



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 13, 2017



Gameday: Stars vs. Hurricanes

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

12:00 AM

"All my rowdy friends are here on Monday night!"

This is the gameday hub, where you can find all the latest news and information you need to know for tonight's game between the Dallas Stars and Carolina Hurricanes. Make Hurricanes.com a regular stop throughout the day, as we update this hub with notes, videos, photos and more as puck drop draws near.

After a scheduled off day on Sunday, the Hurricanes will be back on the ice at PNC Arena at 10:30 a.m. on Monday for their morning skate.

Last updated: 12:00 a.m.

CANES CAN EXTEND POINT STREAK VS. STARS

12:00 a.m.

The Carolina Hurricanes bring a four-game point streak into their second and final meeting of the season against the Dallas Stars.

The Hurricanes have captured six of a possible eight points in their last four games (2-0-2), dating back to Nov. 4 in Arizona. The Canes now have the opportunity to extend their season-long point streak to five games when they face off with the Stars for the second time in just over three weeks.

The two teams first met this season on Oct. 21 in Dallas, the concluding site of the Hurricanes' four-game State Fair road trip. The Stars jumped out to an early lead, taking a 2-0 advantage into the first intermission and leading by three goals, 4-1, heading into the final 20 minutes of regulation. The Canes would end up mounting a furious comeback to get within a goal at 4-3, but they couldn't find the game-tying tally.

"I think we've got to learn the lesson that you can't dig that deep of a hole. You've got to be ready to start. We need more guys ready to start from the drop of the first puck," head coach Bill Peters said after that game. "I didn't think there was an emotional engagement to the game."

Fast forward three weeks, and the Hurricanes got the exact start they were looking for against the Chicago Blackhawks at home. [Brock McGinn](#) extended his goal-scoring streak to three games to open the scoring, and [Jeff Skinner](#)'s team-leading eighth goal of the season extended the Canes' lead to 2-0 before the midway point of the first period. The Canes held a 3-1 advantage as the puck dropped in the third period, but they settled for a point in a 4-3 overtime loss.

"It's tough," [Derek Ryan](#) said. "You've got to be able to close those ones out. I thought they got a couple of bounces, but at the same time we have to make sure we're locking it up defensively, and we didn't do that."

The Canes swapped forwards with Charlotte on Sunday evening, assigning [Patrick Brown](#) and recalling Phil Di Giuseppe, who ranks fourth in Checkers scoring with 12 points (4g, 8a) in 14 games. Di Giuseppe has played 77 games and tallied 24 points (8g, 16a) with the Hurricanes in his career.

CANESPR NOTES: During this four-game point streak, McGinn (4g), [Justin Williams](#) (1g, 3a) and Ryan (1g, 3a) lead the team with four points each. ... The Canes have out-shot their opponents in 13 of their 15 games this season.

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[Canes Recall Phil Di Giuseppe from Charlotte](#)

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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes recall Di Giuseppe, Stempniak from Charlotte

The AHL forward returns to the NHL amid Hurricanes scoring woes, and the veteran comes back after an injury setback.

by [Justin Lape@LankyLape](mailto:Justin.Lape@LankyLape) Nov 12, 2017, 7:41pm EST

The [Carolina Hurricanes](#) announced Sunday night that forward Phil Di Giuseppe has been recalled from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League. Di Giuseppe has played in 14 games with Charlotte this season, registering 12 points (four goals, eight assists). This is his first recall of the season after he was the final cut out of training camp in early October.

Di Giuseppe replaces Checkers captain [Patrick Brown](#) on the roster. Brown was recalled for insurance during the Canes' two-game road trip and did not make an appearance in five games on the NHL roster, serving as a healthy scratch in each game. He returns to a powerful Charlotte squad that lost their last game, snapping a four game win streak.

The Hurricanes also announced they have recalled forward [Lee Stempniak](#) from Charlotte, who was in the minors for a conditioning stint. Stempniak suffered an injury in his first game of his conditioning stint after just two shifts.

See the Hurricanes press release below:

CANES RECALL PHIL DI GIUSEPPE FROM CHARLOTTE
Patrick Brown assigned to Checkers; Lee Stempniak recalled from conditioning stint

Ron Francis, Executive Vice President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has recalled forward Phil Di Giuseppe from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League (AHL). Francis also announced that the team has assigned forward Patrick Brown to Charlotte, and that Lee Stempniak has been recalled from his conditioning stint.

Di Giuseppe, 24, is ranked fourth on the Checkers with 12 points (4g, 8a) in 14 games this season. The Maple, Ontario, native has earned 24 points (8g, 16a) in 77 career games with Carolina, including seven points (1g, 6a) in 36 games with the Hurricanes last season. Di Giuseppe was Carolina's first pick, 38th overall, in the second round of the 2012 NHL Draft and signed a three-year, entry-level contract with the Canes on March 26, 2014.

Brown, 25, registered four points (1g, 3a) in nine games with the Checkers prior to his recall on Oct. 31 and was a healthy extra for all five Hurricanes games since joining the team. The Bloomfield Hills, MI, native has recorded two points (1g, 1a) in 28 career NHL games with Carolina and skated in a career-high 14 games with the Hurricanes last season. Brown signed with Carolina as a free agent on April 12, 2014, following his four-year collegiate career at Boston College.

Stempniak is being recalled after suffering an upper-body injury during the first game of his conditioning stint with Charlotte on Friday night in Utica.



Abysmal power play costing Hurricanes big time

Andrew Schnittker, Sports Editor

7 hrs ago

The start to the 2017-18 season has been a mixed bag for the Carolina Hurricanes. While the team has a solid record at 6-5-4, the Canes are not on the pace they need to be to get back to the postseason for the first time since 2009.

There are a few factors that have held the team back from a better start, but the most glaring, and the one most likely to push the NHL's longest-active playoff drought to nine years, is a lack of production on the power play. The Canes' man advantage has been woefully inept thus far on the young season.

Carolina has scored a measly six goals on 49 power-play opportunities, and ranks 29th out of 31 teams with a 12.2



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conversion percentage. Struggles on the power play are nothing new for the Canes either. Since ranking 15th in the league in head coach Bill Peters's first season in 2014-15, the team has ranked 24th and 21st, respectively, in each of the last two seasons.

Finding its way into the top half of the league with the man advantage is something the Canes will have to strive for if they want to accomplish their goals this year. Of the teams in the top 15 of the league on the power play, 11 currently occupy playoff position. In fact, in each of the last three seasons, at least seven of the top 15 have reached the postseason.

The Canes know the power play has to be better, with Peters saying as much after the team's 4-3 overtime loss to the Chicago Blackhawks Saturday night, and that the team would look at personnel changes to try and improve it.

"Tough segment for the power play," Peters said. "Five games, didn't score. [Chicago got one]. Don't think it showed up as a power-play goal, but our guy didn't on the ice yet, so in essence it's a power-play goal. When you're not winning the special teams battle, it makes it hard."

It's pretty easy to find direct examples of the power-play struggles costing the Canes at least one point in the

standings this season. Of the team's nine total losses this year (regulation and overtime combined), seven have come by one goal. In five of those games, the Canes have failed to score even once on the power play.

That's five instances where even doing the bare minimum would have gotten the Canes at least one additional point in the standings. Add five points to the team's current total of 16, and the Canes would be tied for third in the Metropolitan Division, instead of four points out of a wildcard.

If there's a positive, it's that the Canes' players are clearly aware the power play is costing the team points and needs to improve.

"I think the power play's been struggling as of late," forward Jeff Skinner said. "We've got to find a way to turn that around. It's costing us in some situations where we need a bit of a jump and we could maybe use one from the PP but we're not getting it. It's got to be better."

Whether it's personnel changes, stylistic or structural changes, Peters, assistant coach Rod Brind'Amour and the Canes have to find a way to jumpstart the power play. Without better production up a man, Carolina is likely to be looking at another long summer when this season wraps up.



Hurricanes host Stars with both teams searching for identities

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Two NHL teams -- Carolina and Dallas - still tinkering offensively will square off Monday night at PNC Arena.

by [STATS](#)

11h ago • 2 min read Update 11h ago

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Two [NHL teams](#) -- Carolina and Dallas -- still tinkering offensively will square off Monday night at PNC Arena.

The [Dallas Stars](#), using a break in the schedule this past week to log some much-needed practice time, switched up their line combinations prior to a 5-0 victory over the New York Islanders on Friday.

Coach Ken Hitchcock said a pair of lopsided losses within a four-day span to the Winnipeg Jets made the decision easy to separate his top scoring duo of Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin -- each of whom have eight goals and 16 points.

