclimated to the roster, the Golden Knights should surge as Western Conference favorites.

What we know now: The Golden Knights have been a little inconsistent, and don't have the typically strong possession numbers we usually see from them. Once again, they're relying heavily on Marc-Andre Fleury (he has started 13 of their 16 games).

9. Buffalo Sabres

Previous ranking: 5

What we thought in the preseason: This was going to be another forgettable season in Buffalo. As the team adjusted to yet another new coach, it's unlikely the

Sabres could keep up with the talented Atlantic Division.

What we know now: So they've fallen back to earth after a torrid start (and need to find a way to generate more offense at even strength). But this team had sneaky good upgrades in the offseason, and could contend for a playoff spot.

10. Vancouver Canucks

Previous ranking: 12

What we thought in the preseason: Not much, really. The Canucks didn't do anything this offseason to warrant attention, and they were poised to be slightly better than last season's pedestrian squad.

What we know now: This offense is sizzling hot (five or more goals in five of their past seven games). Meanwhile, there's no sophomore slump for Elias Pettersson; with 20 points in 15 games, he's creeping into the Hart Trophy conversation.

11. Colorado Avalanche

Previous ranking: 3

What we thought in the preseason: Everyone's favorite Stanley Cup sleeper team is no longer in position to surprise people. Now the Avs have to live up to the hefty expectations.

What we know now: The Avs looked great until they lost two-thirds of their top line, Gabriel Landeskog and Mikko Rantanen, to injury. Luckily, GM Joe Sakic added depth forward help this offseason, which is helping keep this team afloat.

12. Toronto Maple Leafs

Previous ranking: 8

What we thought in the preseason: With over \$33 million in cap space devoted to three forwards (John Tavares, Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner), this team is on the clock to win. The offense better produce, and anything short of a long playoff run is a disappointment.

What we know now: A sluggish start (by their standards) can be attributed in part to injuries. The offense is producing (ranking seventh in the NHL with 3.44 goals per game) but something still feels amiss.

13. Arizona Coyotes

Previous ranking: 16

What we thought in the preseason: The Yotes were decimated by injuries last season, but with everyone back -- especially goalie Antti Raanta -- they should be a playoff team.



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What we know now: They've had slightly more luck on the injury front (though Niklas Hjalmarsson is out long term). Though it's nice having Raanta back, Darcy Kuemper has been the star in net (10 starts, seven wins, a league-best .940 save percentage and 1.69 goals-against average).

14. Pittsburgh Penguins

Previous ranking: 10

What we thought in the preseason: That we'd spend the entire season wondering whether shipping Phil Kessel out -- and bringing in Alex Galchenyuk, Dominik Kahun and Brandon Tanev -- would make the offense better or worse.

What we know now: It's hard to assess this team's capabilities considering the injuries that the Penguins have had to endure. Just when they got everybody back, Patric Hornqvist was sent to IR.

15. Tampa Bay Lightning

Previous ranking: 14

What we thought in the preseason: The juggernaut returns. This ultratalented and deep lineup will be able to rebound from the playoff collapse. After tying the NHL record with 62 wins last season, this is still the team to beat in the East.

What we know now: The Lightning are having a hard time shaking off being swept out of the first round last season. Sure, they're banged up, but one of the reasons they're not seeing success, as defenseman Ryan McDonagh told reporters last week, is that they're "lacking confidence."

16. Calgary Flames

Previous ranking: 17

What we thought in the preseason: The Flames should build off last season's success, but goaltending could be their demise. After all, would you trust a goalie tandem led by Cam Talbot?

What we know now: Forget Talbot, it has been David Rittich's show. Rittich, who reportedly curbed his Coca-Cola addiction in an offseason reset, has faced a league-high 461 shots and is shining, with a .915 save percentage.

17. Florida Panthers

Previous ranking: 18

What we thought in the preseason: Joel Quenneville and Sergei Bobrovsky are here to save the day. The two splash offseason acquisition should transform this perennially underrated team into a playoff contender.

What we know now: The Panthers have erased a brutal start and seem to be finding a rhythm under Quenneville, winning five of their last seven. Bobrovsky's early play (.882 save percentage) is concerning, but at least he got his first shutout this week.

18. Anaheim Ducks

Previous ranking: 15

What we thought in the preseason: The only good thing going for the Ducks this season is John Gibson, who is going to be burdened with a massive workload yet again. Maybe this is the year to throw in the towel on some of the veterans.

What we know now: The Ducks have relied on Gibson -- especially since the defense is depleted by injuries -- but the kids look all right, and have kept this team within playoff position. They're really bad at tanking.

19. Montreal Canadiens

Previous ranking: 19

What we thought in the preseason: The Canadiens are a bubble playoff team, and could make a run. But they need serious fixes to their power play, which was second worst in the league, at 12.9%.

What we know now: Montreal is still on the playoff bubble, and we're still cautiously optimistic about a run. But the serious fixes are now urgent for the penalty kill, second worst in the league, at 68.9%.

20. Winnipeg Jets

Previous ranking: 20

What we thought in the preseason: Things surely would quell after a dramatic summer, in which Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor both needed new contracts, and Dustin Byfuglien announced, on the eve of camp, he was taking time away from the team.

What we know now: Things have not calmed down. The Byfuglien situation is lingering, and potentially brewing into something more serious. If the NHLPA files a grievance against the team, the Jets could be in cap trouble yet again.

21. Philadelphia Flyers

Previous ranking: 22

What we thought in the preseason: The savior is here! Carter Hart, just 21, could offer the solution to a decades-long quest for quality goaltending in Philly.

What we know now: We're reminded that Hart is just 21, and is going to go through some growing pains (he has a .885 save percentage through nine games).



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For now, the Flyers are opting for a near-even split with veteran Brian Elliott.

22. Dallas Stars

Previous ranking: 24

What we thought in the preseason: With a stud goalie tandem and strong defensive structure, the Stars were poised to build off last season's success. They just need to amp up the offense a bit.

What we know now: The Stars started the season looking quite slow, and the offense was dreadful. They've picked things up recently but will face some adversity with John Klingberg out of the lineup for at least two weeks.

23. Columbus Blue Jackets

Previous ranking: 21

What we thought in the preseason: The Blue Jackets were going to go into us-against-the-world mode, and play with vengeance in spite of all the players who left. Also, the power play couldn't be worse than last season's, right?

What we know now: The Blue Jackets are motivated to win, but they just might not have the depth to do it as consistently. And the power play is just as bad as last season.

24. New Jersey Devils

Previous ranking: 30

What we thought in the preseason: With Jack Hughes, P.K. Subban and Wayne Simmonds coming into the fold, this team was surely headed back to the playoffs and tri-state area relevancy.

What we know now: After going winless in their first six games, we got nervous. But putting assistant GM Tom Fitzgerald behind the bench has been an effective wake-up call.

Get the best of ESPN sent to your inbox The ESPN Daily delivers the biggest sports news and moments every weekday.

25. New York Rangers

Previous ranking: 25

What we thought in the preseason: The rebuild is over! The kids are here, and ready to save the day, bringing Henrik Lundqvist one last chance for Stanley Cup glory.

What we know now: The goal now is to see steady improvements from Kaapo Kakko, Filip Chytil, Lias Andersson, et al. In other words, the rebuild is almost over, but we're not quite there yet.

26. San Jose Sharks

Previous ranking: 23

What we thought in the preseason: Veteran squad, Stanley Cup aspirations; it should just be rinse, wash and repeat at this point, yes?

What we know now: Not quite. Perhaps we overestimated the goaltenders' competence, or underestimated the loss of Joe Pavelski and Joonas Donskoi. Or maybe the defense is just really taxed. Whatever it is, this Sharks team has been rotten.

27. Chicago Blackhawks

Previous ranking: 26

What we thought in the preseason: This is a confusing team, straddling two eras. The Blackhawks want to stay competitive without tearing it all down, but that's easier said than done.

What we know now: They have turned to the kids. The (potentially for the long term) arrivals of Kirby Dach and Adam Boqvist means Chicago knows it needs to start thinking about who will be franchise leaders years from now.

28. Minnesota Wild

Previous ranking: 28

What we thought in the preseason: Paul Fenton did his fair share of damage in his short time as GM, but there are still talented players on this roster (though some are old, with lengthy contracts).

What we know now: Things were a little worse than we predicted. Among the issues for new GM Bill Guerin: how to get the most out of inconsistent players such as Victor Rask and Kevin Fiala, and whether they should be traded.

29. Los Angeles Kings

Previous ranking: 29

What we thought in the preseason: Not much to look forward to in Los Angeles this season, until the Kings can start incorporating their prospects (and they do have an impressive prospect pipeline).

What we know now: It's going to get worse before it gets better. The goaltending is bad. The team gave up five goals in four straight games. Trade rumors swirl, but the fire sale of aging vets might just be a pipe dream.

30. Ottawa Senators

Previous ranking: 31



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What we thought in the preseason: The least talented roster in the NHL was going to win very few games. The biggest goal? Avoiding more drama.

What we know now: Under first-year coach D.J. Smith, the culture is in better shape. The team has a few more wins than expected, but it's still a bleak outlook.

31. Detroit Red Wings

Previous ranking: 27

What we thought in the preseason: It's going to be a long and potentially ugly season as the rebuild trudges on, but the top line will be able to provide at least a few highlights.

What we know now: It's ugly. Detroit has a league-worst minus-29 goal differential. And the top line has been the only highlight: Dylan Larkin, Tyler Bertuzzi and Anthony Mantha have scored 19 of the team's 34 goals.

YAHOO! SPORTS

Facing Rangers, Hurricanes look to regain early success

Field Level Media

The opening buzz around the Carolina Hurricanes has dimmed, so the team has to prove it can make it through the long haul.

The next chance comes Thursday night, when the New York Rangers visit Raleigh, N.C.

Carolina has lost six of its last 10 games, including the past two, after opening the season at 5-0-0.

"We've changed our group this year a little bit and we're talented, but that doesn't win," coach Rod Brind'Amour told reporters. "That does not win if you don't get to the net and be first."

The Rangers have had a down-and-up week in a pair of home games, losing 6-2 on Monday night to the Ottawa Senators and then thumping the Detroit Red Wings 5-1 on Wednesday night.

"You have to handle momentum changes in games," said Rangers coach David Quinn, whose team has won three of its last four games.

This will be the back half of only the second set of games on back-to-back nights so far this season for New York.

Still, it's possible that the Rangers could start goalie Henrik Lundqvist on the short rest after he made 35 saves against Detroit.

"There's a chance he could play (Thursday)," Quinn said.

The Rangers have posted four or more goals in six of their 13 games.

New York's Tony DeAngelo posted two points with one goal and one assist Wednesday night.

"Tony has always been a good offensive player," Quinn said. "He has great instincts, great skill."

For the Hurricanes, it might be a matter of returning to a grittier style after they lost 4-1 on Tuesday night at Philadelphia.

"I think we're looking for the pretty play a little bit too much," Brind'Amour said. "Every once in a while it will work, but it's not a recipe for success long-term."

The Carolina players seem to recognize that they've drifted at times.

"It has kind of been some new stuff of us getting a little too cute," center Jordan Staal said. "Trying to make something out of nothing when it isn't there."

Hurricanes center Lucas Wallmark has noticed that as well.

"We came away from our identity, and we have to play our game to be successful so we should know that," he said.

Earlier this week, the Hurricanes were without scoring leader Erik Haula because of a knee injury. He didn't make the trip to Philadelphia, and that suggests he might be out for multiple games.

Without Haula, the Hurricanes opted for a lineup with seven forwards -- something they've done off and on this season.

On Wednesday, they called up forward Eetu Luostarinen, who is expected to make his NHL debut.

Carolina has received strong play from Wallmark, who scored the team's lone goal in Philadelphia.



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"He has been good for us," Brind'Amour said. "But he can't be our best player. That's the other part of it. We got other guys who need to be better."

The Rangers and Hurricanes are meeting for the first time this season. They split four matchups last

season. This will be the Rangers' only road outing amid a five-game stretch.

--Field Level Media



SB NATION CANES COUNTRY

Carolina Hurricanes vs. New York Rangers: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Hurricanes look to end a disappointing run against division rivals as they face yet another Metropolitan opponent in the New York Rangers.

By Andrew Ahr

Carolina Hurricanes (9-5-1, 19 pts) vs. New York Rangers (5-6-1, 11 pts)

Thursday, November 7, 2019 - 7:00 PM ET
PNC Arena - Raleigh, NC

Watch: Fox Sports Carolinas
Listen: 99.9 The Fan

The Hurricanes and Rangers face off for the first time this season as the Hurricanes look to get back on track after a disappointing string of play.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Rangers
Record	9-5-1	5-6-1
Goals/Game	3.27	3.08
Goals Against/Game	2.80	3.50
Shots/Game	32.3	30.0
Faceoff %	49.1%	50.7%
Power Play % (Rank)	22.4% (9)	17.8% (18)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	80.7% (15)	79.6% (10)

Category	Hurricanes	Rangers
ES Corsi For %	54.48%	43.45%
ES PDO	99.3	100.1
PIM/Game	8:51	12:30

Goaltender #1

Category	Petr Mrazek	Henrik Lundqvist
Record	7-2-1	3-3-1
Save %	.909	.906
GAA	2.50	3.58

Goaltender #2

Category	James Reimer	Alexandar Georgiev
Record	2-3-0	3-3-1
Save %	.907	.913
GAA	2.93	2.87

Game Notes



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The Hurricanes and Rangers face off for the first of four meetings between the teams this season. Carolina will be in New York on November 27th and December 27th, and the teams will complete the series on February 21st in Raleigh.

The teams split the season series 2-2-0 in 2018-19.

The Canes broke the Madison Square Garden Curse last February, snapping a streak of 16 consecutive losses in Manhattan (0-13-3).

We may see a new face in the lineup tonight. The Canes called up Eetu Luostarinen yesterday and he will make his NHL debut tonight.

Tonight is the Canes' first matchup against former high profile Hurricanes prospect Adam Fox. His rights were traded to the Rangers in exchange for a second round pick and a conditional third rounder in 2020.

We also get a chance to say hello to old friend Greg McKegg, who signed with the Rangers in free agency.

Storm Advisory

Dougie Hamilton hasn't replaced his shin pads in 10 years. Hey, if they're effective...

The Stars unveiled their Winter Classic threads yesterday. Pass or fail?

Disney+ is getting a 'The Mighty Ducks' reboot! [SB Nation]

Who are the candidates to end the season as the NHL's top scorer? [NHL]

(extremely Gary Bettman voice) We Have A Trade to Announce

Hurricanes recall Eetu Luostarinen from Charlotte

With Erik Haula nursing an injury, the Canes will hand an NHL debut to the Finnish center.

By Brian LeBlanc

Erik Haula's surgically repaired knee continues to give him nagging trouble, and the Carolina Hurricanes' recent deployment of an eleven-forward lineup has been, to say the least, a disappointment. Those factors converged to hand Eetu Luostarinen his first NHL callup on Wednesday, and he is expected to make his NHL debut when the Canes face the Rangers at PNC Arena tomorrow night.

Luostarinen, a second-round pick in 2017, is in his first season in North America, and has taken to the AHL game with relative ease so far. He has tallied five goals and seven points in his ten games with the Charlotte Checkers following a three-year stint with KalPa of the Finnish Liiga. Luostarinen will likely slot in between Ryan Dzingel and Martin Necas, in the spot that Haula would normally play, perhaps trading shifts with Lucas Wallmark from time to time.

Rod Brind'Amour said after practice Wednesday that Haula's continued discomfort is not structural and simply requires a bit of rest to recoup. The Hurricanes will not take a morning skate tomorrow prior to the

game, so Luostarinen's first time with his new team will be in the pregame warmup tomorrow night. The release from the team is below.

CANES RECALL LUOSTARINEN FROM CHARLOTTE

Forward looking to make NHL debut

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has recalled forward Eetu Luostarinen (EH-too loo-oh-STAR-ih-nehn) from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League (AHL).

Luostarinen, 21, has registered seven points (5g, 2a) in 10 AHL games with the Checkers this season and is looking to make his NHL debut. The 6'3", 186-pound forward currently leads all Charlotte skaters and ranks tied for third among AHL rookies in goals. Luostarinen played the last three seasons for KalPa (Finland), recording 63 points (24g, 39a) in 141 career Liiga games. He represented Finland at the 2019 IIHF World Championship, appearing in four games and winning gold. The Siilinjärvi, Finland, native was drafted by the Hurricanes in the second round, 42nd overall, of the 2017 NHL Draft.



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How Erik Haula Fits in with the Hurricanes' Future

Haula has been a perfect fit with the Hurricanes, and that doesn't project to change any time soon.

By Brett Finger

Looking back at the history of the Carolina Hurricanes, you're not going to find an offseason acquisition that had more of an instant impact on the club than Erik Haula.

Acquired in a one-for-one deal for prospect Nicolas Roy with the Vegas Golden Knights, Haula's proven in the early going of the 2019-20 season that his time off from his brutal knee injury last season hasn't caused him to lose a step.

Fourteen games, eight goals. Pretty good.

Beyond his goal total, Haula's overall play rivals any forward on the roster. While Haula is on the ice, the Hurricanes own 61.82% of the high-danger shot attempts, which ranks second among all Carolina skaters behind only Martin Necas - his linemate.

His track record goes back several seasons. His defensive impact is just as noticeable as his offensive impact. While contributing a notable increase of high-danger shot attempts in the slot, he excels at preventing those same chances in his own end of the ice.

Erik Haula's 5-on-5 isolated impact shot map. hockeyviz.com

Obviously, you know how impactful Haula has been. You don't need me to provide stats and visual examples to prove that he's good, but when what you see with your eyes gets backed up in an obvious way via statistics, that means you have a really good player. His numbers have been consistent with that of a quality top-six center for a while, and his increased role with the Golden Knights in their inaugural season gave him the opportunity to convert it to counting stats like goals and points.

Carolina made a very good decision over the summer to acquire the player. Vegas needed cap relief, and the Canes needed more production in their top-nine. It made a lot of sense, even if they were taking a risk on a player coming off of an ugly season-ending injury.

The trade looks like a home run - for now, at least.

Haula is on the final year of a three-year deal at an AAV of \$2.75 million. He'll be an unrestricted free agent this summer, which means that he could very easily walk and test the open market in hopes of securing what will likely be the biggest payday of his NHL career at the age of 29.

Between now and then, the Hurricanes need to discern what they want to do with him and figure out how he fits into what they are building.

So, how does he fit?

Not so surprisingly, he fits very well - with his on-ice production, his fit on the team, and where the future lies with the organization.

While Carolina's current young wave of forward talent has broken into the league - Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas are leading that movement - there is another wave that will come through the pipeline over the next three or four years.

Ryan Suzuki, Carolina's first-round pick in 2019, has the upside of a top-nine centerman with high-end vision and puck-moving ability. That's exciting, but he's not particularly close to threatening for a roster spot. Meanwhile, in Charlotte, there are a couple of forward who possess the upside of becoming NHL players. That starts with Morgan Geekie, Eetu Luostarinen, Janne Kuokkanen, and Julien Gauthier.

While the Hurricanes would be thrilled to see any of those players develop into the player that Haula is now, that is far from a given and is still years in the making.

There is room for Haula in this Hurricanes lineup over the next few seasons without blocking a young forward from taking the next step.

That, alone, lines up well for a potential contract extension between the two sides, but there's another big factor - Jordan Staal.

The team's captain has been playing in a top-six role ever since he arrived in Carolina during the summer of 2012. He is now 31, with three more seasons at \$6 million AAV after the 2019-20 campaign. Some decline is understandable from a guy who has never been an offensive powerhouse in a Hurricane uniform, so it's important to have the center depth that allows him to take a reduced workload.

That's an area where Haula could be crucial.

In addition to providing the offense, defense, faceoff acumen, and speed through the middle of the ice, Haula's presence moving forward could extend Staal's prime years by keeping him away from a dramatically high workload.

Haula plays both special teams very well, in addition to his work at 5-on-5. Keeping Haula does the team, as a whole, a favor as well as Jordan Staal.



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A center core comprised of Sebastian Aho, Haula, Necas, Staal and Lucas Wallmark over the next three or four seasons is good enough, in conjunction with Carolina's high-end blue line, to put you among the legitimate Stanley Cup contenders in the league.

In all likelihood, Haula won't score 40 goals this season like his early rampage might suggest, but he can flirt with 30 and still provide all the things outlined above. He drives play, creates chances for his teammates, gets his own chances, and is as responsible of a two-way player that the Hurricanes currently have.

But after all, it's a business, so the dollars and years have to make sense for the Hurricanes to keep Haula in the fold on a mid-term contract. His injury history might give Carolina leverage in negotiations, and again, the Hurricanes would be taking a leap of faith in re-upping a player who has had some concerning injuries in his past, but if he can play 70 games this season and be the consistent player that he has been for years now, that should lessen the concern on Carolina's end.

He's still on the right side of 30, so he should be able to give a team (preferably Carolina) a few more years of really good hockey. If the deal goes upwards of four years, I think it still makes sense, given where the Hurricanes are right now with their combination of aging NHL players and still-developing prospects.

Does three or four years at \$4-5 million AAV make sense on Carolina's books? It would line him up to become a UFA a season before, or the summer that, Staal's contract expires. A new deal also assures the

About Last Night: Not a Full 60 Minutes

The Hurricanes surrendered three third-period goals Tuesday night in Philadelphia, as the Flyers skated to a 4-1 win over Carolina.

By Alec Sawyer

The Carolina Hurricanes lost their fourth consecutive road game Tuesday night, as a poor showing in the third period doomed the Canes in a 4-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers in the Wells Fargo Center.

The Canes and Flyers came out of the second intermission tied at 1-1, but things quickly unraveled in the final frame for Carolina as the Hurricanes dropped their second straight game. Lucas Wallmark netted the Canes' only goal, a great team effort in the second period.

Play the full 60 minutes

Canes two high-quality middle-six centers through the duration of Aho's great young years as the first-line center. Then, if guys like Geekie or Suzuki develop quickly enough to earn consideration during that time, you have the option of shifting one of them to the wing to help fill out your top-nine.

Financially, the Canes have to be aware of Andrei Svechnikov and Necas' second contracts. By that time, though, the \$8.333 million of dead cap space taken up by Patrick Marleau and Alex Semin's buyouts will be off the books, Joel Edmundson and Trevor van Riemsdyk won't be taking up a combined \$5.4 million, James Reimer's deal worth \$3.4 million AAV will be history, and the NHL's salary cap should continue to rise.

That should give them more than enough money to take care of their two young players, give Dougie Hamilton his raise, and extend Haula.

Obviously, other moves will be made between now and then that will play into this, but mapping out a new deal for Haula right now seems doable, especially with the likes of Aho, Teuvo Teravainen, Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce all under extremely team-friendly deals for what they bring to the table.

All of this is conjecture, but the sentiment here is clear - Erik Haula has been a great fit, and his track record tells us that he's worth a significant contract. The only worry with him is his health. Can he stay healthy through an NHL season? If he can, there's no more real questions about it. If not, then that's going to be a potentially serious road block.

We'll see how it plays out.

Hockey players will tell you all the time the importance of playing a full 60 minutes, and the Hurricanes just didn't do that Tuesday night. Carolina played really well through the first two periods, and was the better team heading into the final 20. The Canes really just needed to continue doing the important things well, and a win seemed likely after the second intermission.

However, that's not what happened in the third. The Flyers took the lead for good just over a minute into the final period, taking advantage of some lackluster puck handling from the Carolina defense.

Philadelphia scored another goal to make it 3-1 about 10 minutes later, again taking advantage of some less-than-sharp play from the Canes' defenders. Carolina lost the puck with not much pressure at the blue line, and then the Canes couldn't clear away a rebound as the Flyers doubled their lead.



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After an empty power play, Philadelphia really put the game out of reach with a breakaway effort from Claude Giroux, sprung by a misplayed puck from Lucas Wallmark.

As sharp as the Hurricanes looked in the first and second periods, they were dull and sloppy throughout the third and it cost them at least a point, maybe two. It's the second game in a row for Carolina where the third period has made the difference in a loss, this time with Philadelphia adding insult to injury with three third-period goals.

Generally speaking, you've got to play the full 60 minutes if you want to have a chance to win hockey games. For the Canes Tuesday night, it seemed like they were content with playing just 40.

Necas keeps getting better

Perhaps the biggest bright spot for Carolina Tuesday, and an ever-growing bright spot for the squad this season, was the play of young forward Martin Necas. Necas made things happen all night, as he got the most ice time of his young career against the Flyers.

Necas made a great play to help set up the Canes first goal, firing a perfect pass right to the stick of Trevor van Riemsdyk who was making his way into the attacking zone. Van Riemsdyk made an even better pass to assist Wallmark's goal, but it was Necas who saw the play developing and got things started.

The form has been coming around lately for Necas, and he's looking like he'll do nothing but continue to improve as the season goes along. The Czech forward has points in the Canes' last three games, and he's becoming more and more a part of the game plan.

The Hurricanes have so much young talent, and what Necas brings to the ice shouldn't be overlooked. He's still just 20 years old, he's getting his first long-term stay in the NHL and he's starting to put up the numbers and produce for Carolina.

Figure out the Haydn Fleury situation

Fleury played Tuesday night for the first time in five games, as he found the starting lineup instead of the healthy scratch list due to an injury to Erik Haula. With Fleury on the ice, the Canes played with 11 forwards and seven defensemen for the third time this season. Carolina is now 0-2-1 in those games.

Fleury started the season playing regular minutes, with Trevor van Riemsdyk recovering from shoulder surgery, but he's the odd man out now that van Riemsdyk is back and healthy. Even with his return to the ice Tuesday, Fleury got just 7:09 of ice time.

Rod Brind'Amour and the Hurricanes are doing Fleury, and the team, no favors by keeping the seventh-overall pick from the 2014 draft around. Playing an 11-7 rotation isn't a recipe for long-term success, and assuming Haula's injury is nothing serious, Fleury will be back to finding his name listed as a scratch.

For a player still young and developing like Fleury, no good can be done from keeping him off the ice. Carolina needs to figure out the situation soon. Whether that means a trade or a placement on waivers hoping they can sneak Fleury through and send him to Charlotte, keeping him around and letting him play in the occasional 11-7 game isn't helping anyone.