"What happens is when you have one line that is doing everything the tendency is to let it do everything, and that's the feeling I had that was happening on our hockey club," Hitchcock said. "We were just allowing that one line to save the day and in the end ... the two games against Winnipeg were a wakeup call for me. We do need way more (offensive) participation if we are going to beat good teams because they have two and in some cases three lines that score. We just needed more people involved.

"The other thing for me with Benn and Seguin is a next level of leadership; they've got to take on the responsibility of helping other people," the coach added. "They did that against the Islanders."

Meanwhile, the [Hurricanes](#), with just a 2-2-3 home record this season, continue to struggle on the power play, dropping to 29th in the league. Carolina had an opportunity to put Chicago away in the third period Saturday night, but failed to score yet again with the man advantage and ended up blowing a two-goal lead in a 4-3 overtime loss.

Carolina ended up 0-for-3 on the power play against the Blackhawks, managing just one shot on goal. The Hurricanes have gone five straight games without a man-advantage goal and have tallied just one in 10 games.

"It has been a tough segment for the power play," said Carolina coach Bill Peters, whose team has just six power-play goals this season -- 30th in the league. "When you are not winning the special team battles it's hard."

Peters said he plans to consult with assistant coach Rod Brind'Amour, who runs the team's power play, and see what changes can be made prior to the Monday night game with the Stars.

"I think we have to make some personnel changes, that would be my opinion, my two cents," Peters said.



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"The power play has been struggling, but we've got to find a way to turn that around because it is costing us in situations where we need a jump and we're not getting it," said Jeff Skinner, Carolina's top goal scorer.

Dallas, first in the [NHL](#) on the power play, jumped out to a 4-0 lead on the Hurricanes three weeks ago at home before holding on for a 4-3 victory, extending its win streak over Carolina to six straight dating to March 2015.



Hurricanes Return Brown, Recall Di Giuseppe

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: November 12, 2017

The Hurricanes have made a swap at forward, assigning Patrick Brown to Charlotte and recalling Phil Di Giuseppe from the Checkers.

Brown has been with the Hurricanes since October 31, but has not appeared in a game for Carolina this season, serving as a healthy extra in each contest. With Charlotte this season, the Checkers captain has recorded four points (1g, 3a) and 25 points in nine games.

This marks the first NHL recall of the season for Di Giuseppe. The fourth-year pro currently ranks fourth on the

Checkers in scoring with 12 points in 14 games, including eight in his last seven. Di Giuseppe has spent much of the last two seasons in the NHL, logging 24 points (8g, 16a) in 77 career contests with Carolina.

The Hurricanes have also recalled Lee Stempniak from his conditioning stint with the Checkers. The veteran forward appeared in one game with Charlotte but left Friday's game early in the first period and did not return.

The Checkers' longest road trip of the year is rolling into its final week, with the team taking on Springfield in a morning game on Wednesday.

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1082991 Carolina Hurricanes

Peters promising some changes for Hurricanes

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

NOVEMBER 12, 2017 7:53 AM



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Carolina Hurricanes coach Bill Peters allows assistant coach Rod Brind'Amour to take charge of the team's power play.

But as Peters said Saturday, "I think we have to make some personnel changes myself. It will be my opinion, my two cents."

Something has to give. After going 0-for-3 on the power play with one shot Saturday in a 4-3 overtime loss to the Chicago Blackhawks, the Canes are 1-for-26 in the past 10 games and 0-for-14 in the past five.

Peters likes to break the season up into five-game segments. Other than Jeff Skinner's power-play goal against the Anaheim Ducks on Oct. 29, everything else has come up empty the past two segments.

When a team fails to convert on five power plays and wins 3-1, as the Canes did Tuesday against the Florida Panthers, it goes on a checklist for things to be corrected in a later practice. But on Saturday, it denied the Canes (6-5-4) a point they can't afford to be giving away and ended a two-game win streak.

"It's costing us in some situations where we need a bit of a jump, where we could use one from the PP (power play), but we're not getting it," Skinner said.

On the Canes' first power play Saturday, the Blackhawks had more scoring chances than Carolina. The Blackhawks' Brandon Saad shook free on a shorthanded breakaway, forcing a penalty shot as defenseman Noah Hanifin tried to corral the speedy forward and slashed him.

Canes goalie Scott Darling easily denied Saad's attempt, although Saad would later be the one to beat his former Blackhawks teammate for the overtime winner.

Speaking of overtime ...

Whether it's execution, shot selection, a lack of finish or lack of confidence, the Canes can't find a way to win in those three-on-three overtime sessions the fans tend to love and the goalies probably dread.

The Canes have had five games go beyond regulation this season, winning the season-opener in a shootout against Minnesota but losing the past four. They were pretty dominant three-on-three against Anaheim and Arizona but couldn't score, losing both games in shootouts.

On Saturday, first Elias Lindholm and then Justin Faulk had chances to end it for the Hurricanes early in the overtime. But backup goalie Anton Forsberg, in net for Chicago as Corey Crawford had the day off, made the two stops, and Saad soon beat Darling five-hole for the winner after a Canes' defensive mixup.

"We may have to look at some personnel (changes) there, too," Peters said of overtime.

The Canes, coming off a 3-1 road win Friday against Columbus, had other issues Saturday. They never trailed in the game until Saad's goal, taking a 2-0 lead after the first period and 3-1 lead after two as Brock McGinn scored twice and Skinner notched his eighth of the season.

"In the third period, especially at home with a two-goal lead, you've got to be able to close those out," Canes forward Derek Ryan said.

But Alex DeBrincat scored the second of his two goals in the third and defenseman Gustav Forsling scored from the point on a shot that Darling couldn't track or stop.

With the Canes leading 3-2, Skinner was looking at an open net but missed high and later was denied on a backhand by Forsberg.

"Sometimes you try to get those off as quick as you can," Skinner said. "You've got to bear down, especially late in the game."

And especially on the power play. And in overtime.

News Observer LOADED: 11.13.2017

1083005 Dallas Stars

An early-season goal is on the line for Ken Hitchcock and the Stars during their upcoming road trip

By Mike Heika

A lineup shuffle produced stunning results for the Stars on Friday in a 5-0 win over the New York Islanders, but coach Ken Hitchcock said the real test for his team awaits on the road.

Dallas will play at Carolina on Monday, at Florida on Tuesday and at Tampa Bay on Thursday. That's a pretty rough schedule for a team currently 3-5-0 away from home.

"We need to win on the road to keep pace with everything that is going on," Hitchcock said of a tough Western Conference playoff race. "We have to have a better road record if we expect to be a playoff team."

The 9-7-0 Stars currently hold one of the wild-card playoff spots in the West after 16 games, and Hitchcock said one of his team's early-season goals is to be in the playoffs after 20 games. This trip will be key in that.

Of course, just as important is building unity and finding the right chemistry in the first year under a new coaching staff. Hitchcock made massive changes to his forward lines for the last game, moving Jamie Benn to center with Alexander Radulov and Gemel Smith and flanking Tyler Seguin with Mattias Janmark and Devin Shore. The top line of Benn-Seguina-Radulov has been one of the hottest scoring lines in the NHL, but Hitchcock said the Stars need more balance.

"We weren't getting it done with one line," he said. "That line was playing well, but we weren't winning hockey games, and we're in the winning business."

Hitchcock said Tyler Pitlick will return from an upper-body injury that kept him out for two games, and that could force a change on the third or fourth line.

However, the real challenge on the road will probably focus on defense and goaltending. Dallas ranks second in the NHL at home in goals against average (1.75) and third in save percentage (.934). The Stars rank 25th on the road at 3.63 and 27th at .883.

Hitchcock said Ben Bishop will start at Carolina and Kari Lehtonen at Florida, and he would decide on the Tampa Bay game after seeing those two performances. Bishop played parts of five seasons with the Lightning, but Hitchcock said his decision will be performance-based.

"Whoever gives us the best chance of winning the game, that's who we'll go with," Hitchcock said. "That's just the way it is."

As for the line juggling that looked so good on Friday?

"They were good in one game, so let's see how it moves forward," he said. "I did like the 1-2 punch a lot, but we'll get a better read on the road."

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 11.13.2017

1082985 Buffalo Sabres

'They've lost the point of the kneel': Doug Allen on the anthem, protests and patriotism

By Tim O'Shei | Published Sat, Nov 11, 2017 | Updated Sun, Nov 12, 2017



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Doug Allen walked into KeyBank Center Tuesday night wearing a warm jacket over his black-and-white tux and an NRA baseball cap over his bald head. He said hello, excused himself to drop the coat and cap in the green room, and headed to the Zamboni entrance that leads to the Buffalo Sabres' ice surface.