Wrapping Up

After starting the season 5-0-0, the Hurricanes are just 4-5-1 in their last 10. A lot of things are still going right for Carolina, but other things are starting to emerge as glaring issues. The Canes still have a very talented squad, and with any team there will always be kinks to work out.

November hasn't started to kindly for Carolina, but there is still a ton of hockey left to be played. The Canes will get back to it Thursday night in PNC Arena, when they host the New York Rangers.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Canes Recall Eetu Luostarinen, Checkers Swap Spencer Smallman and Jacob Pritchard

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Ahead of their matchup with the New York Rangers on Thursday, the Hurricanes have recalled Eetu Luostarinen from Charlotte.

The 21-year-old Finn leads the Checkers and is tied for third among all AHL rookies with five goals this season, and ranks fourth on the Checkers in scoring with seven points through 10 games.

A second-round pick by Carolina in 2017, Luostarinen made the jump to North America this year after spending the last three seasons with KalPa Kuopio in his home country's top league.

Additionally, the Checkers have made a swap of their own, recalling Jacob Pritchard from the ECHL's Greenville Swamp Rabbits and assigning Spencer Smallman there.

The 24-year-old Pritchard recorded three points (2g, 1a) during his five-game stint with the Swamp Rabbits. He now returns to Charlotte where he has

logged four games so far in his rookie season. After a breakout senior season at UMass, Pritchard joined the Checkers for their Calder Cup run last year, notching a goal in six playoff games.

Smallman, 23, heads to Greenville after recovering from an injury that kept him out of the majority of last season. A fifth-round pick in 2015, Smallman put up six assists in 12 games for the Checkers last season before being forced out due to injury. His rookie campaign in 2017-18 saw him log 13 points (2g, 11a) in 14 ECHL games for the ECHL's Florida Everblades after missing most of that season due to injury as well.

The Hurricanes host the Rangers tomorrow before traveling to Ottawa on Saturday, while the Checkers face off against the Springfield Thunderbirds on home ice this Friday and Saturday.

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SportScan

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

1160184 Carolina Hurricanes

Five observations from the Canes' 4-1 road loss to the Flyers

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

NOVEMBER 06, 2019 10:02 AM

Here are five observations from the Carolina Hurricanes' 4-1 road loss Tuesday to the Philadelphia Flyers:

1. CANES NEED MORE UGLY GOALS

Forget "cute." Think "grind." That's the message Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour sent out after the loss. The Canes, he said, were playing well Tuesday but added, "I'll be blunt. We've changed our group this year a little bit and we're talented but that doesn't win if you don't get to the net, be first and grind out the goals first -- that mentality."

The Canes' goal had some artistry to it, Martin Necas using his speed to get to the puck in the offensive zone, making a nice cross-ice pass to Trevor van Riemsdyk, who set up Lucas Wallmark for the score. But as Brind'Amour said, the Canes need more ugly ones.

Added Wallmark: "We need to play our game and it's not fancy every time and I think first of all we need to shoot more."

2. NUMBERS DON'T DECIDE THE GAME

Those looking only at the analytics of the game probably would have thought the Canes came away with the win. The Canes had more scoring chances (21-18) and high-danger chances (12-7), according to the Natural Stat Trick analytics site. They had the better of the Corsi and Fenwick stats, with 61 total shot attempts to the Flyers' 43.

But statistics lie and the numbers don't decide the game. Flyers goalie Carter Hart, up and down this season, was up Tuesday, stopping 33 of 34 shots. Canes goalie Petr Mrazek allowed four goals on 28 shots -- three on 13 shots in the third period.

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3. MISSING ERIK HAULA

The Canes aren't the same team without center Erik Haula in the lineup and his availability -- in practices and games -- moving forward is an immediate concern.

Brind'Amour said Wednesday that Haula, who underwent major surgery on his right knee last season, was experiencing some issues with the knee and his status is "day to day." Brind'Amour said there was no structural damage to the knee that would require further surgery but that he did not know when Haula, who leads the Canes this season with eight goals, could return.

4. CANES STILL DEVELOPING AS A ROAD TEAM

A big part of the Canes becoming a playoff team last season was winning on the road, finishing 22-16-3 in the 41 games. It helped having that wise old head, Justin Williams, in the lineup and in the room, and the Canes became a very tough out.

The Canes are 3-3-1 on the road through the first seven games this season and don't have Williams. But also to remember: they were 3-3-1 after the first seven a year ago and developed into a strong road team.

5. MORE ICE TIME, LESS PRODUCTION

Dressing 11 forwards and seven defensemen resulted in center Sebastian Aho getting 22:21 of ice time and winger Teuvo Teravainen getting 22:04. Brind'Amour had two of his best players on the ice more but the production wasn't there, only 22 minutes of wear and tear.

Forward Jordan Martinook, who has missed the past 11 games with a core muscle injury, has been skating and might be able to rejoin practice soon. The Canes need that extra forward and more specifically need Martinook.

For now, Eetu Luostarinen will get a look. The Finnish forward, signed to an entry-level contract in May, was recalled Wednesday from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL and should make his NHL debut Thursday against the New York Rangers.

News Observer LOADED: 11.07.2019

Rangers score 3 in second period to cruise past Red Wings

By VIN A. CHERWOOD



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Tony DeAngelo had a goal and an assist in New York's three-goal second period, Henrik Lundqvist stopped 35 shots during his first start in 10 days, and the Rangers beat the struggling Detroit Red Wings 5-1 Wednesday night.

Artemi Panarin and Ryan Strome also had a goal and an assist apiece, and Chris Kreider and Greg McKegg scored to help New York win for the fourth time in six games. Lundqvist, after sitting out the previous three games, made 24 saves over the final 28:06.

Valtteri Filppula scored and Jimmy Howard finished with 26 saves, but the Red Wings' fourth straight loss dropped them to 1-11-1 in their last 13 games. Detroit won the previous five meetings with the Rangers.

Trailing 3-1 in the second, the Red Wings picked up the pressure. They outshot the Rangers 15-3 over a 16½-minute stretch, but couldn't beat Lundqvist.

McKegg then pushed the lead to 4-1 at 8:44 of the third with his first goal for the Rangers on their third shot of the period. With the Red Wings on a power play, McKegg brought the puck up the left side and sent a shot that went off the shaft of Howard's stick. With the goalie unaware where the puck was as it lay in front, McKegg skated in and quickly put it in for New York's third short-handed score of the season.

Panarin added an empty-netter with 2:37 left for his seventh goal and 14th point, both team highs.

After a scoreless first period, the Rangers took control with three goals in the first 8:49 of the second — including two on their first three shots.

DeAngelo got New York on the board with a power-play goal with one second remaining on a holding penalty to Adam Erne. Brendan Lemieux took a pass from Pavel Buchnevich on the right doorstep, and his shot rebounded off Howard's pad to the left to DeAngelo, who quickly put it in for his sixth at 4:25.

Tony DeAngelo, center, celebrates after scoring a goal during the second period against the Detroit Red Wings.

Kreider made it 2-0 as he got a cross-ice pass from Buchnevich and beat Howard up high on the glove side from the right side for his third at 6:04.

The Rangers made it 3-0 with their second power-play goal of the period as Adam Fox's shot deflected off Strome's right shoulder and past Howard at 8:49. Strome, who had a six-game point streak snapped in New York's 6-2 loss to Ottawa on Monday night, got his fifth goal and 10th point in the last eight games.

Just 52 seconds later, Athanasiou got past Rangers defenseman Jacob Trouba on the left side for a 2-on-0 rush, cut in toward the net and passed to the right to Filppula, who put the puck past Lundqvist to pull the Red Wings to 3-1.

NOTES

Panarin extended his point streak to six games (three goals, five assists). He also has eight goals and 10 assists in 11 career games against Detroit. ... Rangers C Mika Zibanejad missed his fourth straight game with an upper body injury. ...

New York scored at least one power-play goal for the fourth time in five games. ... Detroit entered last in the NHL on the penalty kill, giving up 16 goals in 51 power plays for its opponents, and allowed two in three chances to the Rangers. ... The teams meet two more times this season in a home-and-home on consecutive nights: Jan. 31 back at Madison Square Garden, and Feb. 1 in Detroit. ... C Frans Nielsen was a last-minute scratch. ... The Red Wings have been outscored 55-24 over the second and third periods this season.

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.07.2019

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Henrik Lundqvist adjusting to new Rangers' goalie schedule

By Brett Cyrgalis November 7, 2019 | 1:15am

It wasn't an exact number, but it was close.

Rangers coach David Quinn made it pretty clear how he wants to break up his goaltending duties for the season, saying that Henrik Lundqvist is likely to get around 60 percent of the starts, while 40 percent will go to his backup, currently Alexandar Georgiev, with Igor Sheshterkin not too far away while excelling with AHL Hartford.

"Most teams are going with a two-goalie situation where one might play 60 percent and the other plays 40, and I think when the dust settles, that'll be the case for us," Quinn said after Lundqvist returned to the nets after sitting for the previous three in the team's 5-1 win over the Red Wings on Wednesday night at the Garden. "He's handled it well and he's played well."

Lundqvist, 37, knew the decreased workload was going to be an adjustment, likely the biggest adjustment of his 15-year career. But he focused on his preparation, and came in to stop 35 of 36 shots in what he called "probably the best game I've had in front of me all year."

There is a very good chance he could also start the second leg of this back-to-back, Thursday night against the Hurricanes in Raleigh, N.C.

"I knew going into this year, it would be a little different, I wouldn't play as much," Lundqvist said. "Throughout my entire career, I'm looking to get into the flow where you don't have to work as hard to prepare because you're playing so many games and you're just in it. That's going to change. I just have to work harder to prepare."

Veteran defenseman Marc Staal returned the lineup after being a healthy scratch the past three games, replacing rookie Ryan Lindgren.

"I don't feel great about sitting Lindgren, he's done some good things," Quinn said. "But we wanted to get Staalsy back in, he deserves to get back in. Looking at the rest of the 'D' corps, just felt that was the move we were going to make."



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Quinn said he thought Staal had a “solid night,” playing 18:19 mostly paired with Adam Fox.

Top-line center Mika Zibanejad missed his fourth straight with the upper-body/neck injury suffered Oct. 27, and he did not make the trip to Raleigh. Zibanejad did take part in most of Wednesday’s morning skate, and Quinn said, “He’s getting closer.”

Forward Greg McKeeg drew back in after being scratched for three straight, and he scored his first goal as a Ranger, shorthanded, to make it 4-1 at 8:44 of the third period. His insertion made Lias Andersson a healthy scratch for the first time this season.

“I thought Lias had a little bit of a drop in play [Monday] night,” Quinn said. “He’s a 20-year-old kid that’s had a good run here, played some good hockey. But it’s just a choice we made.”

New York Post LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160240 New York Rangers

Rangers bounce back by destroying awful Red Wings

By Brett Cyrgalis November 6, 2019 | 11:03pm | Updated

There had to be moments when they thought about it, when the fresh memories of the most recent debacle crept up and shook the ground under the Garden ice. But if these Rangers are going to show progress this season, and show growth and maturity, they’re going to have put the bad nights behind them.

Which is exactly what they did when they bounced back from Monday’s brutal loss by beating the worst team in the league, taking a 5-1 win over the Red Wings on Wednesday night at the Garden.

“We had to have a performance like this after what happened last game,” said goalie Henrik Lundqvist, who made 35 saves in his first start back after sitting for three straight. “You can learn from our ups and downs, and I think we did.”

Now the Rangers (6-6-1) can begin to put the 6-2 loss to the Senators from Monday behind them, when they had a terrific opening 11 minutes and then utterly collapsed. The message was clear that there really aren’t any easy games in this league — well, except maybe against the Red Wings (4-12-2), who have now lost 11 of their past 12 and struggling to look like they belong in this league.

But despite the Rangers having a 3-0 lead turn into a 3-1 with Detroit then on the power play midway through the third period, there was no collapse this time. A shorthanded goal from Greg McKeeg, his first as a Ranger, and an empty-netter from Artemi Panarin made it 5-1 and wrapped it up.

“For us, there is only one level to play to win games consistently, and that’s we have to keep it simple, it doesn’t

matter who we play,” Lundqvist said. “A top team or a team that’s struggling in the bottom of the standings — there is one way to play this game, especially for us. Today, I thought we did that. We played our style.

“Simple game, let the skill take over when there’s an opportunity. But don’t force it.”

Learning to do that with all of the influx of talent over the summer has been difficult, and it has led to very frustrating moments. The emotions ran over on Monday, while it was a cold-blooded performance against the Red Wings right from the start.

“Good response,” said Chris Kreider, who scored his third goal of the season when he beat goalie Jimmy Howard on a right-wing snap-shot at 6:04 of the second period to make it 2-0. “We took what we did for 11 minutes at the start of the other night and were able to do it a little longer.”

It helped that the Blueshirts also sandwiched Kreider’s goal with two power-play tallies, the first coming from Tony DeAngelo at 4:25 of the second, the blueliner’s fifth goal of the season to make it 1-0; and then an Adam Fox wrist shot that bounced in off the back of Ryan Strome and went in to make it 3-0 at 8:49.

But it did get dicey when the Rangers took their foot off the gas for a few minutes late in the second, giving up a two-on-one odd-man rush that Valteri Filppula burred at 9:41 to cut the lead to 3-1 going into the third period.

“Every team is going to have a push,” Kreider said. “But when that happened, I think we did a much better job — and we talked about it in the room — of staying in our structure and limiting chances, even when they were tilting the ice a little bit. So that was encouraging.”

It was encouraging for the Rangers just to get over the mental hump of what happened, showing that they can build on that scar tissue — and will have to keep doing it, continuing with Thursday night’s game against the Hurricanes in Raleigh, N.C.

“We played more simple,” Panarin said through an interpreter, “and no ruthless mistakes.”

New York Post LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160241 New York Rangers

James Dolan urged to sell stakes in Knicks and Rangers by investor

By Josh Kosman November 6, 2019 | 9:52PM

Pressure is building on New York Knicks owner James Dolan to pump up the value of the failing basketball team by selling off stakes to wealthy investors.

On Wednesday, activist investor Clifton S. Robbins said he’s been prodding Dolan’s Madison Square Garden to score minority buyers for the Knicks and Rangers ahead of a



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planned spinoff that will separate MSG's sports teams from its other assets, like Radio City Music Hall.

Robbins, whose Blue Harbour Group hedge fund owns a 4 percent stake in MSG, said he thinks the Knicks and Rangers combined should be worth \$7.2 billion, far higher than the \$5.55 billion price tag they have been given by Forbes. And he suggested they might get closer to that value if Dolan would get off the sideline and find new investors ahead of — or in conjunction with — the 2020 spinoff.

Robbins revealed the push in an interview with Bloomberg News just three days after The Post exclusively reported that buyout firm Silver Lake Partners has approached MSG with just such an offer.

Silver Lake, which already owns close to 10 percent of MSG, has proposed taking a bigger stake in MSG's sports teams than it will otherwise get when they are spun off in the first quarter, as The Post reported Nov. 3.

It's not the first time Dolan, who's notoriously unpopular with fans, has been urged to loosen his grip on the Knicks, as he himself admitted in a 2017 video he made for Deadspin.

"You know, I own a basketball team. For most people that would be a dream. For a trust fund kid, it's a living hell. Always some a--hole telling me to sell," said Dolan, who's the son of Cablevision's founder.

Dolan will continue to control the Knicks and Rangers under the spinoff, which gives MSG's current shareholders two-thirds of the new stock, because his one-third stake will come with supercharged voting powers, company filings show.

MSG, which declined to comment, has previously said it's open to selling some of the one-third stake it plans to retain so it can invest in its other businesses, including the futuristic, orb-like entertainment globes Dolan is building in Las Vegas and London.

Shares of MSG, which Robbins said should be worth \$400 a piece, closed up 1.6 percent, to \$275.72.

New York Post LOADED: 11.07.2019

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Rangers know how they should have responded to Senators wake-up call

By Brett Cyrgalis November 6, 2019 | 2:31PM

Brendan Lemieux took a short moment to think, and measured his words. But the message was clear from the Rangers winger that he didn't like the edgy way Brady Tkachuk was playing — without ever accepting the invitation to fight — when the Senators came into the Garden on Monday and took a 6-2 victory, raining on the Blueshirts' parade by ending a two-game winning streak with a rude and physical contest.

"I don't appreciate guys that don't back it up," Lemieux told The Post before Wednesday night's primetime Garden match against the Red Wings. "But to each their own."

Lemieux had quite a few keruffles during that game, including a first-period fight with Mark Borowiecki that helped turned the tide towards Ottawa and seemed to perpetuate the Rangers' collapse after a terrific first 11 minutes. But Lemieux could never get Tkachuk to engage more than grabbing and shoving, and the frustration was clear — even if Lemieux said that Tkachuk didn't bother him more than "any other player on their team."

"He's a good hockey player, and he did a good job of sparking their team," Lemieux said. "Our group just didn't respond the way that we should have. That could be a different game if we respond the right way, we just didn't. That's all there is to it."

"It's not about the actual nature of what goes on or who does what; after the whistle, the fights, all that. I think it's more about how we respond — by playing hockey. At the end of the day, we're here to win hockey games, and we didn't respond the right way."

Coach David Quinn has preached the need for his team to be physical from the beginning, far more than his turn-the-other-cheek predecessor, Alain Vigneault. But Quinn was clearly agitated with the way his team responded after Lemieux's fight, having emotion turn into frustration without the game results that matter.

"It's managing your emotions and gearing your energy in the right direction. One of the things I thought that happened the other night was I thought we geared our energy and our physicality in a negative way," Quinn said. "Physicality has to have between the whistles, not after the whistles. I thought emotions got the best of us. It was a frustrating night."

That is not something that any of Quinn's players would disagree with, Lemieux included. The 23-year-old son of former NHL legend Claude came to the Rangers in a trade with the Jets last season and, as a restricted free agent this summer, signed a one-year, \$925,000 deal. He had no goals and three assists through his first 11 games of this season, and he wants to produce more offensively.

But he knows his game is more than that, and he wants to help the team win in every way he can.

"Outside of getting penalized, I play as physical as I can, within our structure and conserving the right amount of energy," Lemieux said. "But I want to be a hard guy to play against. Those are overly physical guys. I have the capability and the body to do it, so that's what I try to do."

Lemieux said his focus is always on playing the game the right way, so he doesn't necessarily think there needs to be a distinct line drawn between being physical and possibly getting frustrated. But that type of play is always circumstantial, depending on the game.

"If we're up in a game, I'm going to respond to the other team's physicality and meet it," he said. "But sometimes there are times to pick your spots."

Really, he just wants to contribute to a winning team, and Quinn wants everyone on the roster to play to his own



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identity. This team already has six fights through the first 12 games, on pace for more than they've had in each of the past three years. But the focus is only on using the physical side of the game to get the results — no matter how much an opponent can get under the club's collective skin.

"As a team, I think our focus is always to be physical," Lemieux said. "I think just playing the right way, and in that is physicality."

New York Post LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160243 New York Rangers

Postgame analysis: Tony DeAngelo continues offensive surge in New York Rangers win

Vincent Z. Mercogliano, NHL writer Published 10:35 p.m. ET Nov. 6, 2019 | Updated 12:05 a.m. ET Nov. 7, 2019

New York Rangers defenseman Tony DeAngelo (77) scores a goal against Detroit Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard (35) during the second period at Madison Square Garden.

NEW YORK - Tony DeAngelo may be seeing dollar signs floating around in his head — he's just wisely not willing to come out and say it.

The right-handed defenseman tried to squeeze as much as he could out of the Rangers this offseason, holding out a week into training camp before reluctantly accepting a one-year, \$925,000 offer. The 23-year-old will be a restricted free agent again this summer, and he's playing like a man with a chip on his shoulder.

DeAngelo scored the Rangers' first goal and assisted on another in the Rangers' 5-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings at Madison Square Garden on Wednesday, helping the Blueshirts (6-6-1) bounce back from an embarrassing 6-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Monday.

"I think I kind of proved myself last year and I'm just trying to build off that," DeAngelo said. "I'm not too worry about anything. I think whatever it is contract-wise, it is what it is right now. I'll take care of it in the summer, so I'm not too focused on it. Obviously, I want to have the best year I can, but right now we're just worried about trying to win games."

He's up to 11 points (five goals and six assists) through 13 games, with nine of those points coming in his last seven games.

DeAngelo's goal came on a power play early in the second period. Brendan Lemieux did a nice job of working in close to get a shot off on Detroit goalie Jimmy Howard, and DeAngelo came streaking in from the backside to clean up the rebound.

"It's part of my game," DeAngelo said. "I need to put up points, and so far so good with that category. But there's other parts of my game I want to continue to work on here, and I think that'll even help the points keep coming —

working defensively and making sure we get pucks out and, and obviously I'm at my best in the O-zone."

DeAngelo's goal began a stretch of three in less than five minutes for the Rangers.

The second goal came after Filip Chytil made a nice play to recover a lost puck and found DeAngelo, who took advantage of a gap in the middle of the ice. He carried the puck through the neutral zone and found Pavel Buchnevich, who made a cross-ice pass to Chris Kreider. Kreider gathered it with his skate and beat Howard top shelf to make it 2-0.

The third goal was the Rangers' second on the power play. Rookie Adam Fox, who replaced DeAngelo on the top power-play unit, set a wristed high toward the Red Wings' net and Ryan Strome tipped it in for his fifth goal of the season.

After a rare stretch of three straight games with the same lineup, Rangers coach David Quinn shook things up a bit Wednesday night.

Henrik Lundqvist and Marc Staal — the two longest-tenured Rangers — both returned after sitting out for three straight. Staal replaced rookie Ryan Lindgren, who has impressed since his return from AHL Hartford.

"I don't feel great about sitting Lindgren," Quinn said before the game. "I think he's done some good things, but I want to get (Staal) back in. He deserves to get back in, and looking at the rest of the 'D' corps, I just felt that there was the move to make."

Quinn also decided to give 21-year-old Lias Andersson a night off after what he called "a little bit of a drop in play" against Ottawa. He inserted Greg McKeeg, who played limited minutes but did make a nice play to score the Rangers' fourth goal short-handed.

Brett Howden set McKeeg up to get a shot off on Howard, who lost track of the rebound. McKeeg followed the puck, skating in between two Detroit players and finishing the play for his first goal with the Rangers.

"It's in the back end of your head," McKeeg said of trying to prove he should remain in the lineup. "You try not to think of it like that and you just try to put your best foot forward any way you can to help the team. But I mean, no one likes sitting out, and everyone wants to play each and every night. And the thing is here we got a lot of good players."

Let's start with this... I love everyone's passion. I really do. The fans are a big part of what makes this job a lot of fun. I try to respond as often as possible, and I try to get answers to your questions when they're well thought out and within reason. That's why I've repeatedly asked about line combinations, the use of analytics and Andersson's ice time. But I told you Staal was coming back in the next time the Rangers lost, and I think it's fine that Andersson watched one game from the press box in the first of a back-to-back. (It could even be a good thing, either because he saw the game from a different perspective and/or if it serves as motivation.) He'll almost certainly be back in for Thursday night's game in Carolina, as will Lindgren. (We'll get to who might come out for Lindgren in a moment.) The only difference in the lines against Detroit, as opposed to the lines we saw against Tampa Bay, Nashville and Ottawa, is



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that McKegg centered the fourth line instead of Andersson. Is that really a big deal for one night? It seemed to work out fine against a not-so-great team.

I'm also not sure I understand the paranoia about the Rangers ruining their youth. We're a long way away from being able to judge how they've done developing this flock of young players. I get it — Andersson is a former first-round pick who is buried on the fourth line. I'm surprised he hasn't gotten a look on a different line yet, too. And if you want to say the Rangers should incorporate more analytics, that's fair. (Although it's still unclear how much weight they actually do put in the numbers. It might be more than we think, even if Quinn seems to be more of an "eye-test" guy.) But the Rangers have seven players who are 21-or-younger on this team, so this notion that they aren't giving the kids a chance is a serious reach. And if you're going to criticize Quinn (or the front office or whoever) for not playing Andersson enough, do they get credit for what they did with Chytil? It's hard to argue that sending him to AHL Hartford to begin the season wasn't the right move. It worked exactly how they hoped — he only missed a brief amount of NHL games, and he came back a much better player.

New York Rangers defenseman Marc Staal (18) defends against Detroit Red Wings center Andreas Athanasiou (72) during the first period at Madison Square Garden.

With all that said, Quinn should get Lindgren back in there against the Hurricanes. He admitted that Lindgren deserves to be in, and even though Quinn said Staal was "solid" against Detroit, there were others who made more glaring miscues. I think Staal will stay in for at least one more game, with either Libor Hajek or Brady Skjei getting a night off.

It'll be interesting to see how Quinn handles this juggling act with seven defensemen for six spots. I asked him if he'll rotate depending on who's playing well (and who's not). "Yes, it'll definitely be that," Quinn said. "It'll be the guys that play well, and maybe the leash is a little shorter for guys because I'm comfortable with (all) seven. Maybe there were times where if you don't feel great with all seven, a guy doesn't have a good night, you give him another chance. Well, I think that might be a little bit different now with seven guys that I'd like to see play."

I'm guessing Micheal Haley comes out for Andersson. Can't take your boy McKegg out after earning the Broadway Hat.

Don't be surprised if Lundqvist is back in there against Carolina, too. He played a good game with 35 saves after the long layoff. Quinn said they were still undecided about Thursday's goalie, and Hank said, "If he gives me an opportunity, I'll play, for sure."

Lundqvist talked about adjusting to the extra time off and how it affected his play. "It was not so much the three games (off)," he said. "I think just the whole start, the first two months, the way the schedule's been. We didn't play many games early on, just sitting here and there. I knew going into this year it would be a little different — I wouldn't play as much. For me, throughout my entire career, I'm lucky to get into that flow where you don't have to work as hard to prepare, playing so many games and you're just in it. This year, that's going to change."

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160244 New York Rangers

NY Rangers lineup: Henrik Lundqvist and Marc Staal return; Mika Zibanejad still out

Vincent Z. Mercogliano, NHL writer Published 12:25 p.m. ET Nov. 6, 2019 | Updated 12:34 p.m. ET Nov. 6, 2019

NEW YORK - After making it through three games with the same lineup for the first time all season, it was clear that the Rangers were planning changes following an ugly 6-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Monday.