In about 45 minutes, Allen would walk a blue-and-yellow carpet onto the ice and do what he does about three dozen nights a year: sing the national anthem.

Allen, 53, has sung "O Canada" and "The Star-Spangled Banner" for the Sabres since the early 1990s, and he has been the team's primary anthem singer since 2005. He cuts a sharp-dressed, goateed-man image and sings a straight-up, no-frills anthem that is instantly recognizable to fans.

They're calling his name now – "Doug! Doug!" – as he chats in the Zamboni bay. On most nights, he'd be bantering with fans, and posing for pictures with his signature index-finger point — the same one he uses to punctuate the final lines of the anthem: "Land of the free, and the home of the brave."

But tonight, he's chatting a little more quietly and a lot more intensely. He's talking about something that's been on his mind — and President Trump's mind, Colin Kaepernick's mind, the NFL's collective mind and, well ... who hasn't thought about this one?

Allen is talking about professional athletes protesting during the national anthem, a trend that began when Kaepernick took a knee to protest what he called the unfair treatment of black citizens in the United States and that exploded into a national debate when Trump voiced his objection to the practice. And in a broader sense, Allen is talking about what that means — and where people physically and metaphorically stand — in America.

"Obviously, there is all kinds of stuff that goes through your mind," Allen says. "Some things you can say, and some things you shouldn't say, because we're all human."

Allen makes two things quickly clear: He believes players have a right to protest, and he is pleased that it hasn't appeared to happen during his own presentations of the anthem. (The anthem protests have been prevalent in the National Football League, but not the National Hockey League.)

"In one sense, they accomplished something by bringing this discussion out," Allen said. "The discussion has been overshadowed by the kneeling at the football games and the debates that happened about the kneeling ..."

"They've lost the point of the kneel and just caused controversy."

Though the national anthem is intended to be a unifying symbol, it often is not. The lyrics were written first as a poem in 1814 by Francis Scott Key, a 35-year-old lawyer. But "The Star-Spangled Banner," as it was later named, didn't actually become a national anthem until an act of Congress made it so in 1931.

It took more than a century of debate, consideration and comparisons against rival compositions ("America the Beautiful," "God Bless America" and "Yankee Doodle" among them) for the song to become the anthem.

Marc Ferris, author of "Star-Spangled Banner: The Unlikely Story of America's National Anthem," said the song always has had a political tinge to it.

Marc Ferris is the author of "Star-Spangled Banner: The Unlikely Story of America's National Anthem."

"It's so amazing to me how the flag is just a piece of cloth, right?" he said. "The song is just a bunch of lyrics and a melody. But the emotions are just tied into it. It's just amazing. It's incredible. It's complicated."

But even Ferris, who devoted years studying the anthem to write his book, is surprised by the controversy around it.

"Journalists ask me questions (about) the taking of the knee," he said. "This has been unbelievable. Never could I have foreseen this. Never."

Allen, who first learned the anthem from his second-grade music teacher when he was growing up in Gowanda, also has studied the story behind the song. When he's singing on the ice, Allen sometimes envisions what Key observed on the night he wrote the song.

Key was aboard a ship in Baltimore Harbor and watched a battle between the Americans and British during the War of 1812. Much like "a journalist," to borrow a descriptor used by Ferris, Key wrote what he saw on the back of a letter.

Allen tells the story: "It was an overwhelming situation for us. ... Our cannons were not able to reach out into the bay far enough to do any damage to the British fleet. And yet they could lob bombs onto us. There was a ground battle happening too. Basically, about all we could do is hunker down and hold out."

To show they would not surrender, the Americans raised a massive flag. The "rocket's red glare" and those bombs "bursting in air" provided the night-time illumination that Key needed to see that "our flag was still there."

Allen keeps on by quoting the song: "Oh say, does that Star Spangled Banner yet wave, o'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave?"

When Allen sings those final words of the first verse (there actually are four verses, but only the first is typically performed) he thinks of himself as posing a question to everyone in the arena.

"When I sing that section," he said, "I'm asking them, and myself, 'Do I still love my country? Is the flag still important? Is this still America that represents freedom and prosperity and all of those things that we love about our country?'"

"Does the flag still mean that?"

Earlier this year, a sales representative from Pegula Sports and Entertainment, which owns both the Sabres and Buffalo Bills, reached out to Jason Cordova.

A 43-year-old retired Army captain, Cordova is the owner of Finger Food Products, a Niagara Falls company that makes Original Pizza Logs. He does business with both the Bills and Sabres, and the Pegula rep had an attractive hockey opportunity for him. The Sabres have a years-long tradition of inviting veterans to stand on the ice next to Allen as he sings the anthem.

Jason Cordova, whose Niagara Falls company makes Original Pizza Logs, quickly accepted the opportunity to sponsor a veteran's program for the Buffalo Sabres.

Would Cordova, as a military veteran, like to have Original Pizza Logs sponsor the program?

Cordova's answer was an immediate yes.

"When I hear the anthem, it's one of the sweetest sounds in all the world," said Cordova, who still stands at attention when he hears the anthem, even if it's audible in the distance from the Niagara Falls Air Base, which is near his business. "It immediately triggers all the thoughts of all the veterans who served before me. It triggers gratitude. Immediately. Without hesitation."

To Cordova, the flag and the anthem still represent — to mirror Allen's words — freedom, prosperity, and love for country. For him, like so many veterans, this is deeply rooted. Cordova's grandfather, Joseph R. Vara, served the duration of World War II in the Army.

Vara was a father figure to Cordova, who grew up four doors from his grandfather's house in Amherst. Vara once told his grandson that his biggest regret was turning down a field commission to become an officer.



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"Papa, I'll be an officer for you one day," Cordova told his grandfather. He kept that promise: Cordova became an Army officer in May 1997 — six months after his grandfather died.

"That's why the anthem and the patriotism, all of that matter," Cordova said. "Unapologetically."

Cordova, who provides four 100-level tickets for the veteran honored at each game, was moved by the woman who joined anthem singer Anna Heerd for the season opener. Allen didn't perform that game; he had a musical rehearsal at his church. The veteran's name is Marian J. Morreale, and she is a 94-year-old Coast Guard veteran whose leg was amputated a year ago. During the anthem, Morreale stood.

"That was one of my most prideful moments during this whole anthem controversy," Cordova said. "This was still going on; the Bills and other teams were still kneeling, and here is a 94-year-old woman with one leg who stood."

"I support her."

National Anthem, Veteran, WWII, Anthem, Buffalo Sabres, Sabres...

WWII veteran and amputee Marian Morreale proudly stands for the National Anthem before tonight's Sabres game. Video Courtesy: MSG. #Sabres

Posted by 7 Eyewitness News WKBW on Thursday, October 5, 2017

The anthem protests across sports have slowed somewhat in recent weeks. Allen, like Cordova, would like to see them end altogether.

"I would like to see it stop," Allen said. "But with the understanding that now, let's get all you guys together and do something about it."

Athletes, he points out, have both the money and the platform to effectively band together and create real change.

"Let's go ahead and do something tangible and work together to address some of those things," he said. "I don't know what it's like to be an African-American in this country. I never will. And so I recognize that I don't understand what they have experienced. But I also know that in this country, we all have opportunity, we all have the ability to address a need, an issue, whatever, and to try to do something to make it better."

When Allen ponders what athletes could do by directing their money and influence at a cause, he comes from the opposite perspective. Despite the image cast by his tux and operatic voice, he does not live a high-spending lifestyle. Allen and wife, April, live in a modest home in Hamburg with their three children, ages 20, 17 and 15. They don't buy cable or satellite television, but rather use an antenna.

Allen works full-time as maintenance manager for the Buffalo City Mission, which provides shelter for the homeless. He's also the worship director at Fellowship Wesleyan Church in West Seneca.

Ask Allen — who, as the National Rifle Association cap hints, is an avid hunter — about his gun collection, and he jokes, "Mine are very utilitarian. I'm poor — I can't afford fancy guns!"

But he knows his perspective, just like those athletes, would be valuable. He grasps his name recognition in Western New York, and has occasionally, fleetingly, mulled running for office. Allen is a registered Republican; he believes in lower government spending, tax cuts, and gun owners' rights.

But right now, he has no plans to run. Plus, his gig as the Sabres' anthem singer gives him the opportunity to promote patriotism to an arena packed with people several nights a month.

In the Zamboni bay on that recent evening, an older man wearing a Vietnam veteran cap approached Allen. The man, Tom Zak, is veteran of both the Navy and Army. He was admiring an American flag pin on Allen's lapel.

"That's a Secret Service pin," Allen told him, noting the agency's emblem in the middle of the flag."

"Is that right?" Zak asked.