With the Detroit Red Wings in town for an 8 p.m. puck drop Wednesday, coach David Quinn went over a series of updates and decisions for game No. 12 of the 2019-20 regular season.

Mika Zibanejad has missed the last three games with an upper body/neck injury, and Quinn confirmed he's going to miss at least two more.

The Rangers' top center won't play against Detroit or Thursday night against the Carolina Hurricanes. They'll reevaluate after that.

"He took another step forward today," Quinn said. "So, he's getting closer. He won't come on the trip (Thursday), but he's getting closer. ... Every day is a new answer to how he's feeling. I didn't really have a timetable set."

Marc Staal returns after three-game hiatus

The Rangers called up rookie defenseman Ryan Lindgren from AHL Hartford prior to last Tuesday's 4-1 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning, inserting him into the lineup in place of veteran Marc Staal for three consecutive games.

Quinn said Staal would get back in at some point, which will come Wednesday at Lindgren's expense.

"I don't feel great about sitting Lindgren," Quinn said. "I think he's done some good things, but I want to get Staal back in. He deserves to get back in, and looking at the rest of the 'D' corps, I just felt that there was the move to make."

How consistently Staal plays moving forward remains an unknown. Quinn talked about the areas where the 32-year-old needs to improve.

"Just a little bit quicker, a little bit more assertiveness, a little bit more physicality," he said. "Everything was OK (before he got taken out), but I think there's another level for him to get to, and he knows that. He's worked hard at it over the last week, and I expect him to have a good night tonight."

Lias Andersson a healthy scratch

After Quinn highlighted his play during the brief two-game winning streak, Lias Andersson struggled in the loss to the Senators and will not play against the Red Wings.



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Greg McKeeg will step in as the fourth-line center after sitting the previous three games.

"I thought Lias had a little bit of a drop in play the other night," Quinn said. "He's a 20-year-old kid that's had a good run here and played some pretty good hockey, but it's just a choice we made."

D pairs set; line combos TBD

Quinn confirmed that Staal will be paired with rookie Adam Fox, while the other two defensive pairings will remain the same — Jacob Trouba with Libor Hájek, and Tony DeAngelo with Brady Skjei.

Quinn said he's still undecided about the line combinations, specifically where rookie Kaapo Kakko will play. He's been used mostly on the third line with Brett Howden and Brendan Lemieux of late, but he was elevated to the top line with Artemi Panarin and Ryan Strome for the final 25 minutes of Monday's loss to Ottawa.

Kakko enjoyed perhaps his best game against the Senators, scoring his third goal of the season and notching the first multi-point game of his young NHL career.

"He's playing with a lot more swagger right now," Quinn said of Kakko. "I think there's much more of a pace to his game. He's getting into battles, as opposed to being around them. And usually when you've got that type of talent and you do those things, you're going to be productive offensively. I never worried about him offensively. We need to focus on what he's doing shift in and shift out, and what his approach is within each shift."

If Kakko stays on the top line, expect to see Jesper Fast take his right wing spot on the third.

Henrik Lundqvist back in goal

After sitting for three games in favor of Alexandar Georgiev, veteran goaltender Henrik Lundqvist will return to the ice against Detroit.

"I expect a good night out of him. That's why he's in there," Quinn said. "I think he's had a good year. He's done a good job adapting to a reduced workload, which I think is just the way the league's going and the situation we're in. I think he's going to benefit from it long term."

Lundqvist is 2-4 in six starts, with a 3.58 goals against average and a .906 save percentage. His last start was his worst of the season, allowing four goals in two periods in the 7-4 loss to the Boston Bruins on Oct. 27.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160245 New York Rangers

Rangers bounce back with solid play at both ends in win over Red Wings

By Colin Stephenson

After the way they played in an ugly loss to the Ottawa Senators at the Garden on Monday, the Rangers were badly in need of a bounce-back performance Wednesday against the lowly Detroit Red Wings.

And with No. 1 center Mika Zibanejad missing his fourth straight game — still unable to play because of an upper-body injury the Rangers have said for 11 days was a day-to-day issue — the Rangers did get that bounce-back they were looking for, taking care of business with a 5-1 victory in the front end of a back-to-back that continues Thursday in Carolina against the Hurricanes.

Two power-play goals and a shorthanded goal powered the Rangers, who improved to 6-6-1. Detroit, which entered the game tied with the Senators for the fewest points in the league (nine), fell to 4-12-1.

"It was really important," forward Artemi Panarin said when asked how important it was for the Rangers to bounce back after the Ottawa loss. "It was a second test for us."

Panarin scored his seventh goal of the season, into an empty net with 2:37 left, to provide the final margin. The Red Wings trailed 4-1 when they pulled goaltender Jimmy Howard for the extra skater with more than five-and-a-half minutes left in the game.

Henrik Lundqvist started in net for the Rangers for the first time since Oct. 27, when he played the first two periods against the Boston Bruins. He entered Wednesday with a 2-3 record, .906 save percentage, and a 3.58 goals-against average.

Against the Red Wings, Lundqvist was sharp — he made 35 saves — and stopped all 16 shots he faced in the third period.

Coach David Quinn, who had said at the morning skate that there was "a chance" Lundqvist could play again Thursday, wouldn't tip his hand on whether Lundqvist would play Thursday. He said would talk about it with goalie coach Benoit Allaire.

Lundqvist, asked after the game if he would be up to the challenge of playing again Thursday, said, "If he gives me an opportunity, I'll play."

Neither team generated much in the first period, which featured no goals, no penalties and not much action at all. But the Rangers got three goals in a span of four minutes, 24 seconds early in the second period to take command.

Two of the goals came on the power play, on which the Rangers were 2-for-3. Defenseman Tony DeAngelo, dropped to the second power-play unit after Adam Fox took his place with the first group, converted a rebound of a shot by Brendan Lemieux for his fifth goal, at 4:25, one second before a penalty to Detroit's Adam Erne expired, to open the scoring.

Chris Kreider snapped in his third goal of the season to make it 2-0 at 6:04 of the period, and the Rangers made it 3-0 with their second power-play goal of the game, this one credited to Ryan Strome at 8:49, after Fox's shot bounced in off him and got behind Howard. The goal was Strome's fifth of the season.



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Detroit got one back less than a minute later, when former Islander Valtteri Filppula scored his second goal of the season at 8:41, finishing a two-on-none pass from Andreas Athanasiou, after Rangers defenseman Jacob Trouba gambled unsuccessfully when he tried to strip the puck from Athanasiou in the neutral zone. That pulled Detroit to within 3-1 and it finished the second period with a flurry.

Micheal Haley's tripping penalty early in the third period put Detroit on the power play, but Greg McKegg, returning to the lineup after sitting out the previous three games, scored a shorthanded goal, his first goal as a Ranger, to make it 4-1 at 8:44 of the third period.

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Henrik Lundqvist trying to adjust to making fewer starts

By Colin Stephenson

Henrik Lundqvist was back between the pipes for the Rangers Wednesday, starting in goal against the Detroit Red Wings at the Garden, 10 days after his last appearance. That kind of layoff isn't at all what the 37-year-old is used to. In fact, this whole season, so far, has been anything but business as usual for Lundqvist.

It began with the declaration at the start of training camp by Rangers president John Davidson – echoed by coach David Quinn – that Lundqvist's ice time would be reduced this season. The team's rationale is it wants to keep Lundqvist fresh for a potential playoff run, while also giving Alexandar Georgiev a chance to play enough to continue his development. Then, there was that crazy early season schedule that saw the Rangers start with three games in the first 14 days. Finally, Lundqvist had to sit and watch while Quinn rode a hot Georgiev for three starts in a row.

"I know it's going to be different this year, but also the schedule has made the whole thing very different," Lundqvist said following Wednesday's morning skate. "Like I've said, when you're not playing, you try to just be focusing on what you do in practice and how you prepare yourself. That's all you can do — not think too much when you're about to play. It's more about the preparation and what you can control."

Lundqvist clearly isn't controlling as much as he used to this season. The Rangers may have turned the corner on the rebuild they announced in February 2018, but they're not ready to contend just yet. They're still a young team – the youngest in the league, in fact – with seven players on the roster 21 years old or younger, including three 21-year-old rookie defensemen. So, while the additions of Artemi Panarin, Jacob Trouba, and 18-year-old Kaapo Kakko have greatly improved the roster, the Blueshirts are still in for a roller-coaster ride this season. And Lundqvist knows it.

"Yeah we added a couple players, but a big part of our team is a lot of young guys trying to learn and get that experience," he said. "And if you look at our game so far, it is a little up and down, and I think that comes with the learning process. But hopefully we can improve that and be very consistent. I think that's how you win and get points in this league. It's being consistent, and not have your great game and then you fall down."

Lundqvist entered Wednesday with a 2-3 record, a .906 save percentage, and a swollen 3.58 goals-against average. He didn't finish his last start, coming out after two periods (four goals allowed, on 31 shots) in an ugly 7-4 loss to the Boston Bruins on Oct. 27. Despite the numbers, though, Quinn said he thought Lundqvist has "had a good year."

"I think he's done a good job adapting to a reduced workload (and), just the way the league's going and the situation we're in, I think he's going to benefit from it, long term," Quinn said.

Quinn said on Monday that though Lundqvist had to sit for a while as Georgiev strung a few starts together, he will get his turn to go on runs, too. In fact, Quinn said at Wednesday's morning skate that Lundqvist could be back in goal as soon as Thursday, as the Rangers complete a back-to-back with a road game in Carolina against the Hurricanes.

"We'll see how tonight goes, see what type of game develops," the coach said. "There's a chance he could play (Thursday)."

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1160247 New York Rangers

Rangers bump Ryan Lindgren from lineup, allowing Marc Staal to return

By Colin Stephenson

David Quinn knew he wanted to get veteran defenseman Marc Staal back into the lineup after sitting the 32-year-old alternate captain for three straight games, but the question the second-year coach was faced with was which defenseman would he take out to create an opening for Staal?

He settled on taking out Ryan Lindgren, the 21-year-old rookie who had been the one who bumped Staal out of the lineup in the first place.

"I don't feel great about sitting Lindgren – he's done some good things," Quinn said. But I wanted to get 'Staalsie' back in. He deserves to get back in. And looking at the rest of the 'D' corps, I just felt that that was the move to make."

Lindgren had an assist and was a plus-3 in his three games in the lineup. He was one of only two players to have a plus rating (+1) in the 6-2 loss to Ottawa on Monday.



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Lias Andersson, the 21-year-old, fourth line center, also came out of the lineup, replaced by veteran Greg McKegg who, like Staal, had been scratched the previous three games.

"I thought, you know, Lias had a little bit of drop in play the other night (against Ottawa), and he's a [21]-year-old kid that's a good run here, and played some pretty good hockey," Quinn said. "But it's just the choice we made."

Zibanejad misses fourth straight game

Mika Zibanejad took part in the morning skate, but did so wearing a red (non-contact) jersey and ultimately missed his fourth straight game with an upper body injury. The 26-year-old center did not make the trip with the team after the game to Raleigh, N.C. for Thursday's game against the Carolina Hurricanes.

"He took another step forward today, so he's getting closer," Quinn said of Zibanejad. "Just every day is a new answer to how he's feeling so I didn't really have a timetable set. And when he's healthy, he'll be ready to go."

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1160248 New York Rangers

'It's nice when we take care of business like that': Henrik Lundqvist turns back the clock to help Rangers rebound

By Rick Carpiello Nov 6, 2019 47

NEW YORK — So let's unplug the Rangers' goalie controversy for a little while.

There's going to be a decision, and it's going to be really difficult at some point regarding the Rangers goalies when top prospect Igor Shesterkin is tossed into the mix. It doesn't need to be made until after this season, or before next season perhaps, even as Shesterkin dominates the AHL.

But there was always this understanding for this season: It will only be a problem if Henrik Lundqvist doesn't play well.

So there is no problem here and now.

After sitting out three in a row while Prince Alexandar Georgiev, the 1B, played, the King, or 1A, was back in goal Wednesday for a fairly tidy 5-1 win over the season-on-fire Detroit Red Wings (4-12-1).

In another season, Lundqvist wearing the ball cap on the bench for three in a row would have been a gigantic story. Now, as he closes in on age 38 in March, it's different. He and coach David Quinn, and goalie whisperer Benoit Allaire, are going to do it differently this season. Lundqvist is going to play less. He knew it going into the summer, he knew it before the season, and he knows it now. Georgiev will play more than a backup usually plays, Lundqvist less than he usually plays. But if Lundqvist plays well enough, he's still 1A and will start more games than Georgiev — who was a bit off

against Ottawa two nights earlier after winning his previous two.

Still, it was odd to see Lundqvist sitting out three in a row.

"It was not so much the three games," he said. "I think the whole start, the first two months, the way the schedule's been. You know, we didn't play many games early on. I've been sitting here and there. And I knew going into this year it would be a little different — I will not play as much.

"For me, you know, throughout my entire career, I'm looking to get into that flow where you don't have to work so hard to prepare because you're playing so many games, you're just in it. That's going to change, so I just have to work a little harder to prepare. It's new. I don't know how many games I'm going to play this year, but I was excited to be out there today and play and try to help the team to win."

Quinn, after the game, wouldn't commit to playing Lundqvist again, some 20 hours later, in Carolina Thursday. Quinn smiled and said he hadn't yet discussed it with Allaire or his goalies.

But it's a pretty good guess that Lundqvist will be back in net in Raleigh because of his absurd numbers in regular-season back-to-backs. He's played in both ends of 84 of those in his career, going 53-23-8 with a 2.12 goals-against average, a .928 save percentage and nine shutouts. However, he hasn't played a back-to-back since Oct 16-17, 2018.

I asked him whether he wants to play again.

"If he gives me the opportunity," Lundqvist smiled, "I'll play for sure, yeah."

This was Lundqvist's first game this season in which he allowed fewer than two goals. A lot of the blame for that goes to the team in front of him. You know, the youngest team in the league that's been up and down like a toilet seat through the first 13 games. You know, when odd-man rushes were given out like M&Ms on Halloween.

"I think that was the most structured game I've had in front of me so far this year," Lundqvist said. "It felt good to play when you feel that we're in the right place and the few chances they had. I felt like we were there to help out on rebounds and didn't give them too much room. This was a game — we had to have a performance like this after what happened last game (a terrible loss to another terrible team, Ottawa). We need to learn from our ups and downs, and I think we did.

"For us, there's only one level to play, for us to win games consistently, and that's we have to keep it simple, no matter who we play — a top team or a team that's struggling and in the bottom of the standings. There's one way to play this game, especially for us, and today I thought we did that. We played our style, and a simple game — let the skill take over when there's an opportunity, but don't force it."

He also said, "It's nice when we take care of business like that."

And they did. Quinn has more difficult decisions ahead of him, regarding Lundqvist and others. But he doesn't have a problem in goal. The King, the face of the franchise, is on board with the plan.



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"He understands why we're doing it," Quinn said. "It certainly isn't punishment. It's just load management, game management, whatever you want to call it, for someone his age and for the way the position has kind of changed a little bit. Most teams are going with a two-goalie situation where one might play 60 percent and the other guy 40, and I think when the dust settles that will be the case for us. So he's handled it well, and he's played well. He's played well. As I said to him when last year ended, 'We want you to have a good season, not a good half,' and I think this will help him do that."

Nevertheless, it's an adjustment.

"Yeah, for sure," Quinn said. "And I think as you get older in your career there's a lot of adjustments you have to make. So he's embracing it, he understands it. I'm sure he doesn't love it. I'm sure he wants to play 65-70 games. And I wouldn't want a goalie not wanting to play 65 or 70 games. So, he's a smart guy and he understands the changes and adapting as you move further in your career."

Thoughts

1. Lundqvist didn't see much early, other than a bunch of long shots that he calmly gloved, and a Darren Helm shot off the left post.

2. The nicest thing you could say about the first period was that it wasn't the last 50 minutes of the Ottawa game. And really, the Rangers defended quite well in the first. But I about cracked my head on the press box table when I nodded off.

3. Lundqvist also got an Academy Award nomination when he, shall we say, embellished after Brady Skjei bumped Adam Erne into him post-whistle early in the second.

4. By the way, this was no gimme, not with Jimmy Howard in Detroit's net. The Red Wings had won five in a row over the Rangers (four of them in the skills competition after the hockey game ends). Howard came in 10-3-3, 1.77, .948 against the Rangers; plus five of the past six, six of eight, nine of 13 games between these teams had gone to OT or the skills competition. Twenty of the past 22 had been decided by one goal.

5. Good Tony, Bad Tony: With Adam Erne in the box, Brendan Lemieux made a move to his forehand down low and was stopped by Howard, but Tony DeAngelo — as he does so well — drove to the left post and potted the rebound for his fifth of the season, one behind Artemi Panarin's team lead to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead.

WELCOME BACK TO THE SCORESHEET, TONY DEANGELO (@TONYDEE07)! #WNH

📷: [HTTPS://T.CO/XS75TCXXSA](https://t.co/xs75tcxxsa) @NHLONNBCSPORTS
PIC.TWITTER.COM/C7Q10RWKXD

— NHL (@NHL) NOVEMBER 7, 2019

6. Filip Chytil made a play in the defensive zone, supporting Brady Skjei along the wall, and got the puck to DeAngelo, who took it up ice and gave it to Pavel Buchnevich. Kreider was in stride up the right wing, took Buchnevich's pass and rifled a shot over Howard's shoulder on the short side for a 2-0 lead.

CHRIS KREIDER ZEROED IN ON THIS SHOT. 😊 #WNH

📷: [HTTPS://T.CO/OVHTLDHF9N](https://t.co/ovhtldhf9n) @NHLONNBCSPORTS
PIC.TWITTER.COM/HYGXS9M5TS

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7. Lemieux drew a penalty to fellow pest Justin Abdelkader and the second power-play unit made it 3-0. Adam Fox's long shot went in off Ryan Strome's body for Strome's fifth of the season. And that, kids, is how you keep up that unsustainable shooting percentage that everybody's always complaining about.

8. Kakko-Meter: By the way, that first power-play unit is kinda like Groundhog Day, isn't it? The puck goes left point to right half-wall, back to Kakko in the right circle, and instead of one-timing a shot he half-times a pass toward the left post that misses everything. Otherwise, his game is really headed in a good direction. He had a robust 19:32 of ice time in a game in which the Rangers didn't have anybody over 20:00 — the first time that's happened for the Rangers since ice time began being tracked in 1997-98.

9. The shutout didn't last but 50 seconds after the Strome goal, as a colossal breakdown, with Libor Hajek trapped up ice, resulted in a two-on-one that Jacob Trouba somehow turned into a two-on-none by choosing to play Andreas Athanasiou at the blue line. Athanasiou just blew past him and set up Valteri Filppula for a no-chancer against Lundqvist to cut the Red Wings' deficit to 3-1.

ATHANSIOU SENDS A ROYAL ROAD PASS TO FILPPULA, WHO GETS THE RED WINGS ON THE BOARD 52 SECONDS AFTER THE NYR'S THIRD GOAL
PIC.TWITTER.COM/MNR6CPEZ6Y

— SHAYNA (@HAYYYSHAYYY) NOVEMBER 7, 2019

10. Cue up the "Benny Hill" music for the fourth Rangers goal, which occurred while the team was short-handed in the middle of the third. Micheal Haley was serving a tripping penalty — he actually stuck out his leg and tripped Tyler Bertuzzi — and when the whistle blew, he bee-lined to the box. Brett Howden sent Greg McKeeg up ice for a short shot that hit the nob of Howard's stick. Howard couldn't locate it, and Bertuzzi went to clear it but blew a tire and slid right out of the play, leaving McKeeg with a wide-open shot from the slot. And I don't think he got much on the shot, but it went in for a 4-1 lead. Of course, Quinn put McKeeg back into the lineup knowing he'd score.

11. Lemieux drew another penalty against former Rangers first-rounder Dylan McIlrath — playing in his 51st NHL game after being recalled from the minors. McIlrath also played the PK. Not sure why you'd recall a minor-league defenseman and then dress seven defensemen? But I'm sure if Quinn hid that, Rangers Twitter would burn down (again). Of course, there's not much left of it after Wednesday's lineup decisions.

CHEERS TO YOUR FIRST AS A RANGER, KEGGER.
PIC.TWITTER.COM/JJV9VNOE13

— NEW YORK RANGERS (@NYRANGERS) NOVEMBER 7, 2019



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12. Daily Bread: Panarin had an assist earlier, and when Detroit coach Jeff Blashill pulled Howard with more than five minutes left, Panarin added an empty-netter to pad his team-leading goal tally with No. 7. Strome and Marc Staal assisted on the goal.

13. Quinn Bin: Man, the world nearly ended earlier in the day when Quinn let it be known he was scratching Lias Andersson and Ryan Lindgren. The Lindgren decision wasn't easy – but Staal was coming back into the lineup as soon as the Rangers lost. It was never the plan to sit him for three straight, but they won the first two, so that's what it became. It could have easily been Brady Skjei who came out. It likely wasn't going to be Libor Hajek. So Lindgren got the hook, though Quinn admitted he didn't really deserve it.

14. And with Lindgren here — and yes, Staal is going to play, even if it's not every game — those decisions could be more difficult for Quinn, who now has seven defensemen (plus Brendan Smith). It'll be a case in which a defenseman who played well one game might be out the next.

"Yes, it will definitely be that," Quinn said. "There will be guys that play well and maybe the leash is a little shorter for guys now because I am comfortable with seven. So maybe there were times where if you don't feel great with all seven, a guy doesn't have a good night, you give him another chance. Well, I think that might be a little bit different now with seven guys I'd like to see play."

15. And as for the "Andersson is, or has been, better than Brett Howden" stuff, just stop. He hasn't been. I like Andersson, I think he's been good at times, other times not so good. I think he's going to be a fine NHL player, though a bottom-six center.

16. Staal, back in, after sitting out three in a row – the first time in his career he's been a healthy scratch – became the fourth Rangers defenseman to reach 850 games (Brian Leetch, Harry Howell, Ron Greschner).

17. Still no Mika Zibanejad (neck injury), and he wasn't making the trip to Carolina for Thursday's game, either. And good gosh do the Rangers miss him.

18. Speaking of which how was that hit on Zibanejad not illegal? I mean, first of all, it's high, always. Usually to the head. Second, the guy who's being hit doesn't have the puck, so it's interference at best. And it should be a penalty because of the way shoulder pads are now shoulder weapons. There's no good reason why it's allowed. But it is. This is the NHL. Tap a guy on the gloves, it's a penalty. Crank him to the skull, play on.

19. Thinking back to the Ottawa stinker, and a lot of talk about how the two fights charged up the Senators with the Rangers in control. Well, the Garden, on the big scoreboard, showed repeated slow-mo replays of DeAngelo and Lemieux landing punches. The Senators were watching this from their bench. Did that fire up the Senators? I think it might have. Things like that do. I know it used to tick off the Rangers when the Flyers did it in Philly.

My Three Rangers Stars

Henrik Lundqvist

Tony DeAngelo

Brendan Lemieux

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

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How Adam Fox is quietly becoming one of the Rangers' most valuable pieces

By Shayna Goldman Nov 6, 2019 26

A big part of the Rangers' rebuilding plans was acquiring Adam Fox's draft rights from the Carolina Hurricanes in April. Though it's only a month into the 2019-20 season, Fox has been a highlight to open the year, both elevating the defense and giving a glimpse into the future of this blue line.

Along with replenishing future assets lost from years of contending, building the blue line is an essential part of the Rangers' process. It's an area that's lacked both at the NHL level and through their prospect pipeline. With stockpiled assets, two draft picks were flipped to add Fox a year before his draft rights expired in the hopes that he could develop on their defense for the future and help the team right now. Not only did he bolster their prospect pool this summer, but since debuting at the NHL level, has been a skillful addition.

Let's start from the top. Why Fox and why would a rebuilding team move future assets after putting so much effort into accumulating draft picks?

Fox's offensive abilities were on display throughout his NCAA career as a part of the Harvard Crimson. In his first season, the Flames' 66th overall pick in 2016 tallied six goals and 34 assists in 35 games, which put him at a scoring rate of 1.14 points per game. The following year, he just fell short of a point-per-game pace with 28 in 29 games.

In his junior year, Fox reached career highs of nine goals, 39 assists, and 48 points in 33 games. While his raw totals of 48 points ranked fourth in the NCAA, his 1.45 point per game rate led the way for skaters. He was the first defender to lead the NCAA in scoring rate since 1995. His stellar season landed him as a finalist for the 2019 Hobey Baker Award.

While players usually don't carry their NCAA scoring rate to the NHL, a number of defenders who scored at similar rates to Fox in college, including Zach Werenski, Jake Gardiner, and Alex Goligoski, and have gone on to succeed in the NHL.

The Rangers were swinging for upside with Fox, even though he's undersized at 5-foot-11. He joins a growing club of young defenders who can thrive in the NHL despite not reaching the six-foot mark, like Quinn Hughes, Sam Girard, Victor Mete, and Will Butcher.

But they could have waited. Fox's draft rights were set to expire after this season, which would have given them the opportunity to sign him as a free agent — just as they did with Kevin Hayes and Jimmy Vesey. But the sooner they got



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him in their lineup, the sooner he could refine his game at the NHL level. There wasn't much more for him to accomplish in the NCAA to develop his game.

A second and conditional third round pick (which is bound to become another second round pick, as he's 19 games away from meeting that condition) is a lot for a rebuilding team who has been focused on replenishing assets, not draining them. But along with their prospects, the Rangers still need young, NHL-ready players now. In the 21-year-old, they've added a player who can contribute now and for years to come.

Fox, just 12 games into his NHL career, has already been effective for the Rangers.

"His poise really continues to impress me night in and night out, a guy that can step in and play with his poise and his deception. His compete level is higher than maybe a lot of people would anticipate, and when we traded for him there was a question of, was he going to be able to compete at this level right out of the gate, and was his skating going to allow him to play right away? He answered those two questions quickly," David Quinn said.