"It was given to me by a member of the Secret Service many years ago," Allen said. "He came down and introduced himself while I was in the penalty box and he gave me two of them. I've appreciated them ever since."

Their conversation was soon interrupted by a music booming through the arena sound system. The Sabres and their opponents, the Washington Capitals, were taking the ice. Allen, then, had to take the ice as well. It was then he met the veteran whom he would honor that evening, Brittney Bake, a Navy veteran who served two decades and was deployed four times.

Bake, it turns out, was Zak's daughter. She was joined by her mother, Sally Zak; her husband, Nathan, who is also a Navy veteran; and their 12-year-old twin sons, Noah and Zak.

Bake, when asked off the ice about the wave of protests, said, "I served 20 years so they have the right to do what they want, but I'll always stand for the anthem."

Which is exactly what she did on the ice that evening, with her hand held steady over her heart. When Allen sang the final words of the anthem — Home of the brave — he pointed directly at her. And the crowd roared.

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1082986 Buffalo Sabres

At least at back end, net results are improving for Sabres

ByMike Harrington | Published Sun, Nov 12, 2017 | Updated Sun, Nov 12, 2017

Ineffective offense, especially on the power play, and injuries on defense have plagued the Buffalo Sabres all season. At least the other facet of their game is getting shored up.

Buffalo goaltenders Robin Lehner and Chad Johnson combined to give up just five goals in the three games last week, which added to the frustration of a 1-1-1 stretch. Johnson, in particular, had one of his strongest games of the season in Saturday's 2-1 overtime loss in Montreal.

"We played a good game and we were right there to get two points out of the night," Johnson said after the game in Bell Centre. "It's just frustrating to not get the number of wins that we'd like but it's hockey and we've just got to regroup and take the positives out of this game."

No punch from offense, no hope for Sabres to survive

Starter Robin Lehner was solid in Tuesday's 3-1 win over Washington and gave up only two goals in Friday's 4-1 loss to Florida that saw the Panthers score a pair of empty-netters to seal the deal. Throw in Johnson's 27-save performance Saturday and the Buffalo tandem compiled a 1.65 goals-against average and .940 save percentage for the week by stopping 78 of 83 shots.

Breaking down the net numbers for the season, however, tells a tale of very uneven play from all players on the ice. Overall, the Sabres are 27th in the league in goals-against and 29th in save percentage at just .888.

Lehner is 4-6-1, 2.90/.905 and has a ledger featuring huge disparities between home and road play. In KeyBank Center, Lehner is 2-2-1,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1.49/.952. But on the road, he's 2-4, 4.53/.848 and got pulled early in Brooklyn and Dallas.

Johnson is 0-2 at home with very ugly numbers (5.48 and .855). He's much better on the road, at 1-1-2, 2.96/.897. And while Johnson hasn't been victimized by many bad goals, he's been frustrated by not helping his team out with a few more saves. Heading into Saturday, he had given up 13 goals in his previous three starts.

"He was really good tonight," said Buffalo defenseman Nathan Beaulieu. "He was probably our best player. It sucks. You feel for him and for everyone else in the room."

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NET RESULTS

Charting the Buffalo Sabres' goaltenders so far this season

	Lehner	Johnson
	W-L-O/GAA/Sv. %	W-L-O/GAA/Sv. %
Overall	4-6-1/2.90/.905	1-3-2/3.55/.885
Home	2-2-1/1.49/.952	0-2-0/5.48/.855
Road	2-4-0/4.53/.848	1-1-2/2.96/.897

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The goaltending question will be a seasonlong storyline to watch, with both players on one-year contracts and aiming for their next deal.

"I want to have great numbers and that's what it's all about in this league unfortunately," Johnson said. "But I've felt good about my games. They've been tough games with good scoring chances guys have capitalized on. ... I want to be able to make those saves. I've felt good about my game, which is hard to say sometimes when you're giving up four or five. You have to really be honest with yourself positive or negative regardless of the score."

Johnson stopped Alex Galchenyuk on a breakaway in the first two minutes Saturday, with the Sabres still fragile in the wake of Friday's clunker. It seemed to give the team life and Buffalo went on to outshoot the Canadiens, 16-7, in the first period. Early in the third period, Johnson stopped former Sabre Paul Byron on another clear break a few seconds after Andrew Shaw had scored the tying goal.

"Chad was excellent," said coach Phil Housley "They just get that goal to tie it up and they get a breakaway and he makes a huge save for us. We don't get any points if he doesn't make that save. We can't fault our goaltending. They're giving us a chance to win and hopefully we can give them some run support as we move forward here next week."

Johnson said he could feel the momentum of the game shifting toward the Habs after the Shaw goal and was happy to help his team stem the tide and preserve a point.

"Obviously after a goal it's huge the first minute or two," he said. "It's always the most important. I knew the next save was going to be important and it was a breakaway. So I'm happy for making that. If it helped preserve it ... it was positive to get the one point there."

Housley was frustrated that officials took the rare step of huddling in overtime and taking away a high sticking penalty on Montreal center Jonathan Drouin, deciding not to make the call even though they had whistled the play dead.

"We get a penalty called back which was pretty odd that we're calling penalties back now," Housley said. "They said when he followed through on the shot, he was following through. But if you watch it, I disagree because you're in control of your own stick. To me, it was a penalty but it wasn't called."

The Sabres were off on Sunday. They return to practice Monday and then head to Pittsburgh for Tuesday's game against the Penguins in PP

Paints Arena. It will be their first meeting of the season against the two-time defending Stanley Cup champions, who beat Nashville in the Cup final in June when Housley was an assistant coach for the Predators.

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Sportsnet.ca / HIS NAME IN LIGHTS

BY KRISTINA RUTHERFORD

Spitting chiclets, scaring bears and scoring game-winners. It's no wonder James Neal is the heart of the Vegas Golden Knights' early success. And why that could be a problem.

James Neal opens his mouth and scrunches his face to help raise his scabbed upper lip. All that effort from the Vegas Golden Knights winger results in a view of an absolutely battered gum that once had at least four front teeth and is now home to a gap you could fit half a hockey puck through. "Everything's sensitive," Neal says, standing rink-side after an off-day skate in Toronto. With those teeth missing up top, all aggressively punched out by a stick to the face in late October, Neal "can't do anything," he says. Eating is tough, and don't bother asking him to whistle because he doesn't think that's funny and "it hurts too much." The wounds reopened during a game a couple days ago and blood poured from Neal's mouth. Says the Golden Knights leading goal-scorer, now dressed in sneakers, knee-high socks, shorts and a Vegas hoodie: "Nothing's good right now."

Well, nothing inside Neal's mouth, at least. This season is a whole other story: "Everything's gone better than you'd expect," Neal says, and that's an understatement. Nobody predicted any of this for the Golden Knights. Six days after Las Vegas was the site of the worst mass shooting in modern American history, the NHL's 31st franchise played its first-ever game, and the team not only became a rallying point for a grieving city but, to everyone's surprise, they also started winning, which is very un-expansion-like. Vegas matched a 100-year-old NHL record for the quickest team to nine wins in an inaugural season — getting there in just 13 games — and the Golden Knights were the best in the NHL for part of October. Only five teams have more than Vegas's 21 points right now, and that's despite a tough stretch of late with their first-, second- and third-string goalies injured — including the face of the franchise in Marc-Andre Fleury.

For now, a gritty goal-scorer from Whitby, Ont., who's sick of food in smoothie form is wearing that franchise label. And you could argue Neal earned the right to share it with Fleury right out of the gate. As teammate Nate Schmidt puts it, "Nealer's pretty much the catalyst of what started our Vegas movement." That's a surprise, too, since Neal didn't think he'd even be in the lineup to start the season. He was in a cast until early August after playing with a broken right hand during Nashville's run to the Stanley Cup Final. Left unprotected by the Predators in the summer's expansion draft, Neal rehabbed and made an impact with Vegas immediately, scoring twice in the first game on Oct. 6, including the game-winner — from his knees.

There's no question the motivation is there for the second-round pick who has outscored all but four skaters taken ahead of him in the 2005 NHL Draft. Neal had a career-high 40 goals six seasons ago, he's had at least 21 in each of his nine seasons in this league, and this is a show-me year: his contract is up at the end of the season, and he's with a team few expect much from. Whether he becomes a key addition to a club looking to improve its playoff chances or sticks around and leads this unlikely early success story to more wins, it's a big year for the 30-year-old. "This is my fourth NHL team," Neal says. "I want to win."

NO. 18 WITH A BULLET



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Notching five goals in the Golden Knights' first three games, Neal put the league on notice that his ability to rack up 40 in a season may not be in the rearview.