"We've always liked his instincts, his offensive play. He's got a great ability to get us out of our own end. The thing I've liked, and I've said this before, people were wondering how quickly he could adapt to the NHL level from a defending standpoint and a skating standpoint. Easy would be the wrong word, but it's been a quicker transition I think than anybody had anticipated."

And Fox has managed that transition while rotating defense partners, starting with Libor Hajek for a rookie pair in the first game, to Brady Skjei, Marc Staal, and Ryan Lindgren's right.

On the surface, it may not seem like Fox, a defender known for his offensive impact, has had a solid start with three points in 12 games, which trails defenders Tony DeAngelo, Jacob Trouba, and Brady Skjei, as well as rover Brendan Smith.

Points don't tell the full story for defenders—neither do some of the other more traditional approaches used to evaluate defenders like average time on ice or plus-minus. That's why it's important to look below the surface to best explore a defenseman's effectiveness. While it's a small sample, Fox has been quietly been effective on both ends of the ice, even though he has just three points.

Let's start by exploring his offensive impact.

At 5-on-5, the Rangers aren't generating a high volume of shots, ranking 28th in the league with a shot rate of 50.38 per 60. All shots aren't created equally, though. Expected goals assigns a value to each shot to assess how likely it is to become a goal, factoring in variables such as shot distance, angle, and shot type. The Rangers rank 11th with an expected goal rate for of 2.32 per 60 because they're making the most of the shots they do take.

With Fox on the ice, the Rangers are shooting more — a rate of 54.88 shot attempts per 60. Relative to his teammates, Fox increased their shot attempts for per 60 by 4.75. He also slightly boosts the team's expected goal rate for when deployed.

Fox's offensive generation doesn't stem from a dangerous shot or powerful, speedy skating. It's how he sees the ice, reacts to a situation, and best uses his skill set.

As Quinn noted, Fox's poise with the puck makes him stand out. The fact that he's maintained that even in his first NHL experiences is particularly impressive. From how he weaves through skaters with the puck on his stick, to how he can calmly maintain possession while assessing his next move, even in a tight situation, highlights a maturity to his game and decision-making. That ability to hold on to the puck and make a play, instead of rushing to get the puck off his stick in a bind, is what will lead to more offensive chances while he's on the ice.

Unlike Jacob Trouba, another right-handed defender the Rangers added via trade this summer, Fox isn't as much a shooter as he is a distributor. He's shot the puck just 36 times in all situations so far this season. But with his passing, the Rangers are able to create more offense with him on the ice.

To move the puck up the ice quickly, Fox can spot his teammates for stretch passes. When in the zone, he can move the puck deeper or laterally, whether it's parallel to the blue line to alleviate pressure from opposing forecheckers or across the royal road, which makes a save more challenging for a goaltender. The defender's ability to draw the opponent to him before dishing out a pass, and his willingness to make a riskier play, show why his vision and puck-moving abilities are such a strength.

With Fox, there weren't many questions about how he'd contribute to the Rangers' offense. The questions were more focused on how he'd defend, especially on a team that struggles in their own zone.

The Rangers allow the highest rate of 5-on-5 shots against in the league with 67.21 per 60. Unfortunately, the quality of those shots also put them last with a 3.1 per 60 expected goals against rate.

Fox isn't a particularly physical defender and he isn't a frequent shot blocker. But, as Quinn explained, "there's a lot of different ways to defend."

"I love his anticipation. He competes when he's in a battle, regardless of the size advantage or disadvantage. He's got quick feet, a good stick and he's aware of his body position. So for a guy that young to be able to put himself in those positions and understand that so quickly is pretty exciting."

While Fox doesn't lead the blue line with his offensive underlying numbers, he's the only Ranger to actually break even in shot share — and much of it has to do with his 54.8 per 60 shot rate against, which is the second best on the team. As with any numbers through 12 games, we have to be aware of small sample sizes and how they can skew data.

Relative to his teammates, he's decreased shot attempts against by 12.8; the only player who rates higher on the team is Jesper Fast (-15.5). Along with suppressing shots, Fox is helping limit quality chances against; his 2.19 expected goals against per 60 is the second best on the team.

Chart via HockeyViz



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On the above visuals, red areas represent where teams allow more shots relative to the league average, while blue shows where a team isn't allowing their opponent to generate as many shots. Again, sample size, as well as shot location issues in NHL data for the Rangers' first three games can influence these charts. But even with both considerations, there's still a drastic change between when Fox is and isn't on the ice.

With a shared spotlight between numerous new faces, there's been less pressure on Fox to start his NHL career. And that's allowed him to be one of the more quietly effective players over the last month — especially since many of his contributions haven't been just what he's created, but what he's stopped opponents from creating.

The questions moving forward for Fox are whether he'll maintain this level of play, how much he'll progress this season, and just how much support he'll have around him. His development will also raise questions about the defense as whole, as this is the time to assess before more prospects make the jump to the NHL. But it won't be where Fox fits, it's who will fit around him in the future.

All data via Evolving-Hockey.com, and is adjusted for score and venue. The Athletic's Rick Carpiniello contributed to this report.

*Note: an issue in NHL play-by-play tracking data with shot locations affected some of the shot-based metrics that were used here. While the error was fixed beginning with Oct. 16 games, others prior to were not retroactively corrected. Counsel with Evolving-Hockey resulted in our use of this year's data in comparative means only.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160250 Ottawa Senators

Bagnall: Can Senators break early pattern of historically low attendance?

JAMES BAGNALL Updated: November 6, 2019

This can't be the start Eugene Melnyk envisioned for his Ottawa Senators. Fourteen games into this young NHL season, the Senators are near the bottom in league standings and their fans appear to be slipping away.

The team closed out a three-game home stand Oct. 27 by drubbing the San Jose Sharks 5-2. But just 9,740 spectators were on hand to witness it. During the seven home matches to date, attendance at the Canadian Tire Centre averaged 11,260, according to official game reports. That's less than 60 per cent of capacity. Whether it's spectators or percentage of seats filled, the Senators rank 31st in a league of 31 teams. The next home game — on Thursday against the L.A. Kings — seems unlikely to break the pattern.

Even so, Melnyk isn't about to panic.

"Our goal is to show our fans we are very serious about building a contender here in Ottawa and that means doing it the right way, which isn't always the easiest or fastest," he

noted in an emailed response to multiple queries from this newspaper. "I do find it inspiring to see underdogs succeed, as I think all sports fans do."

Indeed, given the strange alchemy of professional sports these days you would be foolish to draw hard conclusions from dispiriting early season results. The Washington Nationals this year launched their baseball season by losing 62 per cent of their first 50 games, yet persevered to win the World Series. The St. Louis Blues began 2019 ranked dead last in the National Hockey League, then flipped a switch. The team won its first Stanley Cup in June.

The Senators, too, know something about how momentum can shift. Two years ago, despite a 12th-place finish in the regular season, they came within one goal of qualifying for the Stanley Cup final.

But even during this entirely unexpected drive for a championship, a waning enthusiasm could be discerned. Tickets for playoff games went unsold and regular-season attendance slipped significantly from the year before.

In fact, the Senators have seen their fan base shrink for four consecutive seasons, from 18,246 per game in 2014-15 to 14,553 last year — a drop of 20 per cent, according to hockeydb.com, a popular website for hockey enthusiasts. Unknown, of course, is what percentage of these tickets were purchased on discount or simply given away.

Among the other Canadian NHL franchises, only the Calgary Flames and Montreal Canadiens have seen attendance slip over the same four-year period — by a relatively modest three per cent and one per cent respectively. And last year (2018-19) all six of the other Canadian teams reported at least 95 per cent capacity. Arenas in Winnipeg and Toronto were standing room only.

The Senators, in sharp contrast, attracted fans for just 76 per cent of available seats.

All of this suggests a worrisome disconnect between the team and its fan base. According to estimates provided by Forbes Magazine, the team barely broke even in the 2017-18 season when 85 per cent of the seats were filled. And that was before Melnyk included spending on capital improvements and interest on some \$200 million US worth of debt. Best guess: the Senators suffered a net annual loss in excess of \$10 million US. And now, two years later, they're attracting even fewer fans.

The loss of spectators represents serious money. Forbes estimates gate receipts accounted for nearly 30 per cent of the Senators' \$124 million U.S. in revenues two years ago, with television and radio rights, advertising and other revenues accounting for the rest.

The Senators organization is well aware that more fans are staying home. Melnyk noted that ticket buyers in coming weeks will be treated to "an enhanced experience" involving theme nights, live music and fresh offerings of food and beverages.

Assuming the Senators can get their paid attendance back up to at least 14,000 per game this year, that could still represent more than \$5 million in lost revenue compared with the 2017-18 season. The potential losses might be



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smaller depending on what percentage of seats sold are in the more expensive rows closer to the ice surface.

Can Melnyk cover additional losses?

In recent years, he has certainly been careful with his cash. The Senators' payroll, according to capfriendly.com, is significantly below the amount permitted under NHL rules. A year ago, Melnyk aggressively sought an arrangement that would have seen him pay relatively little upfront for a new arena on LeBreton Flats. More recently, the Senators' owner has been defending himself vigorously against a lawsuit launched this summer by a Connecticut casino that is attempting to recover \$1 million US in gambling debts and related interest.

While Melnyk's liquidity does not appear to be as strong as when he ran Biovail more than a decade ago, he's not lacking in assets. He bought the Senators in 2003 out of bankruptcy court for a bargain \$93 million US, and the team and arena are now worth an estimated \$450 million US plus. Most years the Senators lost money, causing the debt to rise from \$45 million US to an estimated \$200 million US. Despite those losses, Melnyk has netted roughly \$200 million US in additional assets during his tenure with the Senators.

Looking ahead, the Senators owner can also anticipate improved revenue streams from broadcasting rights. The NHL's multi-year deal with NBC expires in 2021, and according to Forbes will generate substantially more cash for each team — up to \$400 million US annually split among the 31 teams, or double the current arrangement. (Even more lucrative deals featuring Rogers Communications and TSN do not expire until 2025.) Melnyk can also look forward to a piece of the \$650 million US franchise fee to be paid by Seattle, which begins play in the 2021-22 season.

All of which suggests Melnyk may be biding his time while rebuilding the team with inexpensive young talent.

Except the slumping attendance figures suggest a somewhat obvious danger with this approach.

From the beginning, Melnyk has understood the national capital region is a tough sell for professional hockey. It's a small market — one-quarter the population of greater Toronto — in which the biggest employer, the federal government, discourages its workers from accepting tickets to games. And Ottawa remains the only Canadian city without a downtown NHL arena.

Little wonder that Senators' ticket prices are the lowest among Canadian teams.

Melnyk also suffers a political disadvantage compared with owners in other small-market cities. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson shares with his counterparts in Toronto and Montreal the conviction that municipal taxpayers shouldn't contribute to NHL teams.

And yet, until recently, the team has consistently filled seats. The initial fan enthusiasm related to reacquiring an NHL franchise carried the team through the 1990s. By 2002-03, the Senators were attracting full houses based on talent. That season, the team led the league in the regular season in points and came within one game of reaching the Stanley Cup finals.

That was also the year the Senators slipped into bankruptcy for reasons that had nothing to do with on-ice performance. When Melnyk acquired the team and arena for a song in August 2003, a Cup seemed just a matter of time. Led by captain Daniel Alfredsson, the Senators had a profound connection to the community.

The team topped 100 points in 2006-07 for the fourth straight season — when more than 19,000 fans filled the stadium on average each night. That was the year the Senators reached the finals only to lose to the Anaheim Ducks. It would be the last time the team topped 100 points in the regular season. It has yet to earn another spot in the Cup final.

Enthusiasm ebbed. Trips to the playoffs were no longer a given. Alfie left in 2013. Then, in 2016-17 the fans began to drift away.

Melnyk did not help his cause by musing late in 2017 that he might consider moving the team to another city if the economics became a "disaster."

In his email Tuesday to this newspaper, Melnyk distanced himself from that sentiment, noting, "I have been very clear about my commitment to the city and the hockey club," adding that "I plan to be in Ottawa for the duration of the journey towards winning a Stanley Cup."

Assuming he does stay, it may take a little time for Ottawa residents to look past the collapse this year of the Rendezvous LeBreton partnership — selected by the National Capital Commission to remake LeBreton Flats with an NHL arena as its centrepiece.

Last February, 69 per cent of Ottawa residents surveyed by Ekos Research Associates said they believed Melnyk was "very responsible" for the impasse over the development of LeBreton Flats while just 38 per cent felt the same was true of Melnyk's then-partner, John Ruddy.

Whether that's a fair perception or not is beside the point. In a small market such as Ottawa-Gatineau, many things have to go right for the franchise to succeed. It starts with a solid, real connection between the team and its fans, and this includes players, managers and owner. The team must also offer an experience worth making the drive to Kanata, one that at least offers hope the wins will come.

Those empty seats suggest hope is not yet there. But Melnyk remains convinced the fans will return "as they come to know this young team both on and off the ice."

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160251 Ottawa Senators

Gameday: Los Angeles Kings at Ottawa Senators

Bruce Garrioch

Ottawa Sun Sports Hockey Ottawa Senators

Los Angeles (5-10-0) at Ottawa (4-9-1)



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Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Canadian Tire Centre, TSN5, TSN
1200 AM, Unique 94.5 FM

SPECIAL TEAMS

OTT: PP 7.7% (31st); PK 79.7% (21st)

LAK: PP 10.3% (29th); PK 69.8% (29th)

THE BIG MATCHUP

Jean-Gabriel Pageau vs. Anze Kopitar

Playing the No. 1 centre role with an injury to Colin White, Pageau is on a three-game point streak with 3-1-4 on the club's recent road trip. He is plus-15, has embraced his role as an alternate captain and is helping leading this team on a nightly basis. Kopitar is still the Kings best player and has played a pivotal role.

FIVE KEYS TO THE GAME

1. Home sweet home

Coming back from a three-game road trip, the Senators have a 3-4-0 record in seven home games at the CTC. It would make sense to go back to Anders Nilsson after his win Monday in New York, but Craig Anderson can't be fingered for the 4-1 loss Tuesday in Brooklyn.

2. Bring Brannstrom back in

Push will come to shove where the 20-year-old is concerned, but it will be interesting to see what he's able to do after sitting down for a game Tuesday. The Senators are trying to make sure he has confidence and he'll get more if he can start producing some points.

3. Open the scoring

The Senators are 1-5-1 when allowing the opponent to score the first goal this season and getting on the board first would be a boost of confidence. The Senators are 3-4-0 when they open the scoring. Would be a good start against the Kings.

4. Keep the streak alive

The Senators have won two straight against the Kings coming into this one and this would be the second time in franchise history that Ottawa has won three straight against L.A. The Kings are in a rebuild and are coming off a 3-1 loss to the Leafs Tuesday in Toronto.

5. Get back on track

Centre Chris Tierney has been one of the club's best and most consistent players in the first five weeks of the season but he was held pointless on the recent road trip. The Senators have to have him contributing offensively again.

Senators Gameday Lines

Forwards

Brady Tkachuk-Jean-Gabriel Pageau-Anthony Duclair

Tyler Ennis-Chris Tierney-Vladislav Namestnikov

Nick Paul-Artem Anisimov-Connor Brown

Mikkel Boedker-J.C. Beaudin-Bobby Ryan

Defence pairings

Thomas Chabot-Nikita Zaitsev

Erik Brannstrom-Ron Hainsey

Mark Borowiecki-Dylan DeMelo

Goaltenders

Anders Nilsson

Craig Anderson

Kings Gameday Lines

Forwards

Carl Grundstrom-Anze Kopitar-Jeff Carter

Ilya Kovalchuk-Blake Lizotte-Tyler Toffoli

Alex Lafallo-Adrian Kempe-Dustin Brown

Kyle Clifford-Mike Amadio-Trevor Lewis

Defence pairs

Alec Martinez-Drew Doughty

Ben Hutton-Sean Walker

Kurtis MacDermid-Matt Roy

Goaltenders

Jonathan Quick

Jack Campbell

INJURIES

OTT: Rudolfs Balcers, Logan Brown, Christian Wolanin, Colin White

LAK: Derek Forbort

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160252 Ottawa Senators

PATIENT APPROACH: If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again

Ken Warren

NEW YORK – When the losses start piling up, how do you adequately measure the effectiveness of a rebuilding effort?

After dropping two of three on the most recent venture away from home, including being suffocated in a 4-1 loss to the New York Islanders in Brooklyn Tuesday, the Senators now have 10 losses in 14 outings before meeting the Los Angeles Kings Thursday at Canadian Tire Centre.

That's not good, but it shouldn't be surprising, either.

If and when the Senators finally do turn the corner, joining the Islanders and Boston Bruins of the world in being able to wear down opponents themselves, most of the current crew



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in the dressing room will be long gone, replaced by the next wave of speed and youth.

The future isn't going to feature a fourth line with Mikkel Boedker and Bobby Ryan on the wings. The defence likely won't include current veteran mentors such as Mark Borowiecki and Ron Hainsey and goaltender Craig Anderson could very well be retired in Florida by the time the Senators join the NHL's elite squads.

For now, it's all about building the foundations for long-term success with the group that is here, learning coach D.J. Smith's system on the fly.

Losing stinks, but here's a nugget of optimism: The past three-game road trip, including Monday's 6-2 win over the New York Rangers and Saturday's 5-2 defeat to Boston, was a marked improvement from the previous three-game stretch away from home, when the Senators were pretty much run over by the Vegas Golden Knights, Arizona Coyotes and Dallas Stars.

Against the Bruins, Rangers and Islanders, however, they had some bright moments and only fell apart in selected stretches.

"It's not just the road trip, but we are playing much better," Hainsey said after the defeat to the Islanders.

Hainsey says the signs of improvement were evident in the 5-2 win over the San Jose Sharks that concluded the past homestand.

"We came out and competed well in Boston, competed well (against the Rangers) and competed well (against the Islanders).

"The team play...and you can now see the players instinctually going to the places where they are supposed to go. There's much less thinking than there was the first week and a half, two weeks of the season.

"If you're out there thinking, it's very, very difficult when the other team is humming along. We have continued to improve."

Indeed, the Islanders are rolling, riding a 10-game winning streak. It's not hard to see the influences of general manager Lou Lamoriello and coach Barry Trotz on a structure that Anderson describes as "death by patience."

It's not pretty, but it's effective, serving as a handy role model for the Senators to follow, similar to the message the Bruins delivered a few days earlier.

"We seem to have this conversation a lot, about playing 40 minutes or 50 minutes of great hockey," said Anderson. "We're growing in the right direction."

But they've got a ways to go to find the 60-minute solution.

The bonus for Smith is he has time to try and put the house in order.

It's hard not to look ahead at a potential future that could see left winger Brady Tkachuk regularly playing with currently injured centre Logan Brown or one of the top selections in the 2020 draft – maybe Maxime Lafreniere or Quinton Byfield?— where the younger core gets stronger.

Where might Thomas Chabot be in a few years, after continuing to fine-tune his defensive game with experience?

It's all a test of patience for players, as well as Senators fans.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: On that front, Senators associate coach Jack Capuano, whose chief responsibility is handling the club's defencemen, can't help but compare the current state of the team to the former state of the Islanders.

Capuano was head coach of the Islanders 2010-17, when a similar process was in the place.

"This reminds me a lot of the Islanders," Capuano said. "I like the rebuild. I like the teaching process. I like what D.J. has to say and we've got to be patient with where we are now. I like the team we have now and like depth of the organization."

It helps that Capuano has a talent like Chabot to work with.

"He's going to make his mistakes, but we can't take away his offensive abilities," Capuano said of Chabot, who has one goal and eight assists in 14 games, but has also had his share of defensive breakdowns.

"We've been working with him on his gap (the room given to opposition forwards as they break out), his stick positioning and his angling. We're not giving him 10 things, but he's very coachable. There's a lot of positivity with him right now."

Naturally, Chabot wasn't happy with allowing the Islanders to pull away in the latter stages Tuesday – he was on the power play for the back-breaking shorthanded goal midway through the third period – but he also recognizes what their success is all about.

It's about patience.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160253 Ottawa Senators

The view from Belleville: Goaltending woes coupled with a thin blue line add up to a slow start for B-Sens

By Chris Stevenson Nov 6, 2019

BELLEVILLE — The Belleville Senators are off to a scrambled 4-6 start, sit in seventh place in the AHL's Northern Division and are already seven points out of a playoff spot (with a game in hand).

It's not hard to figure out why: they are last in the division with 43 goals allowed.

The two big reasons are the lack of depth on the blue line, and, more disconcerting, a poor start for two of the franchise's blue-chip prospects, goaltenders Marcus Hogberg and Filip Gustavsson.

First off, they are playing behind a makeshift defence. Saturday against the first-place Hartford Wolf Pack the only



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defensive prospect playing in the game was Max Lajoie. Christian Jaros is out with a groin injury and Andreas Englund is out for at least a month with a lower-body injury.

Stuart Percy, signed to a PTO on Oct. 21, might be out for months with a dislocated elbow.

That left the Senators with four defencemen on AHL contracts (Jordan Murray, Jack Dougherty, Hubert Labrie and Jonathan Aspirot) and Frank Corrado, who is on a PTO.

The shoulder injury sustained by Christian Wolanin just before training camp put a big dent in the Senators' depth. If Wolanin was healthy, Erik Brannstrom is probably in Belleville. Given a healthy blue line (which hasn't been the case, it seems, since the Senators have been in the Bay of Quinte) a first four of Brannstrom, Lajoie, Jaros and Englund doesn't look too bad.

But for now, Senators coach Troy Mann is scrambling.

"We've just got to pick up sticks," he said, noting that his counterpart in Ottawa, D.J. Smith, is dealing with the same issues. "We've got to box out better. I think we can get underneath sticks better. That's something D.J. talked about in training camp.

"We preach it a lot here as well. Whether it's the forwards or the defence, we have to do a better job of boxing out and getting underneath sticks. It's the goalie's job to find those pucks, as well. We're not out of the woods by any means. I do think that area has to get way better for us to make the playoffs."

Which brings us to the goaltending.

Hogberg, who was a stud down the stretch last season during the playoff run that came up just short, has been struggling with his rebound control. He is ranked 51st in goals against average and 49th in save percentage. Not a good look for the 24-year-old who has a one-way deal next season and is expected to be in Ottawa.

Gustavsson, the 21-year-old second-round pick in 2016 (No. 55 by the Pittsburgh Penguins) who came over in the Derick Brassard trade, has three of the four wins despite trailing in all his starts. He has given up the first goal in all of his starts and the first two goals in two games.

However, he did have an encouraging performance on Saturday against the Wolf Pack. He made 33 saves and stopped all three Hartford shooters in the 5-4 shootout win.

"He got the job done," was all Mann would concede. "We've got to cut our goals against. We gave up four again (Saturday). I think our offence now is five straight with three or more goals. We felt all along the offence would be a big part of our DNA because of the skill and speed that we had, but we've got to find a way to cut our goals against down. That goes not only for our defence, but from our goaltending."

All of Gustavsson's starts have been in the second game of back-to-backs. He admitted he hasn't been dealing with the circumstances very well.

"I still have trouble with the start of the game. I think almost every game we've been two or three goals in the first period. It puts a lot of pressure on the guys on the team. They need

to score two goals not to fall behind right away. It puts pressure on me because if I let in the third, I'm on the edge of getting pulled from the net, too," he said.

"That's the biggest thing I need to work on now. When I get into the game, everything goes well and I play my game. It's just those starts I have to work on."

He's been trying to simulate the start of the game in his warmup so when the game starts, he feels like he's already got a few minutes under his belt.

"I didn't have trouble with it in the preseason, it's just since the season started," he said. "I'm trying to be even more focused and do more warmup. I'm trying to be like I've already played a period and I'm really in the game. My head has been a little bit of a blockage for me. We haven't got the wins for the team and I come in for the second game of the week and there's always pressure that we need to win to split the week.

"I think that's been a part that's bothering me too in my brain. I just need to forget about that and just do my thing. After those two goals, then I have nothing to lose, just play the game. When I just play my game, it goes really good."

Gustavsson gave up the first goal again on Saturday, but he was solid after that. Hartford tied the game 3-3 with a goal three seconds after a Belleville penalty expired. He made a sharp save with his right toe off a faceoff with 7:50 to go in the third period.

After Cole Cassels, who's on a PTO with Belleville, scored to give the Senators a 4-3 lead, the Wolf Pack tied it with their goaltender on the bench for an extra attacker. In the overtime, Gustavsson made a couple of good saves with Hartford on the power play and it was off to the shootout.

Gustavsson looked especially strong on Hartford's second shooter, Vinni Lettieri, moving across the net and not giving him any daylight.

"I remember last year I had a lot of goals that went in five-hole. I kind of opened up when they did a big move and I just try to keep it more compact and be a little bit more on my edge and just follow the players more," he said. "I think I did a pretty good job this shootout."

Gustavsson will get another shot to try and polish up his starts this weekend. The Senators are on the road for their next four games including a three-in-three (Syracuse, Hartford, Bridgeport) this weekend.

"We're only 10 games into the season and I think last year at this time we were 5-5 after 10 games," Mann said. "We've got a lot of young players. I know the team is going to grow together and I know each player specifically our higher-end prospects are going to continue to get better in this league. That hopefully will make for more wins as we move forward."

One of those higher-end prospects is rookie forward Jonathan Davidsson, who scored his first AHL goal in Saturday's win.

SOUVENIR PUCK! #FORTHEB
PIC.TWITTER.COM/2M9MJONSJG

— BELLEVILLE SENATORS (@BELLEVILLESSENS)
NOVEMBER 3, 2019



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The 22-year-old, who was part of the trade with the Columbus Blue Jackets for Matt Duchene, got off to a slow start. He had one assist and four shots in his first six games and was a scratch for another two.

Part of the problem was the adjustment to playing on the North American rink for the first time.

With some call-ups and a trade (Jack Rodewald was moved to the Florida Panthers), Davidsson got a chance to move up in the lineup. He played his two best games of the season this past weekend on a line with Alex Formenton and Jordan Szwarz.

He also had an assist in a 7-4 loss to the Toronto Marlies on Friday.

"I thought (Saturday) was by far his best game," Mann said. "He's getting a little bit of his confidence. He's got good speed and a good shot. He's just getting used to the systems and the size of the rink. It's just been an adjustment. It's taken some time. It usually takes four or five weeks.