James Neal was in Grade 4 and on the smaller side for a nine-year-old when he took black and red markers and went to work on his white bedroom wall. The oldest of five siblings, Neal staked out a spot where he didn't have hockey posters or a jersey hanging, and he wrote, in big block letters:

NHL

JAMES NEAL

2005

Being an '87 birthday, that last line was the year he expected to be drafted. Neal's dad, Peter, walked into his son's room, saw the artwork and couldn't believe his eyes. He gave James a talking to, by then familiar to all, "because I was always mad at the kids for destroying the house," Peter says. Neal laughs, thinking of his art. "My dad eventually painted over it," he says. Even under a couple of cover-up coats of paint, though, Peter says Neal's marker work was still visible.

Young Neal was probably ahead of his time in writing down his goals, but that's pretty consistent with his childhood from a hockey-intensity standpoint. His is a family that purchased Saturn cars because they had plastic doors, which meant dents from errant hockey pucks popped back into place easily. Up until two years before James's magic marker stunt, the family lived in Oshawa, but "we moved to Whitby for the rink," Peter explains. Whitby was home to a brand new six-pad facility, so ice time would be easier to come by. The family also made its own rink, which started in the backyard but moved because, as Neal recalls, "the living room window took a real beating." While neighbours were laying down salt to melt the ice in their driveways, Peter was out with a hose soaking his. This made things dicey for anyone who wanted to enter the Neal home on shoes. "It was hard on the pizza delivery guy," Peter says. To avoid injuries, he'd roll out a carpet.

MORE FROM SPORTSNET

Shipachyov: Russian players should think before leaving for NHL

BY SONNY SACHDEVA

Vegas GM McPhee: Vadim Shipachyov 'just wanted to go home'

BY EMILY SADLER

Outside of daily games on the street, in the front yard and in their home's front foyer (all four Neal boys wore full equipment and used full-sized sticks indoors, so chandelier lightbulbs were often replaced), Neal starred with the Wildcats of the Whitby Minor Hockey Association. In high school, he started to train over the summers with then-active NHLer Gary Roberts, who's now known for training many of the league's elite. One morning, a teenaged Neal had to commute from the family cottage on Balsam Lake back to Whitby for the workout. Neal was running up the road at the cottage to catch his ride when he "collided" with a bear. Both Neal and the bear were so startled they ran in opposite directions. Peter swears this is true.

To see all six-foot-three and 220 pounds of Neal bash around in the corners in search of the puck, you could maybe be convinced of that Chuck Norris-scares-a-bear story. But Neal wasn't this big as a teenager — and his lack of size is probably the reason he was a third-round pick in the OHL draft. Known as a quick skater who easily found the back of the net, Neal was just five-foot-nine in his midget year, and the Plymouth Whalers got him 80th overall. "It's weird about James," says former Whalers coach, Mike Vellucci. "I don't think he ever got the credit that he was due at that age group."

"For some reason, he was always under the radar."

Vellucci, now head coach of the Carolina Hurricanes affiliate in Charlotte, liked what he saw from Neal, despite his size. "I loved his hockey sense

and his compete level — I mean, he competed. He always had his feet moving, he was always involved in the play. You could tell he hated to lose."

Neal began his junior career at a lower tier with the Bowmanville Eagles, and by the time he suited up for his first full season in Plymouth, he stood his full six-foot-three. He wasn't just bigger, though. "You could see his confidence had grown, and he had this incredible shot — he started to use that more," Vellucci says. Neal put up 44 points in 67 games his first year in Plymouth, eighth-best in the league among rookies. That summer, the moment he'd scrawled on his bedroom wall came around. The NHL draft was held in Ottawa, and a kid named Sidney went first. Neal got a phone call informing him he'd been selected 33rd overall by the Dallas Stars. "For some reason," Vellucci says, "he was always under the radar."

Neal continued to star for the Whalers, and his final season in Plymouth, led them to the 2007 OHL championship, the first in franchise history. Neal scored the overtime winner to earn his team a Memorial Cup berth, and his eyes widen thinking about what he calls "the scariest tap-in of my life," because of what was on the line. "I was right in the middle of the net and Evan Brophey made an unbelievable play and he just slid it to me," Neal says. "Tapping it in was an amazing feeling."

And it was the type of moment the team expected from Neal. In 20 playoff games that season, he had 13 goals and 25 points. "He was a pure goal-scorer," Vellucci says. "He was our leader."

At the end of that season, just before Neal would begin his pro career, the coach took the 19-year-old aside and told him: "This is your chance to prove everybody wrong." Now, 11 years and four NHL teams later, that's exactly what Neal is trying to do in Las Vegas.

WHALING ON THE COMPETITION

Neal came into his first full season in Plymouth having sprouted to six-foot-three and went on to score 44 points in 67 games.

No. 18 for the Vegas Golden Knights has all 32 of his teeth and he's walking down a sparkly gold carpet, dressed sharply in a brown sports jacket and a tie with a growling tiger's face on it. It's opening night in Las Vegas, and Neal stops to sign autographs for some of the hundreds of fans who've turned up for pre-game festivities before watching the new team play its first game at home. Elvis has been outside the building for hours. Four Clydesdale horses tow a Dalmatian on a wagon nearby. But most surprising of all is the Golden Knights are 2-0-0, and Neal, the winger who missed training camp while recovering from injury, has already scored three goals.

A couple of hours later, Neal records Nos. 4 and 5 of the season, and a third straight game-winner to bring Vegas to 3-0-0. His former Penguins teammate, Fleury, is another major reason this team gets off to a perfect start. The goaltender grins when asked about Neal following the 5-2 win over Arizona. "He's a great shooter, a smart shooter. He's always hungry for more," Fleury says. "I'm glad we have him."

Finding himself on an expansion team four months after falling two games shy of winning a first career Stanley Cup, you wouldn't necessarily expect Neal to be as "glad" as his teammates. You'd think this would be the toughest transition of his career, a real disappointment. But on opening night in Las Vegas, he keeps repeating that the team has to "enjoy the opportunity we have here." And a little over a month later, on a road trip that includes a stop in Toronto, his message hasn't changed. He points out that at least the move to Las Vegas didn't come as a total surprise. With his contract expiring at the end of this season, he figured the Predators would leave him unprotected. "Honestly, I was more ready for what happened than in the past when it was just a phone call: 'You're traded,'" he says. "This wasn't as bad."

Neal can't tell you which trade was toughest for him to swallow, but he never expected either of the first two. In Dallas, at age 21 he earned his way onto the Calder Trophy ballot after a 37-point rookie season, and his 24 goals remain a Stars' record for rookies (not including the Minnesota



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era). He improved on that mark with 27 goals in Year 2, but was shipped to Pittsburgh in his third season to help a banged-up team — Crosby was out with a concussion, and Evgeni Malkin had season-ending knee surgery.

Neal had his best year statistically with the Penguins at age 24. Skating on Malkin's wing he put up 40 goals and 81 points in 2011–12 to earn some Hart Trophy votes. He figured he'd be a Penguin forever. But in 2014, following a second-round exit from the playoffs that saw Neal record just four points in 13 games, rumours swirled that he wanted out. "It got so twisted up," he says. "I never asked for a trade. I never wanted to leave Pittsburgh."

After three seasons with the Penguins and no championship, Neal got a phone call while he was at Matt Niskanen's wedding, sitting at a table with a bunch of guys he was about to find out were no longer teammates. "I was north of Minnesota, in the woods, and I get this voice mail," Neal says. "It was a bunch of mixed emotions, especially because it was Nashville. I didn't know much about the Preds. I was leaving a hockey market to go into what at the time wasn't the biggest market," Neal pauses. "It was tough, but as you get older you realize you're not going to be with a team forever."

ROLLING STONE

After making a Cup Final with his third NHL franchise, Neal is determined to win in Vegas with his fourth.

At stop No. 3 of his NHL career, Neal quickly became a valuable piece of the Predators offence. He missed time because of injuries that first year but still managed 23 goals in 67 games, and then in 2015–16 he put up 31 in a full season. Neal joined a nucleus of players that helped bring the franchise from a first-round playoff exit in 2015 to a Cup Final appearance in 2017. "It turned out to be unbelievable," he says, despite the eventual loss to his former team. Neal also played the final two rounds with that heavily-taped broken hand, barely able to hold onto his stick — even with needles before every game to numb the pain. "You do everything you can to play," he says. It's a lesson he learned as a kid, he adds: "Unless you're dead, you're getting on the ice."

Neal now has a plate and screws in his hand and he was still patiently waiting for it to heal in late August, when he flew out to Sonoma Valley in California for a meeting with Golden Knights owner, Bill Foley. The pair shot a commercial for Foley Estates Vineyard and Winery, then ate and drank and talked wine, food and hockey. "It was awesome," Neal says. He was very intrigued by the sommelier on hand and the work required to do that job, but of course hockey was the main topic of conversation. "We talked about being an expansion team, but making the playoffs," he says. "It's a different expansion team than in the past. We have good players, we've got a great goaltender, so there's no reason why we shouldn't expect the most out of our guys."

"When you think 'expansion team,' you think you're going to lose. But for us, we're here to win. Every guy in our dressing room has something to prove, and we're playing that way."

He continues: "I think when you think 'expansion team,' you think you're going to lose, you're going to get good draft picks. But for us, we're here to win. Every guy in our dressing room has something to prove, and we're playing that way."

According to Schmidt, it's Neal who's setting the pace with his play, spreading the message that a playoff-bound season is well within the team's grasp. The defenceman shakes his head when he considers the start Neal had to the campaign despite skating with the team for a total of just four days before the inaugural game. "That might be new recipe for success: Take training camp off, score eight goals in the first four games," Schmidt says, laughing. (It was actually six goals in four games.) "But he's the guy we look to, to say, 'If we're gonna have success, this guy's gonna have to play well.' And that's what he's doing."

NOT MINDING THE GAP

Losing four teeth to a stick early in the season sucks when it comes to eating, but as Neal explains it: "Unless you're dead, you're getting on the ice."

Schmidt then launches into a recap of the start of the season: "We got over the hump here, got the first goal. He's the guy. We come back and win the game in Dallas — voila, he's the guy that gets the winner." Schmidt throws his hands up. "It takes a lot of pressure off other players when he's performing well. And it is a lot of pressure for him, but he's been doing really well with it and just getting other guys to understand that we need everybody to pull up."

Schmidt has one hand up in front of him, like it's resting on a ledge. He moves it a little higher: "When Nealer's playing well, it brings the rest of us up as well."

Across the league, only 10 players have more than Neal's nine goals, and his three game-winners rank second overall.

"That's a world-class player right there," says fellow forward, Jonathan Marchessault, the 30-goal-scorer for Florida last year, looking to his left, where Neal is sitting in the visitor's dressing room in Toronto. "He puts the puck in the net more easily than anyone on our team. Even with the high expectations on him, he has been able to deliver."

Hours later, Neal gets his team on the board against the Maple Leafs with his eighth goal of the season. He narrowly misses his second of the night in the dying seconds of overtime, a five-hole attempt that Frederik Andersen just manages to keep out. Neal gives himself a smack to the helmet in frustration, then slumps over his team's bench. Moments later, his shootout attempt is stopped. The Knights come away with just one point.

Neal can't deliver a game-winner every night, but for this over-performing Golden Knights team, his ability to put the puck in the net when the stakes are high has been the most welcome of many early surprises. It's anybody's guess whether Neal finishes this season where he started it or joins his fifth NHL franchise. All he can focus on now is his play on the ice. Neal flashes that big gap along his upper gum again, and a pristine full set of teeth along the bottom of his mouth. "It would be pretty amazing to win in Las Vegas," he says.

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THE EVOLUTION OF STEVEN STAMKOS

BY GARE JOYCE

How the Tampa Bay Lightning centre went from superstar sniper to the NHL's premier playmaker.

The season was only weeks old, what they call a small sample, especially when events don't match expectations. Still, it stood out as an anomaly. Not the fact that Steven Stamkos was leading the league in scoring. The last time he played 82 games, he had racked up 72 points, just a point outside the NHL's top 10, and his 43 goals had landed him second only to Alexander Ovechkin. So, this wasn't a third-liner leading the league in the first month of the season. And you expected some noise from the Gulf Coast when hostilities restarted this fall: The Lightning were many people's pick to win the Stanley Cup last season but wound up missing the playoffs, which you could fairly attribute to a plague of injuries. If Stamkos had been around for more than 17 games, it would surely have played out differently. He and the Lightning were ready and rested and motivated to make up for that lost season.



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No, it wasn't that Stamkos was leading the league in scoring. It was the way he was racking up points that jumped out. In his first eight seasons in the league only once did he register more assists than goals, and in that campaign, 2010-11, helpers won out by one thin point (45 goals, 46 assists). It's not that Stamkos is a one-dimensional player at all, but you think of him as one of the game's great finishers, master of the one-timer. And yet, 10 games into the 2017-18 season, Stamkos was the early Art Ross leader with an almost unimaginable line: three goals and 17 assists.

Okay, again, I'll grant you that 10 games is a small window. We're used to seeing players catch fire for a stretch or slump. The same goes for their teams. But here was a player whose game was at its highest level who also seemed like he'd become an entirely different player. Stamkos's stats have taken a turn in the past 10 days. His goal in a win over Columbus Saturday night was his fourth in five games, and he added just one helper in those contests. His stat line now looks less dramatically out of its normal balance. Yet three of those four goals came on the power play — only twice this season has he scored at even strength. So, while it's not like he's completely eschewed scoring, not like he's taken a vow of charity over everything else. But it looks for all the world like Stamkos has transitioned from sniper to set-up man, seemingly over a single summer.

It's one thing for an NHL star's game to evolve over time. We saw it, in fact, with the Lightning's GM, Steve Yzerman, back in his playing days. At age 23, he was a 65-goal scorer on a .500 team. By the time he hit his 30s, he was a two-way centre scoring 20 goals or so, drawing Selke Trophy votes and raising Stanley Cups. Still, in contrast to the switch in Stamkos's game, Yzerman's metamorphosis played out over seasons.

OPTIMUS PRIME

Stamkos's GM, Steve Yzerman, went through a similar transformation from scorer to all-around threat during his time with the Red Wings, but it played out over several years.

Night-and-day changes? Well, they might happen at the elite level, but the only one that comes to this ravaged mind is Stan Mikita, who went from a couple of seasons with more than 140 penalty minutes to the Lady Byng Trophy, along with the Hart and Art Ross. Mikita's second phase, though, seems a matter of mindset more than skill set.

There might be other comparables to Stamkos, but they're easier to come up with if you venture into other arenas. Look at the NBA. In his time with the 76ers, Wilt Chamberlain set every single-game and single-season scoring record imaginable, averaging more than 50 points a game and famously putting up 100 one night in Hershey, Pa. Yet, with the Lakers late in his career, Chamberlain led the NBA in assists.

Steven Stamkos as the NHL's assists leader this season — maybe it's not so dramatic a shift as Wilt's but if you bet on that proposition in Vegas before puck drop, I extend my heartiest congratulations and I am accepting donations.

"At the risk of ridicule: Going into the 2008 draft, I did not see Stamkos being a sniper in the NHL."

Despite the swing in his numbers, Stamkos downplays the notion that he has remade his game. "I've been asked that question a lot lately," he said on Prime Time Sports on Wednesday. "I haven't really changed much." Elite players don't have just one style of play, they have all kinds of arrows in their quiver. Like actors who can do Shakespeare and rom-coms. Like boxers who can come forward and brawl or counterpunch. The very best players have at their disposal many different approaches to the game. Yzerman was a case in point. The interesting question isn't whether Stamkos has changed. No, it's whether this is a new Stamkos or an old one resurgent.

TAPPING INTO HIS ROOTS

The knee-drop one-timer wasn't always Stamkos's signature. As a teenager with the Sting, he was known for his unselfishness and drew comparisons to Jonathan Toews.

I have been a Stamkos watcher from his days as a 16-year-old with the OHL's Sarnia Sting. In fact, I remember signing a copy of a book I wrote about Sidney Crosby's junior days in Rimouski that was gifted to Stamkos for his 15th birthday. And I will admit to this at the risk of ridicule: Going into the 2008 draft, I thought that he'd be a first-line centre, a franchise player and a potential First- or Second-Team All-Star, but I did not see him being a sniper in the NHL. I did not see him as the owner of a one-timer in the Brett Hull template.

Combing my memory banks and notes, what sticks out for me was that when I asked him about his favourite player, Stamkos, at 16, told me it was Yzerman. He wasn't really old enough to remember the 65-goal version of Stevie Y. As a kid, he would have seen Yzerman in the late '90s and early 2000s with Detroit. And, maybe because of that, I imagined that Stamkos would become a player in that mature-Yzerman mould. Yeah, he was a 50-goal scorer with the Sting, but if you can make a distinction between a scorer (someone who creates chances) and a sniper (who finds space and lets fly), I would have projected him as the former. I didn't see him ever finding himself in the running for the Rocket Richard Trophy.