"Whether you're going over to Europe or coming over here, it's an adjustment. I've been happy that that line this weekend probably in the course of both games was our best line."

Here's Davidsson's goal:

CLEANING UP THE  FOR HIS FIRST AHL GOAL
#FORTHEB PIC.TWITTER.COM/VMBAKY0XTW

— BELLEVILLE SENATORS (@BELLEVILLESSENS)
NOVEMBER 3, 2019

Cassels, the son of former NHLer and Ottawa 67's star Andrew Cassels, is making the most of his second PTO with a goal and an assist in his debut in the win over Hartford. The 24-year-old was released from a PTO after training camp and signed on with the Utah Grizzlies of the ECHL.

With Logan Brown and J.C. Beaudin up in Ottawa, the Belleville Senators had just two natural centres and brought Cassels back on Friday. He made a solid contribution on the team's fourth line with Parker Kelly and Andrew Sturtz.

"He's got some AHL experience and we're running basically two centres," Mann said. "We felt it was important to get someone in here. He's a right shot and he's a good penalty killer. Any time you can get your fourth line to contribute two goals, it's important because it adds depth to your scoring. That's something we can get moving forward here."

Cassels was a third-round draft pick (No. 85) in the 2013 NHL Draft by the Vancouver Canucks and won the Memorial Cup in 2015 with the Oshawa Generals (coached by D.J. Smith). He became a free agent when his entry-level deal with the Canucks expired and he played last season with Grizzlys Wolfsburg (yes, named after the Grizzly Adams character) in the DEL.

"My goal is still to play in the NHL. I think with some work and effort I can get there eventually," Cassels said. "I went overseas last year and now it's time to get my feet back on the ground and I'm thankful for the opportunity Belleville is giving me. Hopefully, I can take it and run with it."

He's off to a good start.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160302 Websites

The Athletic / By the numbers: How projections can be wrong and why that's OK

By Dom Luszczyszyn

Nov 6, 2019

It's Nov. 6, 2018 and I'm doing the same thing I do every day from October to June: simulate the remainder of the NHL season. On this day I'll be wrong, just like I was the day before and just like I will be the day after.

That's the nature of the business. As Carolina's Eric Tulsky put it in his conversation with Craig Custance for The Full 60 podcast, the goal is to be less wrong. One year later, we can see exactly how wrong I was.

Our projections thought the New York Islanders would finish with 88 points. Wrong, they earned 103. It thought the Tampa Bay Lightning would only get 108. Wrong, they ended up with 128. It thought the Minnesota Wild would be a playoff team with 97 points. Wrong again, they finished with 83. It thought the Columbus Blue Jackets would finish with 97 points. Idiot. They finished with 98 points.

One year ago, on average, our projections were off by 7.1 points. On the surface, that seems terrible. Ten teams were off by 10 points or more and while that may seem like a huge miss, it's a byproduct of how difficult the sport is to predict thanks to the inherent randomness of every game. When 69 percent of games have the favorite with a less than 60 percent chance of winning, games often boil down to a slightly weighted coin flip. That anything can happen is what makes the sport so exciting, but also a challenge in discerning signal from noise.

Models account for that. Every simulation has a different output and it's important to remember that the projections merely represent an average of all those iterations. There'll be some simulated seasons where a 95-point team ends up with 105, and some with 85. There's a large margin of error this early and that simply means being more uncertain in where a team will ultimately land. It leads to a lot of "wrongness" and that's OK.

It's also nothing without context. An extremely popular question from people who see a model's output is "why is this team so low/high when their point pace is the opposite?" When a model differs drastically from the standings that's a natural question to ponder, especially when a team that's been starved for on-ice results finally gets some and feels disrespected by the algorithm for not believing in those results. Trust me, I get it.

The standings can lie though, especially this early in the season. While my model was off by 7.1 points on Nov. 6 of last year, the team's point pace was off by nine points (after



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being off by 11 the previous day, showing the instability that also comes with looking at early records).

Here's what my model projected on this date last year compared to each team's point pace and their final result.

If the ultimate goal is about being less wrong, then my model's point projections were less wrong than a team's point pace in 17 instances, compared to 13 for the standings.

While some may want to put a lot of stock into early results, what has been previously known about each player and team shouldn't be completely forgotten. My model is stubborn in its opinion of players and teams, but that's a feature, not a bug.

Otherwise, it would've pegged the Canucks as a playoff team, the Wild as a top team in the West, the Avalanche as contenders, the Golden Knights, Hurricanes and Panthers as also-rans or the Senators as an 80-point team. It may have been low on a team like the Islanders or Flames, but that comes with the territory. It will be wrong sometimes, but it'll be wrong less than putting faith in the standings alone.

And that applies to more days than Nov. 6. I went back and looked at the difference between my projections and each team's point pace at the time for every day of the 2018-19 season. The difference is stark in the season's first half, up until around mid-December. That's around the time where a team's point pace becomes a bit more meaningful, but it still lags behind my model until the end of the season where there are fewer games to predict. From Oct. 10 to April 1, my model offered a more accurate reflection of a team's future point total than its point pace on any given day in 155 of 174 days or 89 percent of the time. Fifteen of the 20 days where it didn't perform as well were after March 13 where there was little discernible difference between the two.

The goal isn't to be perfect because that would be impossible – it's to be less wrong and this model (and likely a few others out there) do that, relative to just looking at the standings at the time. That's the value presented by the daily projections, and every day they get a little more accurate.

From that chart, we can also establish a few guidelines.

After the first two months or so, the difference between what's projected and what happens will still likely be around eight points. The margins for error are large and that's why the NHL has surprise teams every season that greatly surpass expectations. Here's what the standings looked like last year in early-December.

Again, it's low on the Islanders and too high on a team like the Flyers, but it's much more bullish on the Penguins despite a woeful start and more bearish on the Sabres despite them having a top-five points percentage at the time. In the West, there's still a modicum of belief in St. Louis despite a bottom-five point pace, plus playoff projected finishes for both Vegas and San Jose despite neither team being on a 90-plus point pace.

At the New Year, the average error falls to six points and drops further to five by the All-Star break. That means a team projected for 95 points is going to land somewhere between 90-to-100, give or take. And that's in February. Here's what the projected standings looked like then.

Just two teams not in a playoff spot find a way in and both are on the cusp. Projected points and point pace start converging a bit, but there are still some differences. The model finally recognizes the Islanders will be closer to 100 points, though still underrates them, but elsewhere it's a touch more accurate for teams like Winnipeg, Colorado and Chicago in the West. Even this late in the game there are teams like St. Louis and Buffalo whose projection and pace are off by 10 or more points.

It takes a long time to be any more accurate, but by the trade deadline, that's halved to about 2.5 points. Even that close to the end, there can still be some differences between what is projected to happen and what actually happens. Here's where we stood just after the trade deadline last year.

Just minor quibbles here and there. Everyone projected for a playoff spot did make it, though the battles were tight and there's no guarantee that would apply for the future. At this point, the biggest difference is Buffalo which is still 11 points off its finishing total, but almost every other team is within five points.

That's just one season of data, but I imagine the same pattern will hold in other seasons where a simulation based on a regressed output will generally be more predictive of a team's point pace for a majority of the season, especially so early on. It's easy to get fooled by early results, which is why it's always prudent to look at underlying numbers to see whether a team is actually good or just fortunate to be in the position they're in.

In terms of this year's surprise teams, Vancouver and Arizona's starts look very encouraging based on their 5-on-5 dominance, the Islanders are interesting because they look to be continuing last year's trend, Buffalo's numbers look more middling than promising and Edmonton, well, there's enough reason to remain skeptical there.

For teams not expected to do much, looking at early standings success can be an intoxicating feeling, but may come with similar after-effects if not careful. It's only been 15 or so games for each team and as exciting as this early time can be, it's best not to get carried away. In the goal of being less wrong, a little patience never hurt anybody.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160303 Websites

The Athletic / What it's really like to grow up the child of a pro hockey player or coach

By Scott Cruickshank

Nov 6, 2019

To Jackson Playfair, the scene remains vivid.

"To the day I leave this earth, I'll remember," he said.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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What Jackson recalls is walking home one winter's day in Saint John, N.B., with his big brother, Dylan, and his baby brother, Austyn. The boys, bundled up, are keen to get out of the cold.

Yanking open the front door, they walk inside their home. Inexplicably, half of their belongings are in boxes. Meanwhile, their parents, Jim and Roxane, are smiling and huddled around the kitchen TV, which is tuned to TSN.

"I could see across the bottom of the picture, it said, 'Jim Playfair hired by the Calgary Flames' — that was his first NHL coaching job," said Jackson. "That was when all three of us kids realized that Dad was going to The Show — and we were going to get to go with him. It was a pretty cool experience."

Understandably, that snapshot from the 2002-03 season, when he was eight years old and his dad was promoted to assistant coach in Calgary, remains frozen in Jackson's mind.

For kids of hockey players and coaches, poignant childhood recollections like Jackson's reflect their unique upbringings.

Uncertain times in an unsettled profession.

Even good news, like a promotion to the NHL, creates upheaval. And bad news, in a blink, can rock their worlds.

There is the side of their childhood existence that is on display — or, at least, easily assumed.

That, thanks to Dad's status, they are roaring around the backstage areas of sports facilities, swiping bubblegum, getting free gear, going to games whenever they want, pocketing last-minute concert tickets, rubbing elbows with the rich and famous, enjoying the ride provided by a well-compensated parent.

To outsiders, they are living the life. Upside is indisputable.

But — according to the offspring of Jim Playfair, Craig Conroy, Darryl Sutter and Brent Sutter — much more is going on, both charming and challenging. Even if it is difficult to articulate.

"They're hard questions to answer," Brett Sutter, son of Darryl, said. "You get so used to it. You don't even think anything about it, to be honest with you."

The other day over lunch, a couple of his peers asked him what it was like growing up with a father who was an NHL coach. "I had to think about it. I'm like, 'Geez, I don't know.' It was normal."

To him, anyway.

Because it is a childhood influenced by big personalities and the shadows they cast; by mockers in the schoolyard; by coaches at minor-hockey rinks; by expectations, their own and others'.

And by the whims of power brokers who, with a single mood swing, can demolish a family's day to day.

Meaning Jackson can contrast his dad's hiring by the Flames to the darker end of the employment spectrum.

"The joy of that ... then the feeling when he gets a phone call and he's fired in the middle of the year," he said. "He doesn't have a job and now we have to figure out where we're going to move. You know that you're losing your school, you're losing your friends, you're losing your hockey team, you're losing your whole life."

"Those are the low moments you go through as a family."

Son of Chicago Blackhawks coach Darryl Sutter, Brett would make regular dressing-room appearances, firing around tennis balls with Denis Savard, Chris Chelios, Gary Suter, Jeremy Roenick.

To this particular six-year-old, that was no big deal. But at school, he would see classmates wearing replica jerseys with those household names on the backs. Those same boys had a hard time believing Brett when he'd tell them that he knew their heroes and had even skated with them.

"You start to realize it's a pretty unique situation," said Brett. "When you're a kid, you're kind of proud of that."

For Brandon Sutter, whose father Brent was playing for the Blackhawks in those days, the connection was no big deal. That is, until he realized that even when his dad ventured out of town for work, he could still see him — on TV.

"That's a wakeup call," said Brandon. "The team's on the road and you're watching him and you're like, 'Oh, this is kind of cool.' That wasn't a common thing."

Dylan Playfair didn't need telecasts to alert him to his dad's prominence as an assistant coach in the late 1990s for IHL Kalamazoo. He'd go to K-Wings games and there, in the middle of the hoopla, was Pops.

"All the fans, sitting in the seats, cheering and yelling and banging on the glass, then seeing your dad on the inside? That was something that always sparked a lot of joy and pride in me," he said. "I remember thinking, 'Whatever I do in my life, it has to be big,' because you're supposed to build on what your parents do, and I always thought my dad set the bar pretty high."

Austyn Playfair's introduction to the hockey lifestyle arrived immediately after Dad led the Saint John Flames to the 2001 Calder Cup championship. Amid raucous celebration, the brothers were allowed to crawl over the boards.

Then three years old, Austyn couldn't believe it: "I remember thinking, 'Oh my God, we can go on the ice without our skates on? What? We can have our feet on the ice? That's crazy.'"

But for the Playfairs and the Conroys, it was the Flames' 2004 playoffs that really drove home the fact that their dads' occupations were something else.

These men were not accountants or electricians or librarians.

"I started to realize, 'This is kind of different. People around me are acting differently,'" said Taylor Conroy, then in Grade 2. "I was seeing it happening and thinking, 'Oh, this is very strange.' It wasn't really normal ... doing 'Go Flames go!' chants in the morning on the intercom, which is so bizarre to think of now. But that's what was happening."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Dad's popularity

Rushing to school one morning, Taylor Conroy forgot her lunch. No problem. Dad, after practising at the Saddledome, would fetch something.

Noontime, since it was late spring, had been scheduled for outside. While Taylor was patiently waiting in the playground, she saw students begin to run madly. "I wasn't sure what was going on."

She laughs. It was only her father.

"Just him walking over with my lunch bag," said Taylor. "He loves to talk about it now. You know how he is. One of my dad's favourite stories, of course."

So downplay it all you want, keep it to yourself, bite your lip, there's no question — these are well-known gents. Like it or not.

A teacher once asked Jackson Playfair if his dad would come by one day after lunch to address the students. The visit was easily arranged.

But when Jim got there, he realized that it wasn't a single classroom, it was the entire school — 600 kids' worth — crammed into the auditorium. No problem.

"It was like watching someone wow the crowd. I think each class had a question for him, so it was quite the barrage," said Jackson. "They had us (brothers) sitting at the front by the podium. So it was cool. People who didn't know who our dad was, they were aware after that."

However, not all moments are destined for the scrapbook.

Sophia Conroy recalls TV crews coming into their home to interview Dad when he was a member of the Los Angeles Kings. For a shy girl, it was not necessarily a thrill.

"I was always very difficult — I never liked cameras and I hated whenever they'd come," said Sophia. "This one time — it's probably still on YouTube somewhere, which is awful — they followed my dad up (to my bedroom) to get me. I refused to be on camera."

For Darryl Sutter and his clan, the visibility of the job meant that trips to local eateries just weren't worth the hassle anymore.

"We had a lot of dinners at home because you couldn't go out — he'd be taking pictures the whole time, answering questions," said Brett. "It would almost not be a relaxing night out. It comes with the nature of Canadian hockey fans."

Kids say the darnedest things — and, at times, the meanest. The children of NHL coaches did not always have it easy.

"I've actually heard that," said Taylor Conroy. "It's a little bit harder to come after you when your dad plays on the team. But it's easier when he's the coach. 'The team's horrible, so it must be your dad's fault.'"

So wisecracks fly. Considering the source is a useful way to gain perspective, as Jackson Playfair knows — at least now. "I mean, the kid who's saying the team sucks and they should fire the coach is eating his cereal and listening to his dad reading the newspaper and saying the team sucks and they should fire the coach."

But when jabs arrive in real time in the schoolyard, it's harder to embrace that grownup approach.

"You hear it and it hurts, it does," said Jackson. "The scary part ... if Johnny Joe is saying the team sucks, and the team really does suck, you might be moving. You might be going to a new school, you might be going to a new hockey team, you might be going to a new neighbourhood in a new city."

Dylan admits he would engage.

Razz him? Brace yourself for a return volley of verbal abuse. High road be damned. "If you're going to play dirty, if you're going to play mean" said Dylan, "then let's play dirty, let's play mean."

One cuss-peppered retort landed him in the principal's office, where he cooled down and apologized — and understood why he was a target. "When it comes to chirping and being mouthy and being ignorant," said Dylan, "there's certainly things that are low-hanging fruit ... (like) cutting someone down who's on the public radar."

But Austyn, the youngest of the Playfair boys, had no problem disregarding insults.

"I always had a pretty laissez-faire attitude," he said. "It's not like I'm going to roll up my sleeves and actually take offence to it. It was never too cutthroat in my experience."

It helped that most of his dad's bad news arrived in the summer. That way, the family was gone before the barbs could really ramp up, according to Austyn. "A midseason firing would be tougher because kids might do the nana-boo-boo thing."

Brett Sutter, for much of his father's time in charge of the Flames' fortunes, was playing for WHL Kootenay. That kept him away from taunts. Then again, Cranbrook, B.C., is a Vancouver Canucks stronghold. "Obviously, a big rival," he said. "We'd get in some good little scuffles. I was a diehard Flames fan, so I loved it."

For the most part, he ignored the guff when it got personal.

"You'd hear the whispers," Brett said. "Not so much to your face, but you know people are talking about it. They'll say something as they walk away. It's nothing that you can't brush off. I usually never said too much. I always had friends at school who'd say, 'Don't bother.'"

"It's just the nature of it. At the end of the day, you ride and die with your family."

But when your namebar reads SUTTER or PLAYFAIR, you can expect special attention on the ice, too. Asked about that, increased jabs and hacks, Jackson laughs because, yeah, obviously, there were more.

"But if I was out there playing against me, I'd probably be saying a few things to get under my skin," he said. "So I can't blame anybody or feel any resentment about it."

Sophia Conroy remembers hearing that the children of one of the Flames players were getting a rough time at school. Her dad gathered the girls to ask if they, too, were being bullied. "But we didn't really have that problem," said Sophia.

Since then, the avenues of abuse have widened.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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For those in the public eye, social media is a game-wrecker. That's plain.

"It would be hard to see things posted on Instagram or Twitter," said Taylor. "People are pretty brutal on there. Anyone who was young now would have much more exposure to the negative part of sports."

Trying an array of sports, Taylor Conroy had harboured high hopes. If her dad was a professional athlete and an Olympian, well, why couldn't she follow?

"I just thought it was going to come naturally to me," said Taylor. "When I wasn't amazing at any of the sports I was doing ..."

It was the same for puck-chasing offspring. Naturally, they wanted to reach the NHL. They were also aware of rinkside chatter about their ability, their potential, and, of course, what role their dad had played.

"You get both sides of it," said Brett Sutter, who was drafted 179th overall in 2005 — his father was drafted 179th in 1978. "There's a lot of kids who think you're given opportunities because of your last name. It can also go the other way — you have to earn it more. I'd never go into it thinking I was going to get a longer look ... or get the short end of the stick, either."

"Something my dad always said: 'Be your own player. Be who you are.'"

Comparisons, though, are unavoidable. There are expectations upon arrival. "Yeah, the pressure was absolutely there," said Dylan Playfair. "I'd definitely be lying if I said it wasn't something I thought about all the time."

Partly because he knew he had been given a leg-up in the hockey world — with the new gear, the extra ice time, the in-house tutelage, the blood line. "To say there's not an advantage would be a lie, so those assumptions were completely grounded."

Kids want to do right by their family history, no matter what.

So if it wasn't off-the-charts production, it needed to be something else.

"I always felt if I could be hard enough to play against, I could uphold the Playfair name," said Dylan. "I was always very protective of my dad's name and my name and I think that came out a lot of time in really aggressive play."

Jackson, to his credit, managed to adopt a healthy view of the process.

"If I was good enough to play on the first team, I'd play there. If I wasn't, then I wouldn't," he said. "Hockey's hockey. You could be in anyone's family, you could be anyone's nephew or niece ... but people judge you on yourself."

Pro-sports immersion does produce players — Jackson Playfair, 25, with the ECHL Orlando Solar Bears; Brandon Sutter, 30, with the Vancouver Canucks; Brett Sutter, 32, with the AHL Ontario Reign — but there are less predictable paths, too.

Sophia Conroy, 20, is in her third year at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., in the Faculty of Life Sciences. She's considering a career in dentistry. Few of her current

classmates know her dad is assistant general manager of an NHL club. "It doesn't really come up," she said. "I just say he works for the Flames, so people assume he's a doctor or a trainer or something."

Her 22-year-old sister, Taylor, aiming for a combined degree in business and arts, is working through her final year at the University of Calgary. "I always hope that I'll end up in the sports world ... it's been such a huge part of my life for so long."

Their youngest sister, Sydney, is a Grade 10 student at Queen Elizabeth High School in Calgary.

Austyn Playfair, 22, recalls telling WHL Tri-City brass that he was giving up junior hockey: "I'm going to make clothing." From the Blanche Macdonald Centre in Vancouver, he's completed the fashion-design course and will graduate in December from the fashion-marketing program.

Dylan Playfair's name, you may already know. He plays a character on the beloved "Letterkenny" series — "Hold my spitter. Tarps off, boys. Let's have a donnybrook" — and his list of acting credits grows.

"I haven't had to go back to a part-time job or anything like that," said the 27-year-old. "It's been really fruitful. I've been very fortunate."

The life

One time during Sophia Conroy's soccer prime — Grade 6 or so — the coaches handed her a game jersey, which featured her father's No. 24, along with the family name across the back.

She flipped. "I got so mad. I was like, 'Now I look just like him.'"

Taylor remembers well the episode: "Something about it made her super uncomfortable. I think people just thought we'd want it. I always wanted it — she did not. I don't know if that made her feel a little more pressure ... or if it was just her wanting to be her own person."

Sophia, in the end, opted for No. 7 — a more subtle tribute to her dad, who wore that sweater at Clarkson (N.Y.) University.

Austyn Playfair gets it.

He recalls being introduced to his junior-high class in Abbotsford as the son of the Heat's new coach. "I wanted to jump out of my skin," he said. "I was like, 'Dude, that's not who I am.' I want to meet people for who they are, not because my dad's job is cool."

"My mom was always saying, 'What we do isn't who you are. Who you are — you need to find that out.'"

Growing up, Taylor Conroy boiled down her dad's prominence to a single thing: "Just one random fact that people know about me."

Then again, the subject of Dad's job does serve as a natural ice-breaker. Which can be handy, giving the transient nature of the profession. Sure, that's an established byproduct of the gig. But, from the inside, an entirely unappreciated piece of the ordeal.



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Born in St. Louis, Taylor Conroy's school years featured stops in Calgary and New York (state) and Los Angeles and Calgary again.

"A bit of a chaotic time," she said. "Luckily, I was young enough that meeting people wasn't super challenging. Coaches deal with it a lot because they don't stay anywhere long."

Indeed, Jim Playfair's pursuits have carried his crew from Dayton, Ohio, to Kalamazoo, Mich., to Saint John, N.B., to Calgary to Abbotsford, B.C., to Phoenix.

This year, he was hired by the Edmonton Oilers.

Uprooting, according to Jackson, forces everyone to pull together. Particularly siblings.

"We didn't have the best friends or the long-lasting neighbour that was your buddy for 20 years," he said. "I've always had my brothers. We were in it together ... one of us was always on the other shoulder going through it."

Dylan remembers going back to Fort St. James, B.C., during the summer and envying the kids there. How lucky they were to live in the same house their whole life, to get to see their dads at 5 p.m. every day. "Or fill in the blanks, right?"

But from an often turbulent existence, the boys were able to draw inspiration. Dylan notes one particular chunk of his father's arc — from Calgary head coach to Calgary associate coach to Abbotsford head coach — and marvels at his dad's behaviour during the heartache of back-to-back demotions.

"To watch him handle that with grace, I mean, I wouldn't wish that on anyone, really," said Dylan. "Now that I'm older, I recognize how much that took for him to be a leader in our family, to take it in stride and not be bitter about it ... and not let it affect his home-life attitude. Everyone deals with adversity, but there's something about being under the public eye and dealing with it."

Sometimes it's not a firing that creates waves.

After all, there's nothing like seeing your dad play a starring role in a viral video that ends up being viewed hundreds of thousands of times.

"Doctors and lawyers and whatever, everyone has a little moment when they might freak," said Jackson. "Unfortunately, because of what he does, it's able to be put on that level and that scale. As a family, we all got a good laugh and a chuckle out of it. Ultimately, we're not always going to end up on the TSN Top 10."

"That's the lesson — whether you stumble or fall, or you have the greatest success or a moment when you're not thinking 100 percent clearly, as long as you can learn from it and grow and, looking back, say, 'That's not how I'd handle that today.'"

About the person in charge, people love to talk. Certainly there is glory — or, at least, the potential of glory — but the burden never lifts, even for family members.

"You feel the pressure of the losses, you feel the pressure of the media," said Jackson. "The assistant or associate coach — rarely do you see that name in the media headlines or

read about him in the paper. But when he's the head coach, that weight's on your shoulders. Being that kid, you definitely feel it a lot harder in many different ways.

"People don't realize the ups and downs of a season — it's not just something you watch on TV and turn it off. It comes in (the house) and it affects everybody. It affects the way everybody's living, good and bad. You feel that."

Asked to name the worst part of the adventure, Dylan doesn't hesitate: "The stress of it. Sometimes winning is a fickle thing. When you're winning? Everyone's happy. When you're losing? It's really hard to put on that smile. That's the hardest part. When we're between jobs and he's looking for a job, it's not just him on the hunt by himself. We're all kind of there with him."

The challenges, though, can have a shaping effect.

And not necessarily in a bad way.

"I have the life skills to walk into a room, not knowing anybody, and put your personality out there and meet new people, and not feel terrified or anxious," said Austyn Playfair. "It's those life skills from leaving a place, being dropped in a school, and having to fend for yourself."

Added Dylan: "I wouldn't be the person I am today without those experiences. I wouldn't have the self-control or the understanding of my place in the world without that. In a lot of ways it led me to the career path I'm on now."

Beyond the character-girding aspects of being children of coaches and players, there were plentiful perks.

Austyn got to play with a sawed-down Daymond Langkow stick, but his dad made sure to spread the wealth. "He'd talk to other parents and they'd say, 'Yeah, we just paid \$250 for a stick yada yada yada,' and my dad would show up at the next practice with a stick and be, 'Hey, this one's on us.' He was always good about keeping us level headed on that."

Flames game passes, too, were well-distributed — to teachers occasionally and to the boys' chums, the wider the range the better. "We were aware that what we had wasn't what everybody else had," said Jackson, "so it's important that you share it."

More benefits? Last-minute concert tickets. Maybe a rope-lifting at an exclusive party at the Stampede. Dinner reservations at trendy restaurants. Brushes with celebrities.

But one of the best bonuses has nothing to do with privilege or freebies.

Simply, it's the luxury of summers off. Undivided attention from the old man. There's nothing like it.

Brett Sutter remembers fondly offseasons at the family farm in Viking, Alta. "That was amazing, spending three or four months together. That was awesome, too."

Said Dylan: "Every summer of my childhood, I remember my dad being there all day, all night. Hanging out with us on the beach. Having friends and family over. Training with him. Late nights around the fire. I remember asking him if he ever wanted to be a GM, and he said, 'No. I always want to have my summers.'"



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Trumping all, though, is having front-row seats to the big moment — when Dad's diligence turns into tangible triumph.

Brett points to the 2012 and 2014 Stanley Cup championships in Los Angeles. "My dad is my biggest idol," he said. "So those are great memories — being able to cheer him on."

Because, all along you've participated in everything — from house-cleanings to house-findings, from skids to streaks, from grim to gravy — and your role is real.

You know it.

"It makes all of the moves, all the sacrifices, worth it," said Dylan. "The highs are really high and as much as the lows suck, you know that you're doing it together.

"Every part of their journey, we're a piece of that."

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

1160304 Websites

The Athletic / Off Beat: Group texts, May-December bromances and making friends in an NHL dressing room

Mark Lazerus

Nov 6, 2019

This is the fifth edition of Off Beat, an occasional series peeling back the curtain to show the human side of professional sports, and the little quirks of hockey culture. You can find the first four editions here and here and here and here.

On his way out of the Blackhawks' dressing room one afternoon last month, Alex DeBrincat announced to nobody in particular that he was going to see "Joker."

"Wait up, I'll come," Patrick Kane said.

"Hey, me, too," Alex Nylander said.

And that's how a 30-year-old found himself at the movies with a couple of 21-year-olds. One of the most famous people in Chicago and two guys who could walk into just about any restaurant in the city and not get noticed. A 13-year veteran, a third-year standout and a rookie on a new team in a new city. Two Americans and a Swede.

Spend enough time around Chicago — or 30 other cities across North America, for that matter — and you never know which combination of Blackhawks you might run into. Oh, sure, you might see longtime BFFs Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook together. But you also might run into Jonathan Toews and Marcus Kruger braving the cold to walk to a mall in downtown Calgary. What on Earth do they have to talk about? You might see DeBrincat out to dinner with Seabrook, Cam Ward and Chris Kunitz in Anaheim; or Strome with Artem Anisimov at the MGM Detroit steakhouse.

What could they possibly have in common? Maybe you'll find Brandon Saad and David Kampf grabbing a quick bite. Wait, what? Or you might have spotted Brendan Perlini and Slater Koekkoek catching a flick in Vancouver. Does Koekkoek even like European soccer?

How do these groupings come about? How are friendships forged in the NHL? How does the new guy become just one of the guys? Well, it turns out an NHL dressing room isn't all that different from any other office setting. Throw a bunch of people into close quarters for hours on end, every single day, and friendships will form, cliques will materialize and merge, and inside jokes will build. Those things matter, too, because the closer you are as an office, the better you'll feel going to work every day — and, ideally, the better you'll perform.

"That's the biggest thing about a team," Toews said. "Everyone wants to feel like whatever contribution they're making, however big or small, it's being noticed and it's valued. And hanging out together, spending time together, that's a good way to do that — to make sure guys feel like and know that they're part of a team, and that their impact matters."

Andrew Shaw has wasted no time reintegrating himself into the Blackhawks' social scene. (David Banks / USA Today)

Every workplace has the Reply-All person. It'll probably shock absolutely no one that Andrew Shaw is the Blackhawks' Reply-All guy.

Just before training camp opened in September, strength coach Paul Goodman blasted out a text to more than 50 players with ice times, weight-room times and conditioning-test times.

"And Shawzie replied to all of the guys," Erik Gustafsson said, shaking his head. "Just dumb. But Shawzie is dumb, so ..."

Like with any social network, the group text has become a staple of communication in the NHL. While official team business is usually covered with email — director of team services Tony Ommen sends out daily emails with practice times and travel reminders and the like — the players themselves mostly keep in touch through texts. A few of the younger guys on the team have their own Snapchat group. Perlini said the Tucson Roadrunners used a WhatsApp group when he was in the AHL. But the group text is the easiest way to keep 23 guys on the same page.

Well, once everyone gets around to putting all the new numbers into their phones, at least.

"That was pretty funny in Prague — I didn't have every number from all the new guys, so it's just number, number, number, number, no names," Gustafsson said. "I was just like, 'Come on. Can't everyone just say their names so I can save it all?'"

The Blackhawks' group text isn't terribly active most nights. On the road, if a player is headed out to dinner somewhere, he'll fire off a quick text that he's leaving for Italian food at 7:30. Meet me in the lobby if you want in. If someone can't find Ommen's most recent email, he'll ask the hive mind what time the bus leaves for the rink. On a Thursday night in



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mid-October, a few guys were talking about the Patrick Mahomes knee injury on Thursday Night Football.

And this being hockey, there's naturally some chirping going on. Mess up a drill in practice, and you'll hear about it on the group chat the rest of the day. And yes, again, Shaw is the loudest one in the chat.

"He talks to himself half the time," Toews said. "I'm not even joking."

It's the smaller group chats that can get a little livelier. The Snapchat group was overloaded with family photos and artfully presented dinner tables over Canadian Thanksgiving. The resident hockey nerds of the team — Kane, DeBrincat and Dylan Strome — have their own little group text, and they'll fire off power-play analysis while watching the same game in their respective homes. Shaw, who quickly bonded (and annoyed) DeBrincat and Strome while they were briefly linemates at the start of the season, still chimes in with them every now and then.

There's also Instagram, of course.

"I don't comment much, but I comment on Shawzie's pics a lot," Gustafsson said. "And I think I follow DeBrincat's dog. No idea why. Hit follow one time, I guess, and now it's following me."

During their first Stanley Cup run in 2009-10, the Blackhawks were inseparable. They rolled 15 to 20 strong to the bar on the road, went out for massive, late-night team dinners after home games, and everyone hung out with everyone. When they did split up for smaller dinners on the road, you didn't pick your dining partners based on whom you liked, you picked based on what food you wanted. After all, it didn't matter who was coming with you, because you liked everyone.

In 2015-16 and 2016-17, that was no longer the case. There were the old guys and the young guys, the Swedes and the Russians, the Czechs and the Slovaks. And the groups didn't really mix all that often. So in the fall of 2017, Toews — who occasionally has to double as social mediator and cruise director as team captain — and the rest of the leadership group declared that the cliques had to go. No more Core and Everyone Else, no more young guys and old guys.

From now on, they were all just Blackhawks. And it worked. Under-the-surface tensions dropped away, and even though the team struggled on the ice, there were few conflicts off it.

"Especially the last two or three years, we've been trying not to have so many cliques on the team," Kane said. "Try to make it one big group with everyone together. I mean, obviously I'm really close with Duncs and Seabs, and Crow and Tazer. With everything we've been through, it's great to hang out with them. But it's also good to see what other guys are up to, too."

Kane is the most obvious clique-buster on the team. Over the last few seasons, he's gravitated toward the younger guys — staying out in practice longer to work on skills development, lingering in the locker room to geek out over stats, and yes, taking the kids to the movies. First, it was Nick Schmaltz, Ryan Hartman and Vinnie Hinostroza. Now

it's DeBrincat, Strome and even Nylander and Kirby Dach, who was 6 years old when Kane made his NHL debut.

"I've always enjoyed when younger guys come into the locker room," Kane said. "I think it's good for the team, especially for us older guys, to talk to them about certain things. Not just hockey things, but lifestyle things, too — how they live their life. I enjoy that. They have a lot to offer, too. They're so skilled, so talented, they've been training the right way, with personal trainers and personal skill guys and things like that. Even talking to a guy like Kirby, there are things you can take from the way he trains and the way he works on the ice in the summers. They help you feel younger, too."

The result is all these odd couples and groupings you see about town sometimes. Sure, Seabrook is 13 years older than DeBrincat. But they both like eating steak the night before a game, so you'll usually find them and a few others in a steakhouse on the road (if you're wondering, yes, sometimes Seabrook picks up the check, but usually they do the pick-someone's-credit-card-out-of-a-hat game). If someone mentions he has an errand to run after a practice, or plans to go shopping in Beverly Hills on an off day in Los Angeles, any one of the other 22 guys might join him.

"Some teams are definitely grouped," said goaltender Robin Lehner, who's on his fourth NHL team in the last six seasons. "This team seems to be not that grouped. It's different from team to team. It depends on the personalities you have, how long they've been together, how many new guys you have — all of these things come into account. But this team isn't grouped. It's very friendly."

In fact, some younger players go out of their way to hang out with the older guys. You never know what pro tip you might learn, or what hilarious tale of yesteryear you might hear.

"You always go to dinner with different guys and get to know new guys and hear new stories," Strome said. "Lehner's an interesting guy to talk to, so I'll hopefully get to go to some dinners with him on the road. I mean, I never knew any of these guys before I came here. Seabrook always has awesome stories, so I like going with him, and he loves going to good places. And Duncs usually follows Seabs around, so it's always fun."

That's not to say there aren't players that are especially close with others. Strome and DeBrincat are the new Keith and Seabrook. David Kampf kept close with Dominik Kahun last year, and has quickly bonded with Dominik Kubalik — "The Czechs never leave each other's sides," Saad said — and Shaw bought a house right around the corner from his longtime buddy Saad.

And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as it doesn't come at the expense of team chemistry as a whole.

"It happens naturally, especially when you've got guys from different countries," Toews said. "You can't have cliques, you've got to make an effort to go out with different guys on the road and stuff like that. But it still happens naturally. If you think about it, if you were playing in Russia, you'd probably hang out with your Canadian or American buddies, too. You've got to allow some guys to do what makes them feel good, and what makes them feel comfortable."



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And that's always been a part of Toews' mandate, even when he was a slightly overwhelmed 20-year-old captain. No man left behind.

"I'm not one of the loudest guys, the biggest talkers in the room," he said. "But you do it in your own way. You're an individual and you've got your own problems and your own game to worry about, so it's not always easy. But when you notice a guy that can use some help or to be included, and you just do something or say something to make him feel comfortable and part of things, I think that goes a long way. And I think a lot of guys have done a good job of that."

Perhaps nobody more than Seabrook, the Blackhawks' one-man welcoming committee.

The hockey world is a small one, and it seems like everybody has crossed paths with just about everybody else at some point along the way to the NHL. But anytime you walk into a new workplace for the first time, it can be a little intimidating.

Enter Seabrook.

"If you come into this locker room, Seabrook is going to make you feel welcome right away," Kane said.

He won't casually sidle up to you and ask how you're doing. He'll catch you from across the room, his booming voice echoing in every stall. If you don't already have a nickname, you'll have one within minutes. If you do already have one, you'll probably get another one. And it will be worse.

Toews is the captain, but Seabrook is the paterfamilias.

"He's awesome," Olli Maatta said. "He's always really friendly, always has something going on, and he keeps it really light in the room, which is nice. Obviously, when the game comes around, that's when it gets serious. But you need that. You need to come to the rink and have a little fun once in a while. That's why you love hockey."

It can be hard to be the new guy. And there are a whopping 10 new guys on the Blackhawks roster this season. They were all made to feel welcome right away. Seabrook downplays his behind-the-scenes role, but there's a reason you'll never hear a Blackhawks player, on or off the record, bemoan Seabrook's contract.

In that room, he's worth every penny.

"I don't know, you talk to him," Seabrook shrugged, talking about his outreach efforts to any given player. "You try to get to know him on a personal level. It's all about having fun and helping them feel as comfortable as they can."

Getting integrated into a new team is a different experience for every player. For Kampf, who spoke little English when he first came to Chicago, it was difficult at times. He clung to Michal Kempny, who also occasionally had to serve as his interpreter.

"I knew enough English to understand," he said. "But I can't say some long story, you know, or something like that. A small sentence was OK. But that's it."

Kampf roomed with DeBrincat on the road, but they mostly just watched their respective Netflix shows with headphones on. (For the record, nearly every player will tell you that a

quiet roommate is a perfect roommate.) But Kampf's English has improved tremendously over the past year, so now he's just one of the guys.

"I was a little bit nervous the first time, but after that, it was great," Kampf said. "Every guy on the team is very nice."

DeBrincat was just a kid when he cracked the NHL. So trips to Las Vegas were particularly stifling. While all his teammates went out for drinks and blackjack, he was literally doing homework, finishing up his high school career. But it didn't take long for him to get over the age difference.

Now there are May-December bromances all over the roster.

"It wasn't too weird," DeBrincat said with a laugh. "Once the year goes on, you see the child in every one of these guys."

Perlini and Strome came to Chicago together in the Schmaltz trade last year, so that eased their transition. But Perlini, who was traded to the Detroit Red Wings on Oct. 28 and will start the getting-to-know-you process yet again, said it was easy to make friends and feel comfortable right away.

"It's not as hard as people think," he said. "I went to five different schools in five years as a kid, so I got used to moving. It's just your common attractions — what do you like outside of hockey, like golf or whatever. You're around each other every day, so you chat about things and you bond that way. The guys in here are great, so it's really not that hard."

"It's like anything in life," Lehner said. "You get what you take, you know? If you don't try to socialize and get to know people, you don't get to know people. If you put your foot in the water, good things usually happen."

All that said, of course, it'll never be like 2010 again. Back then, nearly the entire roster was young and single. These days, the family room down the hall from the locker room is bursting with babies, toddlers and elementary schoolers.

So the days of lingering in the locker room for hours on end or huge, late-night dinners are few and far between. At least at home.

"You've got to pick your spots," Seabrook said. "For me personally, with kids, it's definitely tougher to get out whenever you want. You can't just do what you want whenever you want. You've got to make a plan. You've got kids, and they might have school or baseball or hockey or some kind of activity the next day. You want to go on dates with your wife. So it's picking your spots and trying to find time. That's the biggest challenge."

That's the case for some of the new guys, too. It's not always about needing a restaurant or bar recommendation. Sometimes it's about needing a doctor or a school recommendation.

"Being a guy who's comfortable living in Chicago, you don't really think about certain things after a while," Toews said. "You just kind of come to training camp and settle in. For other guys, there are a lot of new things you don't maybe quite think about. That's where you can be helpful."

However, even in the clique-free, carefree Blackhawks dressing room, there are limits to how much help you can get. Getting out of the house to hang out with your buddies



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and bond with your teammates is important. Critical, even, to a team's success.

But it's not always easy.

"We don't share babysitters," Seabrook said. "They're a hot commodity around here. There might be some fights over babysitters."

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

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The Athletic / 'You can do stupid s—': Why life on the road can be good for NHL players

By Rob Rossi

Nov 6, 2019

During his first few weeks in the Vegas Golden Knights dressing room during the 2017-18 season, goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury felt like a stranger.

Fleury's longtime teammate in Pittsburgh, Sidney Crosby, felt the same way for a few weeks early this season, too.

The Penguins had a home-heavy schedule in October. Aside from a night in Saint Paul, Minn. and another in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Penguins were in Pittsburgh for 18 of the first 20 days in October.

Had it been any other season, Crosby would have looked forward to a swing through NHL cities in Florida and Dallas — a five-days/six-nights trip that included a day off in Dallas — as an overdue opportunity to get some time with unfamiliar faces.

Problem was, the Penguins had broken training camp with four new players and one of those was saddled with a long-term injury by the third regular-season game. By the time the Penguins took a three-game road trip late in October, there were still some unfamiliar faces in Pittsburgh, making that jaunt an important one.

"I think it's always good to get on the road," Crosby said of the Penguins' first significant time together away from Pittsburgh this season. "You get to know the guys, get to spend more time with them. Whether it's at dinner, the hotel or on the bus, everything is a little more laid back and everyone's on the same schedule, so you see everyone."

The road remains a place where the best stories are better lived through but not told.

Which is not to suggest the modern NHL in 2019 shares anything in common with the early years of the league, in which players came to know well each of the six hockey towns, or the 1980s, when the Oilers partied as well off the ice outside of Edmonton as they dominated on it. It isn't like that anymore in hockey.

And just what was "that" like, anyway?

Well, during his contract dispute with the Oilers at the start of the 1987-88 season, Paul Coffey was presented with an opportunity to join the Penguins. He jumped at it, but not merely because those Penguins had begun to assemble talent around a still-emerging Mario Lemieux.

Coffey said he and the Oilers had always "had a lot of fun" — too much fun, some people might say — when the road trips took them to Pittsburgh in the early-to-mid 1980s. A local bar, Froggy's, was famous for serving stiff drinks, and Oilers players were happy to indulge in the excess for a couple of nights in Pittsburgh.

In between, they would manage to drub the Penguins. But Coffey said those "great nights at Froggy's" did a lot more for those Oilers than the win at the old Civic Arena.

"I don't care what anybody says, you win as a team," Coffey said. "We obviously had great players in Edmonton. But we were a team, all of us. And I'm just being honest about it, but it's when you get on the road — when we'd get to a city like Pittsburgh, a place we knew where to go to blow off steam, to just be with the guys and bond away from the rink — that you become a team. It's as important as going through hard times together.

"I think you remember the hard times and those times on the road as much as the winning. I really do."

Froggy's closed its doors years ago. But the doors are still open at some famous NHL hot spots in cities like Montreal, New York and Chicago — the latter being a place former players recall with mixed emotions.

Bill Guerin, who won the Stanley Cup twice as a player and is now general manager of the Minnesota Wild, once described Chicago as "the town you loved to get into and hated when you left."

His description made sense after he explained how visiting players arrive in Chicago and drink until 4 a.m. or later, depending on how much planning had gone into stocking hotel rooms with adult beverages. Guerin recalled players not yet being hungover by the time of a morning skate, definitely "feeling the night before" by the time of the game, and then after: "getting our butts beat by the Blackhawks and going out after the game and having a good time until our flight the next morning."

When relayed that anecdote, the Colorado Avalanche's Ian Cole widened his eyes. Shaking his head, he sheepishly offered that NHL road trips "are not anything like that nowadays."

Could they be? "I don't think so," Cole said.

Should they be? "I'm not going there," Cole said.

"Look, everyone has their own lives at home," Cole said. "I think on the road is where a team can galvanize. Going to dinner. Doing lunches. Hitting the movies. Anything...

"It's just spending time together. I don't think you need to do anything specific or special to create that. I think just having time together will do that for a team."



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Several players said teams' charter flights provide opportunities for bonding. Technological advances have allowed those who don't fancy card games to bring gaming into the fold.

Dominik Kahun, who was traded to the Penguins in the offseason after spending his first NHL season with the Blackhawks, said he noticed a difference between the teams' cultures when traveling for his first preseason road game with Pittsburgh.

"In Chicago, we didn't play much," Kahun said of video-game competitions that Crosby is famous for extending well beyond the confines of an aircraft. "But here, most guys play Fortnite and some guys play NHL and FIFA (games).

"I play only the sports games. But I always have somebody to play against."

The medical community is best equipped to debate whether a night of heavy drinking or a day of intense gaming is more likely to leave a player worse for the wear. Each activity is good for breaking down social barriers, and each can help distract players from dwelling on a losing streak.

While many extracurricular activities have changed over the years, one really hasn't: pranks. And if one of hockey's living legends of pranking has his way, that will never change.

In Pittsburgh, Fleury made it a point at least once each season to mess with a teammate, and he brought his bag of tricks to Las Vegas. Neither changing franchises nor becoming a father of three has weakened his enthusiasm for fostering a chummy culture by annually setting up a teammate or two for the good of the team.

At some point this season, with the bright lights of Las Vegas far away, a Golden Knights player is going to walk off an elevator to find the entirety of his hotel room has been moved to that floor's lobby. It's Fleury's greatest hit and to be a teammate of his is to expect it, to crave it. It's not unlike Bruce Springsteen fans waiting for him to play "Born To Run" at a concert.

"Flower's room prank? Oh, it always kills," Cole said. "You'd think it gets old, but it doesn't. At least, it didn't when I was in (Pittsburgh). Does he still do it in Vegas?"

Fleury's Chesire cat grin gave away the answer to Cole's question. He cautioned that saying anything would "ruin the surprise" of hockey's worst-kept secret.

Why does he play so coy about his trademark road prank into his 16th NHL season?

"To me, it's important every season to be on the road and bring the guys together — that's a good way to build a camaraderie," Fleury said. "And I think you can do that by doing anything or nothing, you know? But you can also do it by just doing stupid shit.

"If it gets a little smile, I think that's good for everyone. It's not stupid if it brings that smile. That's important in a long season. And it's, like, you can do stupid shit on the road because it's just the guys."

The Athletic LOADED: 11.07.2019

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Sportsnet.ca / Loss to Blues shows that Oilers are not deep enough yet

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

November 7, 2019, 12:40 AM

EDMONTON — "Not enough."

Dave Tippett could have been answering any one of a number of questions, after the St. Louis Blues beat the Edmonton Oilers for fun at Rogers Place Wednesday.

Like, "how much did everyone else help Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, coach?"

Or perhaps, "the Blues really tested your roster tonight. What do you think of your team's depth?"

Maybe, "what about the scoring from your right side, coach?"

The actual exchange began with a post-game question about whether the Blues give Tippett a gauge on where his team is at right now.

"You look at that team, they are deep all the way through," began the Oilers head coach, after a 5-2 loss to St. Louis. "You see who measures up to that and who is not up to the standard. How many players you have in that standard."

"What did you think you had in there tonight," Tippett was asked.

"Not enough."

That assessment is, of course, both big- and small-picture.

On the night, the Oilers didn't have enough players on their roster who can match the heavy, stout Blues as they roll four lines and three pairings. It is 'big boy' hockey at its best — the kind of game the Toronto Maple Leafs are going to have to figure out how to play if they're ever going to win anything. Same for the Oilers.

There were two St. Louis empty netters, and the Oilers did have their goalie pulled on a late power play, with a chance to drag this one into overtime. But that doesn't fool Tippett for a second: the Oilers are better than they've been, but they're nowhere near deep enough to beat a Blues team playing that style of hockey.

No chance. Not for a team that relies on Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl to get the job done, or it doesn't get done at all.

From Wednesday's game:

- Three of the Oilers' four right wingers haven't scored yet this season.
- Three of their four centres have just one goal.



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• Behind Leon Draisaitl and James Neal on the left side, there was one goal in the Oilers starting lineup.

• Draisaitl (13 goals) and McDavid (8) have scored 21 of the Oilers 48 goals — or 44 per cent.

“We have lots of guys looking for a lot of extra ice time and extra opportunities. But there is not much happening,” said Tippett. “There is just not enough, right through. The guys who have been killing penalties have been doing a pretty good job, even though we gave up two tonight.

“We need some help there, that goes without saying. Hopefully (Joakim) Nygard will give us a boost coming back with his speed. He was just getting going and could help us. But there are some other guys who we need to chip in.”

Alex Chiasson is snake bit — he gets chances, but nothing goes in.

Jujhar Khaira has one kicked in goal all year. It was his fourth goal in 77 games.

Tomas Jurco is showing us why he is on his fifth organization at age 26. Gaetan Haas, Patrick Russell, Colby Cave... Sam Gagner as a first-liner?

To all of that, we'll borrow a quote from Tippett.

“Not enough.”

“I for sure look at myself as a guy who has to get going, secondary scoring-wise,” said Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who has one goal in 17 games. “Those two guys, they're getting big goals for us almost every game. We've got to find a way to help them out, support them. Get an important one.

“We've got to find a way to start producing — every line.”

Look, they're a much better team than last season. The Oilers can kill a penalty most nights, get goaltending and move a puck far better than a year ago.

After a 7-1 start, however, the Oilers have gone 3-4-2.

It's time to have all hands on deck, and Dave Tippett is looking around his ship.

You can guess what he's finding.

Not enough.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing Taylor Hall's early impact and the Devils' difficult decision

Andrew Berkshire

To say there's been a bit of speculation about Taylor Hall this season would be a bit of an understatement. Every

reaction on the ice, every piece of body language and any interview he gives is picked apart. Everyone is trying to read the tea leaves to find out if there's any chance he wants to stay in New Jersey rather than leaving for somewhere else as a free agent next summer.

Hall has been relatively cagey about his future, choosing his words carefully while making sure it's known that he's taking his time with his first chance at unrestricted free agency. Combine that with his agent being the notorious Darren Ferris, and we can probably expect that kind of rampant speculation all season long and into the summer.

The question few seem to be asking right now is: “What's the best-case scenario for the Devils?” They're in a tricky position here as a team in mid-rebuild that also has some players who are in their competitive windows and likely want to win as soon as possible, Hall being one of them. So can Hall provide value long-term despite his pretty rough injury history, or would it make more sense for the Devils to move him for future assets?

The 2018 Hart Trophy winner has been solid on the surface this season. He's on a point per game pace despite a career low 4.8 shooting percentage that is not going to last very much longer. But let's dig deeper into his play and see how he's doing, compared to what we're used to seeing from him.

Looking at Hall's individual contributions to the Devils' offence, we need to keep in mind that this offence has been increasing each year. But even accounting for that Hall was still fully in Hart Trophy form in his injury-shortened 2018-19 season despite the Devils struggling around him.

Hall has been one of the biggest offensive generators in the NHL over the past few seasons, creating tons of opportunities for his teammates thanks to his unique combination of skills where he can beat you with a shot, a pass, a deke, or just with breakneck speed and physicality.

However, so far this season you'll notice his shots across the board have significantly fallen off. His shot rate from the inner slot has dropped by over a third from his previous two-year average, and the same goes for his scoring chances on net. His overall scoring chance production is down 20 per cent, rush chances are down more than 10 per cent, and his perimeter shots are nearly halved.

Usually when we see a drop in perimeter shots it isn't a big deal, but because Hall's shot rate has fallen across the board, this is a concern. Hall's passes to the slot are actually up this season — he ranks 30th in the NHL there and second on the Devils behind Wayne Simmonds. But everywhere else has fallen off.

The end result is that Hall's ability to create scoring chances for his teammates has dropped by nearly 30 per cent compared to last season's career high numbers.

So, it's fair to say it's been a slow start for one of the league's best offensive performers, but Hall has historically brought a lot more than the offence he creates individually. He has been one of the best transition driving wingers in the NHL over the course of his career, and his impact on the flow of play is massive. So let's look at how the Devils have fared with him on the ice over the past three seasons as well.