MORE FROM SPORTSNET

Era Adjusted: Why Brett Hull's 1990-91 may never be surpassed

BY STEVE DANGLE

What makes Stamkos, Kucherov and the Lightning power play so dangerous

BY DIMITRI FILIPOVIC

I remember watching Stamkos almost single-handedly lead Sarnia to an upset win over Windsor in the playoffs in the spring of 2008. He jumped out at both ends of the rink; scoring on a breakaway one shift, thwarting a breakaway the other way on another. Yet when I spoke to his coach, Dave MacQueen, Stamkos's one-time finishing didn't even come up. In fact, MacQueen cited his young star's passing and playmaking abilities. "When he's not being selfish, nobody can be selfish," MacQueen said then. "He has made everybody on this team better. He has great vision and a sense of where his teammates are every second he's out there." MacQueen also cited Stamkos's defensive play: "When your best player is working hard without the puck, the others will do the same." His skating and hockey sense — seemingly everything came up other than the components of a sniper's game.

When he was in Sarnia, people who watched the OHL debated the relative merits of the leagues two 1990 birthdays — Stamkos and John Tavares, who scored 72 goals as a 16-year-old. The consensus: Tavares was a finisher; Stamkos was a playmaker. Some thought that Tavares might end up on the wing, while Stamkos would be a player along the lines of Jonathan Toews. Years later, the projections seemed to have been flipped around entirely. With the Islanders, Tavares improved his skating dramatically and, having entrenched himself at centre, wound up posting more assists than goals — he filled out his game. Meanwhile, the Lightning rode Stamkos's knee-drop one-timer.

"It used to be that the Lightning looked for players to complement Stamkos, but in Kucherov they have someone who can play right with him and not for him."

How could I have missed that element of Stamkos's game? I was ready to don the dunce cap and stand in the corner until earlier this week, when I spoke to a scout who watched an awful lot of Stamkos in his draft year, a scout whose team was in the hunt for the first-overall pick back in '08. "He was a different player in junior," the scout said. "He didn't have that pure one-touch finishing ability. He had tremendous skill, great skating and a really high hockey IQ. And it's probably the IQ and work ethic that made him into a different player than I projected. He worked on a single aspect of his game, the one-timer, that wasn't necessarily a weakness but it wasn't his strong suit. He worked on it and it became his strength."

Not just his strength, but his signature.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

In Kucherov, Stamkos has a running mate who can truly keep step. It's shown in the early going, with the Lightning stars sitting first and second in league scoring.

You might be tempted to see the change in Stamkos's game to this early point of this season as not elective but rather the by-product of a spate of injuries in recent years. But according to pro scouts I talked to, there's absolutely no truth to the idea that Stamkos has lost any of his physical gifts. In fact, his play is an indication that he has gained something, namely a linemate whose skill set is on a par with his own — right winger Nikita Kucherov. Said one pro scout: "I think [the assists] tell you more about Kucherov than Stamkos, really. You know, in the past, [Stamkos] has looked to shoot and his teammates have looked for him to shoot. He gave them the best chance to score anytime he's on the ice. But Kucherov really took off last year. To me, he was always a skilled player ... you knew he had first-line talent. After Christmas or so, his game took a big jump. He was a lot more dynamic. And [left winger Vladislav] Namestnikov is a great player, too, another guy whose game is on the rise. It used to be that [the Lightning] looked for players to complement Stamkos, but in Kucherov they have someone who can play right with him and not for him."

"I think I'm a guy who has always read the game and done whatever play is best at that time," Stamkos said. "And now, with how hot Kucherov is, the play is to get him the puck. On the power play or on a two-on-one ... my decision [is] based on what's the best play at that time and I'll make it. It just works out that everything [Kucherov] has been shooting has been great. Everything we've been doing is working and I can't say that I've gone into games thinking, 'Okay, I'm going to get two assists tonight.' It's just worked out that way. Having Kuch and I on the same line, one guy is going to be open ... and Kuch has been open so far."

With the Namestnikov-Stamkos-Kucherov line showing the way, the Lightning are out in front in the Eastern Conference, approximately where pundits thought they'd be last season. I suspect that Stamkos's numbers at season's end won't be as skewed as they have been so far. He's still on the point on Tampa Bay's power play and he's not back there because of his passing ability. That said, if I were betting, I'd like the 24-year-old Kucherov's chances of surpassing his career-best 40 goals, which he set last season mostly in Stamkos's absence. If Kucherov were to flirt with 50, it would be testament to the skills that Stamkos first flashed as a teenager and rebooted as he enters his prime.

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SINS OF THE FATHER

BY GARE JOYCE

You'd think being the son of a former NHLer would help pave the way for a talented young player. But, as outlined in this exclusive excerpt from Gare Joyce's new book 'Young Leafs', what the Maple Leafs risked by drafting William Nylander is that he'd be too much like his dad.

After an unimaginably bleak stretch that spanned a decade, the Toronto Maple Leafs affected a turnaround and gave their glory-starved fans something to cheer about last spring. While the focus of attention fell, rightly, on Auston Matthews, the first-overall pick in 2016 draft and the Calder Trophy winner, the rebirth started a couple of years before that with the selection of another first-rounder, William Nylander. In fact, the NHL named Nylander the Rookie of the Month in October and in March,

while Matthews and fellow Leafs freshman Mitch Marner won the honors once each in mid-season.

In Young Leafs, I track the building of a Maple Leafs team that looks poised to be a contender in the Eastern Conference for years to come and is already one of the most exciting teams in the league. If Nylander doesn't turn out to be the most important piece acquired by the management team that came in after Brian Burke, he was still the first — a bold and clean break from the former GM's antiquated vision of the game.

DOWNRIGHT OFFENSIVE

Nylander's nine points through the first nine games of the 2017-18 season are good for second on the Leafs behind Matthews.

William Nylander first appeared on Toronto's radar at NHL Central Scouting's combine in the city back in the spring of 2014. He was a player of interest, a guaranteed first-rounder, the second-ranked European player on Central Scouting's list. He had lived up to that billing at the world under-18 championships weeks earlier when he led the tournament in scoring. He was also a compelling story. His father, Michael, not only had played more than 900 games in the league with six NHL teams but also played with his son on Rogle in the Swedish Elite League that season. And even if you didn't know him by name or by reputation, even if you didn't care about hockey at all, William Nylander got everyone's attention whenever he walked into a room — with his self-assured sense of presence and a head of hair that borrowed equally from Prince Valiant and the boy band of your choice, he had to be someone. The top-ranked European player in that draft class, Kasperian Kapanen, noted, "Girls want their photo with him. We just hold the camera."

Even without the pedigree and the look, the younger Nylander would have gained attention with his play as a junior. At 16, he played a handful of games against proven pros with Sodertalje in the SEL. The year he became a full-time pro, splitting the season between Sodertalje, Modo, and Rogle, he scored 16 goals in 57 games. He had no holes in his skill set; he was elite in every facet of the offensive game. There was only one red flag, and it was one that he had no control over: his father.

In his long NHL career, Michael Nylander had crossed paths with many of the NHL executives and scouts who were evaluating his son, and Michael Nylander hadn't made a great impression on many of them. In the opinion of one NHL scout who had played with him, "He was a talented guy but a me-first type, selfish. He wasn't a coach killer, but he wasn't committed to the team concept. If he gets his goals, gets his contract ... whatever he can get out of it."

Another who played with Michael called him "the worst teammate I ever had ... it was always all about him."

That Michael played for himself was a common view. Not that he was poison in the dressing room — it was just that he wasn't what guys thought of as a good soldier, not even a soldier for hire, or a teammate first.

BY ELLIOTTE FRIEDMAN

Some in hockey were tempted to paint William with the same brush. "Could the apple fall far from the tree?" they wondered. Some others who were ready to give William a fairer shake would admit to concerns about his father's influence. Teams like to have a player's complete attention and not compete with a parent or agent or anyone else who might offer a second opinion.

William Nylander impressed everyone who watched him in physical testing at the combine. "A pure athlete who wasn't even physically mature yet, lots of room for growth," said one NHL team's director of scouting. Check marks beside: height (a half inch under six feet); power (second in a group of more than 100 players in anaerobic testing); lower-body squat strength (in the 90th percentile in the test group); and fitness (up in the 80th percentile). Scouts didn't worry too much that he weighed only 172 pounds, 17 less than the average prospect, because they saw that he had the frame to pack on more useful weight and gain more



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strength. Nylander managed only one rep on the bench press, but that was really comic relief for the scouts looking on. He already had a heavy shot, pro quality, and if he were to gain strength, it would become that much heavier. The bottom line: He wasn't yet physically ready to step into the NHL, not at 18, but scouts could easily project him there in a season or two.