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Here's where things go from a little concerning to a lot more concerning. Over the past few seasons, Hall has had an absolutely stellar impact on the control of the flow of play. Not only has he driven results, but the areas he's exerted the most influence happen to be the most important ones — passes to the slot and inner slot shots.

The drop off here is gigantic. He's gone from one of the league's best play drivers to below average, and it makes you wonder if there are some lingering problems left over from his injury last season. If that's the case, it couldn't come at a worse time for Hall, who is looking to cash in on a mega free agent deal that his past work says he more than deserves.

The Devils are also in a bit of a tough spot, because on the face of it you'd want to go long-term with a player as dynamic as Hall, but are you fully confident that he won't hit an early decline because of the myriad of injuries he's suffered in his career? Or that this is the sudden start of it?

The thing is, as jarring as these numbers look, we are still talking about just one month into a season where Hall is coming back from an injury that kept him out of hockey games since the end of last December. In my opinion he has earned the leeway to have time to shake off the rust and get his game back before we make sweeping judgements about where he's trending.

Another consideration is that Hall has repeatedly shown interest and savvy in these sorts of statistics, so you can bet a stack of cash that he's well aware of how things have been going for him this season. He's likely looking to figure out what's holding him back, which might help him address things and turn it around quicker.

If the Devils wait it out hoping this turns out to be an early-season slump, but find out that perhaps Hall isn't the same player and his market value implodes, it could be a disaster for them. But I don't see any other reasonable approach to take for a team that is just starting to dig itself out of a brutal stretch to start the year.

Patience can be rewarded. Although I don't think the comparison holds at the team level, if we remember the St. Louis Blues last season, we know that sometimes not making a panic move is the best move of all.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.07.2019

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Rookie Notebook: Jack Hughes heating up for Devils

Emily Sadler | @EmmySadler

November 6, 2019, 1:27 PM

Two weeks ago, we looked at which rookies might be making it to the crucial 10-game mark and beyond, meaning the first year of their respective entry-level deals would officially be on the books. (Rookies who signed their ELCs at age 18 or 19 and don't hit 10 NHL games are eligible to have their rookie deals pushed back a year or two.) At the time, we saw several intriguing cases.

Now two weeks later, the picture is a little clearer in terms of which youngsters are here to stay and which need a little more time to develop in the minors.

We begin this edition of the Rookie Notebook with an update on where things stand with those on the bubble.

Here to stay

The top two picks from June's draft, New Jersey's Jack Hughes (13 games) and New York's Kaapo Kakko (12 games), have since passed the mark — no surprise there — while Chicago also wasted no time making their intentions clear with pick No. 3, Kirby Dach. He has a goal and three assists through nine NHL games after joining the club following a three-game conditioning stint with AHL Rockford and has proven he belongs in the big leagues.

Not ready yet

One of the intriguing 10-game cases was Winnipeg Jets defenceman Ville Heinola, whose season-opening NHL stint sat stuck at eight games for a little while as the club pondered the best move. The Jets decided to send him to develop with AHL affiliate Manitoba Moose, with the door still open, per his contract, for him to return to his native Finland.

Still on the fence

The Jets now have another decision to make in David Gustafsson, who has played very limited minutes since getting called up in place of Mark Letestu. With Letestu now ruled out for six months due to a myocarditis diagnosis, the Jets may need to rely more heavily on its depth going forward. Gustafsson is now nine games into his NHL stint, with game No. 10 scheduled for Friday.

Another tough decision on the horizon: The Arizona Coyotes and rookie Barrett Hayton (eight games). He'll go back to the OHL's Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds if he doesn't stick with the NHL club, as he's not eligible to play in the AHL as a 19-year-old. He's been the extra forward in Arizona so far this season, slotting in at various spots. He got top-line minutes over the weekend — and produced a highlight-reel between-the-legs assist — but it's still to be determined whether he'll stay in the desert.

Joel Farabee (eight games) has certainly looked like a legitimate NHLer during his call-up with the Philadelphia Flyers, showing no signs of slowing down with a pair of goals and three points on the season so far.

The first month of the NHL season saw several strong rookie performances, with plenty of great quotes and milestones. Here's a round up of some of the standout rookie moments from the past two weeks:

Olofsson shines in October

We learned two things about Buffalo Sabres rookie Victor Olofsson in the month of October:



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1. He's got a very weird pre-game/intermission ritual.

2. He's basically a one-man power-play unit. The Sabres spent much of October teaching opponents a valuable lesson: Don't take penalties. Buffalo has been electric with the man advantage, posting a 26.9 power-play percentage — and most of that is due to the Sabres' newest sniper. All six of Olofsson's NHL goals have come on the man advantage and just two of his 10 points have come at even-strength. His six-game stint to close out the 2018-19 campaign also yielded two power-play goals, making that eight in all. He has yet to score at even-strength.

The Swedish forward, who was drafted in the seventh round in 2014, currently leads all rookies in goals and was named October's rookie of the month for his standout play.

Bear, meet Ovi

Edmonton Oilers rookie rearguard Ethan Bear is logging big minutes already this season with the red-hot Pacific club, leading all rookies in average time on ice (21:25) while getting top-pair billing alongside Darnell Nurse. The 2015 fifth-rounder has gone up against some tough competition... and produced some pretty funny post-game lines, too.

Luck not on Farabee's side

How's this for bad luck: Philadelphia Flyers rookie Joel Farabee had his first career NHL assist and his first NHL goal overturned by offside challenges during a game against the Chicago Blackhawks on Oct. 24 — his second career NHL matchup.

His luck did turn, finally: Farabee finished the game with a point when he assisted on a third-period goal from — you guessed it — Hayes.

But then, a week later, the bad luck struck again. After forcing overtime with his first (legal) NHL goal on Nov. 1 against the Devils, Farabee's overtime winner was disallowed due to a distinct kicking motion from the rookie on the goal.

Farabee has since scored another goal, giving him two on the season, and has learned a valuable rookie lesson: No goal is safe.

Boqvist's busy week

You thought your week was busy? Chicago Blackhawks rookie rearguard Adam Boqvist has had a jam-packed schedule over the past seven days filled with firsts. Last Wednesday, he scored his first goal as a pro hockey player with the AHL's Rockford IceHogs. One day later, he got the call to join the Blackhawks. Saturday brought his NHL debut, with his first NHL goal — a gorgeous snipe — coming Sunday against the Ducks.

Dach hungry for more

We touched on Dach off the top, with the Blackhawks confirming the rookie will be sticking around beyond the 10-game mark. Dach showed up hungry for NHL experience and has rewarded Blackhawks brass for drafting him third overall last June with a goal and two helpers through nine games.

Also, maybe he's just actually hungry.

Blackhawks writer Chris Kuc gave us a great glimpse into the day-to-day life of the 18-year-old rookie centremen in a recent article on the team's website in which we learned that he's taken up temporary residence with veteran defenceman Brent Seabrook. The article includes plenty of great quotes, but this one might be the best gem in there:

The Ducks have built themselves a reputation for drafting and developing strong defencemen. Add Josh Mahura to that list. The 21-year-old registered a goal and five points in a 17-game NHL stint last season, and started off 2019-20 on a historic note.

All three of his season-debut assists on Oct. 29 came in a span of less than three minutes in the second period.

Despite the successful season debut, Mahura's NHL stint didn't last long. The Ducks announced Wednesday afternoon that they've sent him back to the AHL's San Diego Gulls.

Samsonov's strong starts

With starter Braden Holtby in a contract year, it's crucial for the Washington Capitals to figure out what exactly they have in rookie Ilya Samsonov.

So far, they like what they're seeing. Samsonov, 22, has started five games and won all of 'em, giving him the most wins among rookie netminders so far (Vancouver Thatcher Demko is 4-1 and New Jersey's Mackenzie Blackwood is 3-2). He has posted a 2.38 goals against average and .915 save percentage, with plenty more starts to come.

Vancouver Canucks rookie Quinn Hughes gave fans a scare last Friday when he fell awkwardly to the ice during the first period against the Ducks. He appeared to catch a rut in the ice, which led him to twisting his ankle and pushing his knee forward. Thankfully, the 20-year-old is just fine after sitting out the remainder of Friday's matchup and missing Saturday's game. He was back in action Tuesday against the Blues and came up clutch for the Canucks to tie things up and force overtime. Vancouver lost the game in OT, but gained the peace of mind in knowing their kid was just fine.

Things are looking up for Quinn's little brother, too...

Remember that scoreless start that plagued No. 1 overall pick Jack Hughes? Safe to say it's firmly in the rearview mirror. The New Jersey Devils have struggled, but Hughes is now finding his footing. In the six games since registering his first NHL point on Oct. 17, Hughes tallied three goals and three assists.

Like his brother, Jack also had an injury scare Friday night. During a game against the Flyers, the rookie was rocked by a big hit from Matt Niskanen and went down hard. Also like his brother, he too would be just fine — but it must have been a stressful night in the Hughes household.

OK, bending the rules here a little but it's for a good cause. Though not technically a rookie according to the NHL's official guidelines, we can't help but highlight a pretty cool first from New York Islanders forward Cole Bardreau. The 26-year-old (he turned 26 on July 22, which is why he's no longer considered a rookie) scored his first NHL goal in front of the home crowd on a penalty shot to give his team the



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lead against the Senators on Tuesday night and help extend the club's win streak to 10.

Bardreau, a longtime AHLer, was clearly emotional after the goal — as was every single guy on the Islanders bench. Bardreau's path to the pros went through the NCAA and included several severe injuries, including a broken neck that almost left him paralyzed. Rookie or not, seeing Bardreau find the back of the net under the bright lights Tuesday night will certainly stand as one of the best "firsts" of 2019-20.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Nate Thompson continues to surprise after working on speed

Eric Engels | @EricEngels

November 6, 2019, 3:12 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — "What do they want with Nate Thompson," asked an Eastern-based professional scout just two days after the Montreal Canadiens acquired the aging centre from the Los Angeles Kings in the lead up to last year's trade deadline.

The scout in question had seen Thompson skate some of his 43 games with the Ottawa Senators during the 2017-18 season and had come away less than convinced he could still be a steady contributor to a team contending for a playoff spot in 2019.

"He's slow," the scout said to us.

Sean Burke, who heads up pro scouting out West for the Canadiens, saw something different.

"I scout that area and was positive on Nate," said Burke via text message last weekend. "But we have a number of guys who watched him, including (Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin). He has been good for us and what we were looking for in that role."

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In truth, Thompson has been much better than just good, and he's probably been a lot better than anyone thought he'd be when he came over with a 2019 fifth-round pick in exchange for a 2019 fourth-round pick.

The Alaskan fit in so seamlessly last season that the Canadiens wasted no time in signing him to a new contract. On April 25, Thompson put pen to paper on a one-year, \$1-million deal.

It's what the 35-year-old did next that's largely contributed to his strong start to this season.

"I went on a diet," Thompson said earlier this week. "It wasn't like I lost 10 pounds. It was maybe three to five pounds, and I maybe put on a bit more muscle and got a bit leaner than I have been in the past.

"But I think the biggest thing was just working on my explosiveness, and my quickness. I think everyone in this league is strong, but it's all about speed and that's where the majority of my training was trying to work toward was having that speed."

That meant five to six training sessions a week throughout the entirety of the off-season with Dr. Chad Moreau, who runs Back To Function out of Lomita, Calif., near Hermosa Beach.

"We'd do a lot of competitions and challenges and he has a point system," Thompson said of Moreau, who is the older brother of former NHLer Ethan Moreau.

"I think it created some competitiveness. I was working out with (Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman) Jake Muzzin, (Calgary Flames forward) Milan Lucic and (Kings forward) Dustin Brown, and there were some other young guys with us. We were pushing each other, and I think having those challenges throughout the summer really pushed us to be competitive and it definitely helped me."

The evidence is plain to see. Through 15 games, Thompson has been flying up and down the ice.

It's true he has yet to record a goal, but he's already got five assists — or three less than he produced in 83 games split between the Canadiens and Kings last season.

And that's only part of what has made him a valuable contributor to Montreal's 8-5-2 record on the season.

When you look at the long shift Thompson had at the end of Tuesday's game against Boston, helping the Canadiens cling to a 5-4 lead, you see the value in the work he did with Moreau.

"For Nate, he had a lot of power coming in but we tried to extend his power out, to give him more power endurance," Moreau said in a phone conversation with Sportsnet on Wednesday.

"Hockey's one of those games where it's not enough to be able to reproduce power for one shift or two strides. You have to be able to reproduce it over and over again. So one of our training tools for him was to extend his power out over a longer duration, so he could have a good 40-45 second shift where he doesn't fatigue.

"Everyone gets tired at the end of a shift, but if you're the guy who can just have a little bit more juice in the last 10 seconds of a shift and you can reproduce that over 15-20 shifts a game, then you're going to have more success than if you're hitting a wall 30 seconds into a shift."

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

So far, Thompson's consistency within his shifts has stood out as a good quality in his play.

His teammates see it.



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"Since he's come in our lineup, he's been consistent and he's really stabilized the fourth line," said Canadiens assistant captain Brendan Gallagher on Wednesday.

"Nate's a guy that (Canadiens coach) Claude Julien can really trust, and he can use him on the penalty kill and have him take those important D-zone draws. I think he's been really good for the young linemates that he's had, too. Guys come up and they understand just how complete a player he is and they really learn off of him. It really simplifies their game, it makes their game easier where they have less responsibility, and I think that's probably a pretty underrated quality in that he's able to make other guys' jobs much easier."

It's a direct, hard and strong brand of hockey that Thompson plays. He controls the action on his line — which currently has Nick Cousins on his left and Nick Suzuki on his right — and he makes high-percentage plays at both ends of the ice and rarely ends up out of position.

And Thompson's unheralded ability to play with pace (on a team that demands it) is a big reason he secured his role this season, even though 20-year-olds Suzuki and Ryan Poehling and were threats to unseat him.

Thompson knew they'd challenge him for his job, so he did everything in his power to keep them at bay.

"I think for me, I've always been a guy that's never really let myself get complacent," he said.

"Even coming into camp, I knew that I had a good opportunity, but it wasn't given to me. I know nothing's been given to me, so I think I had to come in here and still play my game to earn a spot. And at the same time, I don't want to just play my game and keep my spot; I want to make an impact."

Thompson is doing that in multiple ways. He owns the Canadiens' best faceoff percentage (55.7 per cent) and he's making an indelible imprint on young players such as Suzuki, Poehling and 19-year-old Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

"I've picked up so many little things from him," Suzuki said Wednesday. "I'm asking him different little things, getting little tips from him. It's not just defence. I think he's definitely underrated in the offensive zone. He seems to be thinking a lot of the same things as me."

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Thompson is doing a lot of them, too, leaving Julien impressed.

"I think it's pretty obvious he's been good," the coach said Wednesday.

"He's been good everywhere. His pace has been good throughout the start of the season so far. His line's been good, they've been producing, you've seen him make great plays, very reliable. Everything you want from a guy who has that role. He's giving (it) to us, so (we're) definitely very happy with his professionalism on the ice and off the ice. He's doing his job well in both areas."

Even that East-based scout chimed in when we reached out to see if his impression of Thompson had changed.

"He's been a pleasant surprise," he said. "I give him credit for doing what he needed to stay in the game."

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: What's next in 'complicated' Byfuglien situation?

Elliott Friedman

November 5, 2019, 11:47 AM

When Winnipeg GM Kevin Cheveldayoff described Dustin Byfuglien's future as "a complicated situation," he wasn't lying.

The defenceman's future is complex and confusing. In the middle of it is his 2018-19 ankle injury, his post-playoff exit physical, Byfuglien's own unique take on the world, and now, the NHL and NHLPA.

There's a question I always ask when trying to find out why things occur the way they do: "What don't I know?" In this case, the answer is "a lot." This is probably going to arbitration, and, when lawyers are involved, certain information will be kept private until it must be presented.

With that in mind, it is foolish to claim I know everything. But here is what I can tell you, from both parties' perspectives.

There's a reason Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff is being evasive. The clamps are tight, he's trying not to pour gasoline on the fire. That edict is from the league itself, which will take the lead on Byfuglien's file.

At issue is Byfuglien's season-ending physical. Taken after the Jets were eliminated in the first round by the St. Louis Blues, multiple sources indicate it pronounced him "fit to play." According to Brian Burke, who has some expertise in these matters, these checkups must be signed by the doctor, the medical trainer and the player. There is also something called "Form 25A" — which labels you as "fit" or "unfit" — that must be signed by the doctor. If a player disputes the findings on Form 25A, he can seek a second opinion.

It is, I'm told, the NHL's position that those results were never disputed during the summer and that, when Byfuglien informed the team that he wasn't going to play, he said he'd lost his passion for hockey. Therefore, his preference was to retire.

In the reporting of this story, one thing was made clear to me: the NHL will fight hard to protect the integrity of the year-end physical. A player signing it, then successfully disputing it months later would lead to major legal league-wide consequences.



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The league also feels Winnipeg did nothing wrong in this situation and should not be penalized.

During the 2018-19 season, Byfuglien had two lengthy absences due to ankle problems, returning to full-time action with a week to go in the regular season.

You know athletes. They play hurt. They put their bodies on the line, especially at playoff time. He played hard against the Blues, averaging 25:42, with eight points in six games. He feels the Jets were well aware he wasn't anywhere close to 100 per cent. He didn't dispute the finding of the physical, and figured that, with a summer of rest, any lingering issues would disappear.

Byfuglien didn't complain about pain during the summer because he didn't skate. He took it easy, thinking rest was best. It was only when he re-started skating immediately prior to training camp that he realized the ankle hadn't healed.

He hasn't spoken on this matter, but, according to a few sources, maintains that this was when he began thinking about retirement. The NHL season is a grind, and Byfuglien wasn't excited about beginning it in pain. The proof, he feels, is that he moved his family back to Manitoba. If he hadn't been thinking of playing, he wouldn't have returned to the provincial capital.

Byfuglien recently had surgery to repair the damage. I've been told there was a broken bone in his foot, also fixed in the procedure. However, the timing of that injury is also in dispute. I don't spend much time in my Twitter mentions, but, apparently, a few people took that to mean he injured it doing something else in the summer. I don't believe that's the case. From what I understand, the dispute is whether or not both sides already knew this and it isn't a revelation.

This is, in the minds of the player, his agency (Octagon), and the NHLPA, a legitimate hockey injury. And they are prepared to strenuously defend that.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

"DUSTIN BEING DUSTIN"

Right from the beginning, other teams questioned why, if Byfuglien was still bothered by his injury, he didn't just show up to camp, accept a rehab assignment and get paid.

Anyone who knows Byfuglien is well aware of his unique personality. He's his own man. Some of his friends and teammates have said no one is surprised he'd do the exact opposite of what should be done or what is expected.

"That's Dustin being Dustin," they say, with a laugh.

"If he can avoid going to training camp, getting poked and prodded, just resting on his own," one former teammate added, "I think he'd like that. A lot."

I can totally see that. But it adds extra layers to the dispute.

Another said not to dismiss the divides that occurred in the Jets' dressing room last season, and how Byfuglien felt about all that. He believes those took a toll on the big defenceman, too. The organization has worked hard to

address those concerns, from giving Patrik Laine much more responsibility, to captain Blake Wheeler promising a change in his leadership, to head coach Paul Maurice pushing a positive environment.

Byfuglien is out until the New Year. At some point, he'll decide if he wants to play. And, it is very likely an arbitrator will be forced to decide what — or if — he should be paid.

He is in the second-last season of his five-year, \$38-million contract. He is scheduled to earn \$8 million this season and \$6 million next. Because he is suspended, he hasn't collected any of that. Barring any kind of settlement, what will have to be decided is when he's eligible to be paid. I'd expect the league to argue it's not until he agrees to report, and either go on a rehab schedule, or suit up to play. I'd expect the NHLPA to counter that Byfuglien deserves every penny.

There's something else, though.

Let's say Byfuglien does decide to return. Does he want to go back to Winnipeg? Do the Jets even want him?

Cheveldayoff isn't saying, but the suspicion is the Jets know they are much better with him than without him. As for the player's choice, well, it's much less certain.

1. I don't think this will end up in a settlement/contract termination; Byfuglien is too important for the Jets to turn into an unrestricted free agent. But, for the sake of argument, there is recent precedent. In October 2015, Los Angeles and Mike Richards reached a settlement on the last five years of his contract, with the former King getting slightly less than 50 per cent of the \$16 million owed to him. In June 2017, Anaheim and Simon Despres came to an understanding — one-third of the \$16 million owed. Last September, Tampa Bay terminated the final season of Jake Dotchin's contract, and a settlement was reached in July. More important to the Jets would be if any money stayed on the cap. Richards counts against Los Angeles's number through 2031–32, but Despres is not counted towards the Ducks' total.

2. Regular readers of this blog are aware that I keep a Nov. 1 stat. Since 2005–06, just nine of 59 teams four (or more) points out of a playoff spot after games on that date have reached the post-season. St. Louis took it to another level in 2018-19, coming back from last overall on Jan. 3 to win it all. This year, eight teams will try to recover from this early hole: Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minnesota, New Jersey, the Rangers, Ottawa and San Jose.

3. This is a critical time for the Sharks, whose first-round pick belongs to the Senators. Two very different games on the weekend. They responded very well to head coach Peter DeBoer using the dreaded "S" word on them — "soft" — outshooting Winnipeg 53–19 on Friday, but losing 2-1. (Every ex-player I've ever worked with said the worst thing a coach could call his players was soft.) Then, Vancouver pounded them 5–2 on Saturday.

The issues have been discussed: goaltending, declining shot rates from Brent Burns and Erik Karlsson, the fact they've never depended on speed in a fast league. But, a couple of opponents have also pointed out that they're not as deep as they've been. GM Doug Wilson saw that, which is why he



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brought back Patrick Marleau after initially declining to, but they might need more.

Another key might be the return of defenceman Radim Simek, who made a real impact in his rookie season before a gruesome leg injury took him out in March. Tim Heed was playing fewer than nine minutes per night, which taxed Burns and Karlsson. Entering Monday's games, the former was second in ice time (26:15) and the latter was sixth (25:18). Dallas, with Miro Heiskanen (13th) and John Klingberg (18th), is the only other team with two blueliners in the top 23. Burns, approaching 35, is an absolute freak of nature. But at his current pace, he is looking at ice times not seen by a player that age since Scott Niedermayer 11 years ago.

4. Last Christmas, the Kings made it clear they were willing to move some of their veteran content for younger pieces. It's a new year, but the plan has not changed. Drew Doughty and Anze Kopitar are staying, as are their younger prospects, many of whom are not with the NHL team. That leaves several veterans, and you don't need me to tell you who they are. One of their most difficult decisions involves Kyle Clifford, a huge part of their culture and someone who is trying to convey the lessons he learned from the Matt Greenes, Rob Scuderis and Jarret Stolls onto the next generation. It doesn't sound like there's a ton of discussion yet about an extension, but word is you will have to work to make the Kings consider parting with him.

5. Teams needing anything fixed in the dressing room should consider Clifford. "He's like Tim 'The Tool Man' Taylor," one former teammate texted. "Around (Manhattan Beach) everyone just hires people, but not him."

The winger rebuilt his own backyard last summer.

"One of my brothers, he's a huge handyman," Clifford said Monday. "I was always FaceTiming him for advice."

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6. Pierre Dorion's presence in Los Angeles and Nashville started the rumour mill. It's known the Senators are looking for experience up front, but he warned not to jump to any conclusions. Ottawa had six days between games, so his primary goal was taking the opportunity to check out a few Western Conference clubs. The Predators are trying to move Kyle Turris, and the fact Dorion was watching them against Calgary had some wondering if the Senators would consider it. The GM wouldn't discuss that, but I'm told it's not happening.

7. One thing that is new about Ottawa: They have a presence in Russia looking at potential free agents. "You haven't seen them dive into this pool that often," one opposing team executive said. "Now, they're here."

8. I did want to give the Senators credit for getting a quick update on Scott Sabourin to Sportsnet's Greg Millen during last Saturday's game in Boston. When a player is conscious, talking with doctors and moving extremities after such an awful-looking injury — teams have to let fans/viewers know as fast as possible. Obviously, the player and his family are the first priority, but you can't reach everyone as quickly as

you'd like and people watching the game are agonizing alongside them.

9. The Karjala Cup is an international tournament beginning Thursday in Finland. There are at least two forwards closely watched by NHL teams: Finland's Jesse Puljujarvi and Russia's Konstantin Okulov. Edmonton GM Ken Holland is going, and last weekend, I asked Puljujarvi's rep, Markus Lehto, via text if the winger would consider returning to the Oilers now that things seem calmer. Lehto was very polite, complimenting Edmonton's early-season success, but said a new address remains the preferred option.

"Jesse's unwillingness to return has nothing to do with current coaches, management, the team, fans or the city," Lehto wrote. "Like I have said multiple times, Jesse has just asked for a change of scenery and to get a fresh start somewhere else. Nothing wrong with that considering the past three seasons. It is very difficult for me to see that he would return there all of a sudden now.... If things don't work out now with the right team and best possible fit, there is nothing wrong (with playing) the whole season in Europe."

Chris Johnston reported last weekend that the Rangers are interested. It makes sense to consider pairing him with Kaapo Kakko.

10. I could see Edmonton making a run at Okulov, even though Montreal is considered the front-runner.

11. Most GMs who go overseas try to stay in Stealth Mode. Arizona GM John Chayka was photographed with Dan Milstein, who reps many Russian players. That is believed to be the third time Chayka's visited winger Alexander Barabanov. The Coyotes are his most ardent pursuer.

12. Taylor Hall's agent is scheduled to meet with New Jersey GM Ray Shero during the team's swing through Western Canada. I think that's going to be in Calgary.

13. I'm making my prediction: Colorado goes big-game hunting. They are banged up now, but looked dynamite when healthy. And they've got plenty of assets.

14. Nate Schmidt is back after a 13-game absence, and the Golden Knights badly missed him. Does Vegas feel the need to add mobility on the blue line? Opponents do think it is one of their few weaknesses.

15. May mean something, may mean nothing, but both Montreal and New Jersey sent a different mix of scouts to separate games in Buffalo. (First was against Arizona, second versus the Islanders.) When I first started, a GM told me to look for that kind of thing.

16. With Travis Dermott back and Zach Hyman nearing his own return, teams checking to see if Toronto wishes to move a big salary are being told the Maple Leafs are determined to give their strongest roster a chance. They want to see that group in action before making any rash decisions. That means, as expected, a team of 20 or 21; so two or three will be traded or waived.

17. One exec, seeing Nic Petan get four points last Friday in his AHL return last weekend: "He's too good for this league."

18. In the last week, both Alex Ovechkin ("If they want to win Stanley Cup, they have to play differently") and Doughty ("If



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any team wants to be successful in the playoffs, they need their top scorers playing good defence and they need their best defenders chipping in on the offence. That's the only way you're going to win") have weighed in on how the Maple Leafs play. While I thought the Ovechkin comments were totally blown out of proportion, there is an opportunity for Toronto. All of a sudden, Mike Babcock doesn't need to pound it into the group, because their peers are doing it for him.

19. Speaking of the AHL, the deadline for applicants to replace retiring commissioner David Andrews was Oct. 31. There was a lot of interest; now we're going to see who applied and who gets an interview. An announcement is expected in January. John Hoven reported Darren Abbott's candidacy. He's the president of AHL Ontario, and a legit contender. But there will be more. It's a coveted job.

20. Eight more points for Boston's top line in the Bruins' 6-4 win over Pittsburgh on Monday night. Five for Brad Marchand, two for David Pastrnak, the other by Patrice Bergeron. I meant to include this a few weeks ago, but I was asking a few of their teammates about their consistent excellence. Take a look at two power-play goals scored against Tampa Bay on Oct. 17:

They aren't even looking at each other. One of the Bruins said they are so good with the extra man because they've practised against their best defensive players for years, from Zdeno Chara on down. It's a good point. If you practise like you play — against that level of talent — competitive nature and structure should make you better.

21. How bananas is this line for the 11-1-2 Bruins? In all situations, they are outscoring opponents 27-7 with all three on the ice, including 12-0 on the power play. After Monday night, do you know how many NHL teams had more than 12 power-play goals? Five. Boston has 15; Buffalo, Vancouver and Washington 14; Vegas 13. Bergeron/Marchand/Pastrnak alone are tied with or outscoring the other 26. The Bruins have scored 36 goals with Marchand on the ice; that's No. 1 in the NHL. Bergeron and Pastrnak have been on the ice for 31 — tied with Roman Josi for fifth. Between them are John Carlson and Leon Draisaitl (34), and Connor McDavid (33). (Source: Natural Stat Trick.)

22. One more on Marchand: Boston's scored 80 per cent of the goals that have occurred with him on the ice. There is only one player above 200 minutes who can say the same: Vancouver's Jordie Benn (10-2, 83 per cent). He's played 37 fewer minutes, though.

23. Josi and Ryan Ellis are both on a point-per-game pace after 15 games. Last defensive teammates to do that in at least 70 appearances? Al MacInnis and Gary Suter for Calgary in 1989-90. Only four defencemen this century have done it: Nicklas Lidstrom (2005-06), Mike Green (2009-10), Karlsson (2015-16) and Burns last year.

24. I don't expect the Oilers to lose too often in overtime, but it happened Monday night at home — 3-2 to Arizona. Edmonton remains atop the Pacific Division, "but we are not satisfied," defenceman Oscar Klefbom said last Friday. "We've had good starts before."

Klefbom himself has nine points in 16 games, third in per-game ice time behind Thomas Chabot and Burns. He's on the first-unit power play, and I asked him if catching his career-high 12 goals from 2016-17 was possible.

"Yes, I have to think it is," he responded. "I have to be a threat to score, not just pass. What if one of Connor or Leon gets hurt? I have to be able to help."

25. Klefbom says the tone is entirely different. I've heard from a few people now that Holland gave a stirring speech the night before training camp began. Klefbom didn't want to go deeply into it, although he did say that the GM "talked about how he's won Stanley Cups, but isn't satisfied and wants more." (I believe a lot of the message was about Detroit's path from NHL afterthought to Stanley Cup champion, and how Edmonton can follow the same path. From what I heard, players were willing to run through walls when it was over.)

Since then, it's been about "building confidence in us," Klefbom said. "(The coaches) want us to make plays, not just off the glass when we're in trouble. But when something goes wrong, it's a lot quieter."

The Oilers have to build depth, but know cornerstones are in place. Got to make them believe.

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

26. Hours before Arizona beat Edmonton, former coach Todd McLellan was in Toronto running Kings practice. There was one point where he stopped a power-play drill and demonstratively explained to a group that included Anze Kopitar how he wanted them to rotate on a certain play. I asked him about it after.

"I was telling them that if they moved, they would force the defence to move, too," he said. "But you can't just tell them to do it. You have to show them why it is going to work. That's what I was doing."

In the same practice, McLellan was also playing the role of a pinching defenceman, pressuring the winger to keep the puck in the offensive zone. At one point, he actually bumped with Michael Amadio. I told McLellan he was pretty aggressive. He laughed and said, "I was terrible. I didn't keep a single puck in."

Someday, someone's going to have to write a book about the last decade in Edmonton. There were good players and good teachers. How did it go so sideways?

27. One scout on the Coyotes: "Islanders West. Structure. Player buy-in. Know their roles. Only difference is the Islanders' players will beat you up. In Arizona, the coach will do it."

28. You watch some of the early-season surprises: Arizona, Buffalo, Islanders, Vancouver. Know what they have in common? A lot of players. You can debate how good they are or aren't, but they can all play in the NHL. You need bodies who can hold their own at this level.



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29. Ryan Poehling gets the call-up from AHL Laval for Montreal's huge Tuesday night home game against Boston. The last time we saw him in an NHL game, he was getting a hat trick in his debut versus Toronto. Poehling had a strong pre-season, but was sent down after suffering a concussion late in exhibition play. He wasn't as dominant as you'd hope in the American League, but one exec who watched him pushed back against that narrative.

"He got hurt, and no one should underestimate how hard it can be for a young player to recover from that injury so early in his career," he said. "It takes time, especially getting used to the physicality."

As a high pick and a centre, Poehling's a target for other hungry players who want their shot, too.

"He will be an NHLer, for sure."

30. One more story from the outdoor game in Regina. At the luncheon, I sat next to one of my favourite athletes, longtime Saskatchewan Roughriders Gene Makowsky. The retired lineman and Grey Cup champion is now Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport in the province. He's a huge Oilers fan, and would always ask me what they were up to whenever we saw each other back in the CFL on CBC days. He told a great story about meeting Wayne Gretzky years ago.

When Gretzky found out who Makowsky was, the Great One peppered him with questions about the 2009 Grey Cup. The Roughriders appeared to have won the championship when the Montreal Alouettes missed a last-second field goal — only to be penalized for too many men on the field. Given another chance, the Alouettes made the kick to win the game. Gretzky wanted to know how that happened. I find that amazing. The mind can set the great apart from the merely good. The desire for detail. The willingness to learn how things go wrong, or how they go right. Makowsky was amazed by Gretzky's curiosity, too.

31. Monday morning, I attended an event for the University of Toronto's Basketball Excellence Program, featuring Nick Nurse, head coach of the NBA champion Raptors. Nurse was on his game during the 60-minute presentation. People always ask about books being read by decision-makers, so I'm happy to pass along that he's read *Freedom in the Huddle: The Creative Edge in Coaching Psychology* "about 50 times." Asked if he spoke to anyone in particular about what it takes to repeat, Nurse mentioned two names. The first was Bill Belichick, who told him to "get my ass back in the office. Get to work," adding that working hard at it is the only way. (I'm paraphrasing here.) The second was Phil Jackson.

Nurse told a hilarious story about going on a long drive in Jackson's truck, with the 11-time champion coach stopping to buy a bag of cherries that was consumed during their trip. One piece of advice Nurse got from Jackson is among the best he's ever received: Imagine yourself holding a sword. Sometimes you've got to give your players the sharp tip. It has to happen. But there are other times you have to look at the handle, and realize you can't always be so cutting.

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TSN.CA / Tavares eager to have Hyman's 'consistency' in lineup

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs, who practised at Ford Performance Centre on Wednesday ahead of Thursday's game against the Vegas Golden Knights.

John Tavares spent time at the end of practice hammering pucks into the net from the same spot on the ice where one night earlier he had somehow missed a wide open cage.

"Doesn't get much easier than that," Tavares said during a first intermission interview following the gaffe against the Los Angeles Kings. "I just kind of got stuck with it and rushed it a bit and just got underneath it."

After a seven-game absence due to a broken right index finger, Toronto's captain definitely experienced some rust in his return. And perhaps that was to be expected even though the 29-year-old skated hard and worked diligently throughout the three weeks of rehab.

"I can't recall the last time I really had to do that kind of comeback in-season," he said. "You miss a decent amount of time so just trying to get back in the rhythm."

Tavares has actually never been in this situation before in his NHL career. His most significant injury, a torn MCL, happened at the Sochi Olympics in 2014 and he didn't play again at all that season. Other than that, his longest previous injury absence was five games during the 2016-17 season and that also ended his year.

Tavares has been incredibly durable throughout his professional career, playing at least 77 games in all but one of his full-length campaigns.

So, this is a new challenge for the centre, who's trying to get back to a sense of normalcy.

"Just not thinking a whole lot," he said of his desired state of mind on the ice, "just being instinctive and going to the right spots and playing quick and making plays that you don't realize you're making. Sometimes that takes a little bit when you comeback. But I want to come back and make an impact right away. I'm not trying to wait and wait for time to get going ... I know I can still be a lot better."

How much will Hyman's return help Marner, Tavares?

Working his way back from injury, Zach Hyman says he is feeling good and is close to making his debut for Toronto, but is still not exactly sure when that will be. Mark Masters has more on why his teammates are excited to get Hyman back into the fold.

If Tavares is facing a challenge in shaking off the rust, what will Zach Hyman be dealing with?



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Head coach Mike Babcock, during an interview on TSN 1050's OverDrive program Wednesday afternoon, said the left winger will likely return to game action this weekend. Earlier in the day, the coach was asked how Hyman can help Tavares and fellow linemate Mitch Marner.

"I don't know how long it's going to take him to help them," Babcock said. "I mean, any time you get injured for two weeks and you come back you're not the same as you were so if you miss as much time (as him), I don't know how much time it's going to take. I really don't know the answer to that."

Hyman was an important part of Toronto's most consistent line last season with Tavares and Marner. Babcock calls him one of the best forecheckers in hockey. What does Tavares appreciate about Hyman?

"His consistency with what he brings to the table every day," he said. "Obviously relentless on the forecheck, putting pressure on the opponent, his attention to detail all over the ice and just making the game easier, because he's in the right spots. He makes it tough on the opponent causing a lot of turnovers in all three zones and he's got a good stick around the net, knows how to get open and use his body. So, he just has a good sense of who we are as players and a good sense of his game and what makes him successful."

When does Hyman, who had knee surgery on April 29, expect to be back?

"Soon," he said with a chuckle. "I feel like I'm really close, I feel like I'm getting there ... That's a hard question. My goal is the next game, but there's a lot of variables that go into when I come back. It's soon. I can't tell you if it's this weekend or not."

It hasn't been an easy road back for Hyman, who scored 21 goals and added 20 assists in 71 games last season.

"Even when you're healthy, you're anxious to get playing again and once June and July roll around and you're not playing in a Stanley Cup Final you want to play," Hyman said. "I've had to wait an extra two months to start my season, but there's light at the end of the tunnel and almost there."

Hyman has leaned on Dr. Meg Popovic, the team's director of athlete wellbeing and performance, for support.

"Meg's awesome," said Hyman. "She's an amazing resource that we have. All teams should have a person like Meg around who's just there to listen and whatever's going on with you, you can have a source to talk to confidentially. She's awesome and she's around all the time and just talking with her over breakfast can make your day better. She's an amazing person."

Zach Hyman is nearing his return to Toronto's lineup as the Leafs inch closer towards being at full strength for the first time this season. With a six-month recovery period, Hyman speaks about the mental grind on his rehab process and praises the Leafs' director of athlete well-being for keeping him positive.

When Hyman is activated off the long term injured list, the Leafs will need to make some moves to get under the salary cap. Three players will likely need to be shuffled off the

current roster. Jason Spezza, who was a healthy scratch on Tuesday, is among the depth players in limbo.

But the 36-year-old is focused on only the immediate future.

"I think I can help the team," he said. "Nobody's said anything to me. I assume I'm here and part of the group and I don't know if you've heard things I haven't heard but, for me, I'm trying to build and help this group out. I think I've been able to hop in and contribute when Johnny was out and try and help the team stay afloat. My role will change day-to-day, but I'm just trying to practice and get ready to go for the next game."

Spezza was among the first players on the ice at practice. He was the last player on the ice at the end.

"I love being around the guys," he said. "I love being around the game. I think we have a pretty cool job and it's pretty fun every day. And when you come to a new team you get to meet new personalities and I'm enjoying being around (Auston Matthews) and some of the younger guys that I didn't know very well."

Marner appreciates how Spezza has helped him learn more about taking faceoffs while also offering advice on tipping pucks and being effective in front of the net. And Marner hasn't noticed Spezza change his demeanour regardless of playing time.

"It hasn't seemed like it's affected him at all," said Marner. "He's been a big part of this team inside this locker room. He's bringing the same attitude every day ... His attitude's been unbelievable."

"He loves hockey," said Babcock, "that's one thing about Spezz. I tell ya, every day he comes here in a good mood, he's enjoying the guys, but it doesn't make it easy. The hardest part is when you've been a top, top player and now you're trying to fit into that role piece, that's the hardest part."

How does Spezza, the second overall pick in the 2001 draft, manage his emotions?

"You don't let the days you don't play affect the days you do play," he explained. "You have to be strong willed and when you get in the lineup you have to have a clear mind and just play and when you're out of the lineup you have to work and try to get better and not let the days blend in with each other and affect each other."

"Over the course of my career, if anybody's ever asked me advice on what to do when you're in and out of the lineup, I tell them to work and to keep working on your game and try to stay sharp and now I have an opportunity to practice what I preached over the years."

Spezza played perhaps his best game as a Leaf on Saturday, picking up a goal and an assist in Philadelphia while also scoring in the shootout to keep the team alive.

"It felt good," Spezza said. "I felt like I had a good game. It felt good to contribute. You just try and chip away. My last five, in general, I felt more and more comfortable. It was a different start to the year for me, but I think the last four or five games I started to feel a little bit more confident out there and making more plays and getting chances and to tap



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one in felt good and that usually gives you a bit more (energy in the) legs."

Spezza will be adding the puck that was used to score his first Leafs goal to the rest of his career keepsakes.

Leafs Ice Chips: Last on at practice, Spezza upbeat amid uncertainty

Jason Spezza was the last Leaf on the practice rink Wednesday as the veteran continues to work hard with sights on getting back into Toronto's lineup. With roster cuts coming due to the Leafs' cap crunch, Spezza is staying positive amid the uncertainty of his future.

Babcock is hoping his team will establish its identity within the next few games. Asked what his ideal identity would be for the team, the coach insisted it's not up to him.

"I don't think that's something I can decide," he told TSN in a pre-game interview on Tuesday. "What we got to do is find out about the players we have ... it's a process of figuring out what we can do best."

What do the players think the identity should be?

"A team that comes every night (and) other teams know that all four lines and all three D pairings are coming to play and nothing's going to be easy and nothing's going to be given," Marner said.

"Fast," said Matthews, "tenacious, play with pace. I think, for us, just finding that consistency night in, night out has been a struggle."

Patience pays off for Matthews and Leafs against Kings

Auston Matthews says the Maple Leafs stayed patient and it paid off in the third with a pair of goals that helped them edge the Kings. With back-to-back wins, he's hoping they can carry this momentum moving forward.

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TSN.CA / Toronto Maple Leafs missing something on special teams

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Nearing the quarter mark of the regular season, the Maple Leafs' special teams have been more liability than asset, with both the penalty kill and power play ranking well into the NHL's bottom half.

That's not the scenario the Maple Leafs expected to be facing, and turning both units back into weapons has become a top priority.

"[Special teams] haven't been good enough, any way you look at them," head coach Mike Babcock said after the

Leafs' practice on Wednesday. "They kind of look like our team; we're a work in progress. We think we can be way better in both areas, but that's great to say. We got to do it.

We got a number of things that we're trying to get done that we haven't gotten done as quickly as we thought we would, but that's part of [improving]."

Through 16 games this season, Toronto ranks 20th in the NHL on the power play (17.3 per cent), and 26th on the penalty kill (75.4 per cent), putting them far below Babcock's preferred threshold of sitting at least top-10 in both areas.

The penalty kill has been especially unsuccessful to start the year, allowing the second-most power-play goals against in the NHL (14). The Maple Leafs have hurt themselves with the sheer volume of penalties they're taking, ranking eighth in the NHL with 60 minor penalties and 124 penalty minutes overall. At this time last year, Toronto was the least-penalized team in the league, clocking in at 103 penalty minutes and 49 infractions.

Meanwhile, the Leafs' power play is 1-for-20 over the past five games and has continually struggled on zone entries and maintaining significant offensive zone time. John Tavares' return to the lineup on Tuesday should help the power play's prospects eventually, but Toronto was still 0-for-4 with the extra man in his first game back.

"The number one thing that will help our penalty kill is staying out of the box," Babcock said. "And then our power play, get everyone back and let's get rolling. We need puck speed, we need retrievals, and we got to be happy to shoot the puck and spend more time in the offensive zone."

Looking back a year ago, Toronto's specialty teams were one of the team's greatest strengths. Through 16 games of the 2018-19 campaign, the Leafs' power play was fifth-best in the league (27.3 per cent) and their kill was fourth-best (84.8 per cent).

Since then, Toronto has undergone significant changes in staffing and personnel, which has compounded some of its issues.

Assistant coaches Jim Hiller and D.J. Smith both left the organization last May, replaced by Paul McFarland as the power play guru and Dave Hakstol as the kill coach. Then Ron Hainsey, Toronto's top shorthanded player the last two seasons, left for Ottawa in free agency last July.

Newcomer Cody Ceci is leading the way in shorthanded minutes per game (3:41), while Jake Muzzin, Morgan Rielly and Mitch Marner are all adapting to larger roles on the kill. Muzzin is averaging 2:47 per game now, up from 1:28 last season; Marner is at 2:44, up from 1:21; and Rielly logs 2:41, up from 1:05.

It's expected that Zach Hyman (ACL tear) will return to Toronto's lineup in the coming week or so, giving the Leafs back one of their top penalty killers and alleviating some of the pressure on guys like Rielly and Marner, who also appear on Toronto's top power-play unit.

But to this point, the combination of new roles and a new system has presented a steep learning curve for the Leafs, which has been amplified by a landslide of self-inflicted wounds.



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"There are a few little things we can clean up, but it starts with taking less penalties," said Muzzin. "We usually can kill three; the fourth one will bite you. So just move your feet more, because all our penalties were stick penalties. Once we get in that groove [on the kill] of no hesitation, no guessing about a read or a go, then we should smooth things out a little bit."

"I think we're still kind of getting confused when [the opponent] gets to a certain point and when we should switch off," Marner added. "But we've talked about those things. I thought our kill has been good, but we've been taking a lot of penalties throughout games. It's something we're trying to get better at."

Given the amount of talent the Leafs have to pepper their power play with, including Tavares, Marner, Auston Matthews and William Nylander, there's a distinct air of underachievement with only nine man-advantage goals to the team's credit so far.

McFarland coached the Florida Panthers' second-ranked power play last season, and was expected to help the Leafs be just as dominant. So far, the players are still struggling to execute McFarland's strategy.

"He's been great," Tavares said of the new coach. "He just continues to stay positive and he's very detailed and gives us a good understanding of what we're looking to do, how we're trying to execute and then staying with those details. He tells us to not try and do too much, stay patient, and let our creativity come off of that."

If the Leafs can follow that plan, the kind of confidence they found last season on special teams should follow.

"We had such a good start in those areas last year, and when you have some early success, it just breeds momentum," Tavares explained. "That can snowball, even when maybe things don't go well, because there's always a trust that if you keep working you're going to find it back. We have to find a stretch where things all just click and come together, be a little bit sharper, have a little better execution and when we get our opportunities, want to put them in."

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TSN.CA / Frank Seravalli identifies heartbeat player for each Canadian NHL team

Frank Seravalli

A heartbeat is defined in the dictionary as a "vital unifying force," and that's especially true in the hockey world.

Every great NHL team has a "heartbeat player," a guy who is the pulse of the team. He likely isn't the best or most

talented player, but he is a spark plug who drags everyone else into the battle on a nightly basis.

Heartbeat players are hard to come by. Not every team has one.

Which players are vitally important to the success of Canada's seven clubs?

Let's break out our stethoscope to examine:

Calgary Flames: Matthew Tkachuk

Tkachuk is the poster boy for "heartbeat player." He is the fuel for the Flames, the straw that stirs the drink in Calgary. We're not just talking about his jaw-dropping OT winner from last week that is among the best goals of all-time, or how no other Flames player in franchise history has scored as many points as Tkachuk has (192) before turning 22. No, it's a comeback like Tuesday night against Arizona that puts him on the poster. He did the dirty work, throwing the body behind the net before funneling the puck up the boards and getting in front for the re-direction with 3:30 left that jumpstarted it all. Whatever Tkachuk lacks in high-end skill compared to Johnny Gaudreau or some of the other top-end players in the NHL, he makes up for in heart, and that might even be more valuable.

Edmonton Oilers: Darnell Nurse

We think of the Oilers as running on the back of Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl – and that certainly is true from a production perspective. But it's Nurse who brings the energy from the backend. Nurse is a grinder from the old school - with the toughness that makes him a perfect match for Oil Country. He piles up hits and blocked shots and he isn't afraid to drop the gloves when necessary. Nurse has also developed the dynamic necessary to be productive at the offensive end. Still, for a team with a mandate from head coach Dave Tippett to cut down on goals against, it's Nurse's presence in front of the net that has the Oil allowing the fourth fewest inner-slot shots against so far in the NHL this season.

Montreal Canadiens: Brendan Gallagher

There is no question Gallagher is the heartbeat of the Habs. Take a look at his highlights and the same adjectives can be used to describe him in almost every one. He is relentless, gritty and effective. Gallagher goes to the net with reckless abandon and little regard for his 5-foot-9 frame. His nose is always dirty. After back-to-back 30-plus goal seasons, Gallagher is on pace to approach 40 this season with his persistent and unique edge to the game. Gallagher, 27, only knows how to play one way - and that's all-out, every shift. Whether it's jumpstarting his team by scoring in the opening minute, like he did in Arizona, or providing a spark with a hit, Gallagher is Montreal's motor.

Ottawa Senators: Brady Tkachuk

It must be a Tkachuk thing, because Brady and Matthew are both a chip off the ole' Big Walt. In the nation's capital, the Sens feed off Tkachuk's energy more than his talent. Take Monday night's win at Madison Square Garden. Yes, Tkachuk chipped in with a goal and an assist. But he was also under New York's skin all night, certainly not shy in the bright lights of Broadway. The 20-year-old winger was in the



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middle of every skirmish, rattling the Rangers. "We played right into his hands," said Rangers coach David Quinn, who coached Tkachuk in his only college season at Boston Univ. "A few too many of our guys got distracted."

Toronto Maple Leafs: Zach Hyman

The Maple Leafs are close to getting their heartbeat back. Hyman is a mere days away from returning from off-season knee surgery - and if you listen to coach Mike Babcock, who says the Leafs have struggled to establish an identity this season, they have missed him. Simply put: Hyman does all the dirty work necessary to win. Last week, Babcock called Hyman "the best there is in hockey" at puck retrievals. Hyman brings something totally unique to sit at the table with the rest of the high-skill Leafs' forwards. Toronto doesn't have a player like him and his return, along with captain John Tavares from a hand injury, will finally have everyone correctly slotted in the lineup. "He's a huge part" of the team, Babcock said. "I mean, even the people that aren't fans are now fans."

Winnipeg Jets: To Be Determined

The real truth is the Winnipeg Jets are still searching for their pulse. In the last handful of years, that heartbeat has certainly been captain Blake Wheeler. He has been their chief "driver" as coach Paul Maurice likes to say. The Jets went as Wheeler did. But this year, in a year where Wheeler has vowed to change his leadership style, it doesn't feel like it's the case. Wheeler (and most of the rest of the Jets) has struggled to produce points. Two-hundred-foot centre Adam Lowry would seem to be a candidate - his teammates praised him for squaring off with Ryan Reaves in Vegas on Saturday - but Lowry hasn't registered a single point in 14 games, either. The Jets just don't seem to have the same juice this season.

Vancouver Canucks: Bo Horvat

It might sound cliché to pick the captain, but Bo Horvat is the closest thing the Canucks have had to a heartbeat player since Alex Burrows departed in 2017. There are no "nights off" for Horvat, who consistently takes on the toughest minutes, wins the majority of faceoffs (60 per cent) and drives as hard to the net as anyone. Think back to Vancouver's first swing out East of the season. Horvat scored in St. Louis, stood up for rookie Quinn Hughes in New Jersey, and was an all-around beast on the trip, collecting a hat trick in Detroit and a goal at the Garden. It's

early, but it's probably safe to say the Canucks made the right choice for captain as Horvat leads the best team in Canada to start the season.

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USA TODAY / Jets' Bryan Little gets 25-30 stitches to close laceration after errant shot to head

Chris Bumbaca

USA TODAY

Winnipeg Jets winger Bryan Little received 25-30 stitches to close a laceration near his ear after being hit with a shot against the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday.

Little was behind the side of the Devils' net when Nikolaj Ehlers ripped a shot wide that struck Little directly in the head. The referee immediately signaled for the training staff to attend to him on the ice. Little got up to skate off but was in obvious pain.

The Jets said Wednesday that Little was taken to nearby St. Boniface Hospital to receive stitches and then went to the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg for further observation in the neurological unit. The team said he has been alert and was in "good spirits this morning."

"Little was alert at all times and is in good spirits this morning," the team said. "Further updates will be provided when available."

Little, who missed the first nine games of the season with a concussion, was a first-round pick in 2006 when the organization was still the Atlanta Thrashers.

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