BIG THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

Scouts didn't worry too much that Nylander was 17 pounds lighter than the average prospect thanks to his pro-quality shot and superb results in combine testing.

Prospects' interviews with teams are a mixed bag — no young player has talked his way onto a club, although a few have hurt their chances when talking with teams. Everything is open to interpretation and scouts' predispositions. Scouts have a unique talent for talking themselves into supposedly character-challenged players and out of reputed Boy Scouts. William Nylander's interviews were a priority for teams with picks in the top 15 at the draft, mostly because of their views of his father.

One scout who gave Nylander high grades based on performance came away from the combine pegging him as aloof and "really full of himself." The scout mentioned that he spotted Nylander wearing jeans and sneakers but no shirt and walking with a bunch of prospects over to a restaurant down the street from the hotel, stuff that passes for rock stars but not NHL players.

Another scout who knew Michael was willing to give both son and father the benefit of the doubt.

"He was pretty much the kid I thought he would be. He grew up around NHL arenas, so he knows the drill. Polite, considered his answers, didn't tell you what he thought you wanted to hear. Talking to him, I didn't get the idea that he was aware of his father's reputation around the league. I asked him if he liked the game — you know, it's a problem if a kid is just doing it because his father pushed him into it. That wasn't the case, though. I thought he was pretty genuine about loving the game and just being around the arena. At the end of the day, you have to say that maybe [Michael] was a pain in the ass, but that doesn't mean he doesn't have his kid's best interests in mind."

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK?

NHL teams worried Nylander had inherited his father's me-first mentality, but that supposed red flag wasn't enough to scare off the Leafs.

The Leafs weren't going to tip their hand about their interview with William Nylander. Back in 2014, the head of their amateur scouting department was Dave Morrison, a man who had overseen the Leafs' drafts for a decade and had taken a lot of criticism from fans. Under his direction, the Leafs' scouting team made at least a couple of home-run picks — Tuukka Rask and Alexander Steen — who were traded away for laughable returns. In the 2006 draft, the Leafs selected seven players, and six of them went on to play more than 100 games in the NHL, including Leo Komarov, taken in the sixth round, 180th overall. And the Leafs' worst recent pick was one that Morrison had been overruled on by then-GM Brian Burke — the team had traded two second-round picks to move up to No. 21 in the first round and select Tyler Biggs, a forward who, after he was drafted, was a frequent healthy scratch with the Marlies, was sent along to Pittsburgh in the Kessel trade, and seemed likely never to play an NHL game.

In the 2014 NHL draft, Morrison was free of Burke, but he might not have had an entirely free hand. But he did still plan for the Leafs to take "a big swing" at the draft.

The Leafs never would have called William Nylander's name if Brian Burke had stuck around. But whatever the Leafs management thought about Michael Nylander's perceived issues clearly paled in comparison to his son's skill, and the Leafs selected William with the eighth overall draft pick. Fans and the media viewed it as a clean break, a shift from the franchise paradigm under Brian Burke. They still didn't mind hyping the selection, mind you — a seeming carryover from Burke claiming that

Morgan Rielly was the top-ranked player of his draft class in the Leafs' books. "[Nylander] might be the most skilled player in the draft," GM Dave Nonis said.

Not that he was walking back his estimation, but in the next breath Nonis made it sound highly unlikely that Nylander was going to line up with the big club that season. "He'll get a chance to show us what he can do in training camp," he said.

You could read into Nonis's demeanor that, at some level, he knew that Nylander's future with the Leafs was going to be brighter and longer-lived than his own.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oshie's shootout goal gives Capitals win over Oilers

Associated Press

November 12, 2017, 10:34 PM

WASHINGTON — Usually, when the Washington Capitals and Edmonton Oilers meet, Alex Ovechkin or Connor McDavid would be expected to figure in the win. This time, it was the goalies who stood out until T.J. Oshie came through in the shootout.

Oshie scored the only goal of the tiebreaker to lift the Capitals to a 2-1 victory over the Oilers on Sunday night. Braden Holtby stopped 29 shots through overtime — including a flurry late in the second period — and all three Edmonton attempts in the shootout.

"It was a pretty dead game up to then, kind of both sides," Holtby said. "We knew they were going to come with a push somehow with their talent offensively."

Dmitry Orlov scored in regulation for the Capitals.

Holtby stopped the only shot in overtime, and he admitted that he would have liked some more action in the five-minute scramble.

"That was probably the most boring 3-on-3 I've played," Holtby said. "Everyone was just winding back and winding back. There was barely anything. It was kind of disappointing."

While the adrenaline junkie goalie wanted some more to do, his teammates are delighted that they have him.

"Holts is the best player every night for us," right winger Tom Wilson said. "He made some huge saves, obviously, but at this point that's a pleasure that we have — him showing up every night. We got to do our best to kind of keep the shots to the perimeter, but he does a good job when they do have a scoring chance. As a team, I thought we did a good job. Holding that squad to one goal is pretty good."

Juhar Khaira scored for the Oilers, who finished 2-1-1 on a four-game trip after winning the first two in overtime. Laurent Brossoit, starting just his second game of the season and 12th in four NHL seasons, finished with 18 saves.

Brossoit thought he played well, but obviously wasn't pleased about Orlov's goal or the one that Oshie managed to get by him.

"I was prepared for it and he still snuck it through," Brossoit said.

Washington coach Barry Trotz hadn't seen the Oilers' backup play before.



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"I don't think we tested him enough early," Trotz said. "We didn't make the shots hard enough. We didn't get in front of him enough. We had some really good looks."

Edmonton coach Todd McLellan said he was satisfied with how his team performed on its first four-game trip of the season.

"We'll take the five of eight (points)," McLellan said. "We wish we could have got more, but now we've got a real test ahead of us going home where we haven't performed well."

The Oilers appeared to score at 6:16 of the second period, but the goal by Oscar Klefbom was waved off after a challenge by Trotz because of goaltender interference by Edmonton's Ryan Nugent-Hopkins.

NOTES: Washington F Brett Connolly returned after missing seven games due to a concussion. ... G Cam Talbot, who led NHL goalies in games last season, had played 11 straight games and 15 of the Oilers' 16 games this season. He hadn't been rested since Oct. 17. ... Capitals D Matt Niskanen (hand) and F Tyler Graovac (upper body) have been skating with the team, but neither has been cleared to play. ... Edmonton F Anton Slepyshev missed his second straight game with a lower body injury.

UP NEXT

Oilers: Host Vegas on Tuesday night.

Capitals: At Nashville on Tuesday night.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sedin, Thornton share mutual respect in 'fraternity of passers'

Iain MacIntyre

November 12, 2017, 1:41 PM

SAN JOSE, Calif. – Henrik Sedin has a favourite player and he isn't his brother Danny. He isn't Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid nor any of the many Swedes in the National Hockey League. He's Joe Thornton.

Since the summer after their 1999 draft by the Vancouver Canucks when Henrik and Daniel Sedin travelled from Ornskoldsvik, Sweden to attend a conditioning camp in Penticton organized by their agents, Hank has admired Thornton. The centre from St. Thomas, Ont., had been drafted two years earlier by the Boston Bruins and was also at the Okanagan camp.

"Joe was there because he had the same agent," Henrik, 37, said before the Canucks lost 5-0 to the Sharks on Saturday. "He was the guy we saw first. And ever since, I've followed him throughout his career because we play the same way. I mean, he's bigger and stronger, but he likes to pass. I've always loved him. He has always been my favourite player."

This partiality has withstood the 12 years that Thornton has played for the Sharks after he was traded by the Bruins into the same division as the Sedins in 2005.

For the first eight of those years, the Canucks and Sharks won more games than any other team in the NHL's Western Conference. They were fierce Pacific Division rivals. The Sharks, like all teams, did everything they could to physically abuse and in any way stop the Sedins. Thornton, who is from London, Ont., contributed to this cause.

During the 2011 Western Conference final, when the Canucks beat the Sharks in five games to advance to the Stanley Cup final, Thornton actually cuffed Henrik while the captains were standing in front of the referee listening to the explanation of a penalty call. Just to make sure no one thought it was an accident, Thornton did it again.

So, it's a little unexpected to hear that through all these years, Thornton was Sedin's favourite player. And it's surprising to learn that Thornton has always liked and admired the Sedins.

"I remember the twins coming out to that camp," Thornton, 38, says of Penticton. "They were just drafted No. 2 and No. 3 at the time, but as 18-year-olds, you could just see their hockey sense was off the charts. If they wanted to, they could keep the puck all day. And they're still doing it today, 20 years later. They play a different style that, really, the game hasn't seen. I don't think there are too many other players who play that style. For me, it's really fun to watch.

"I've always admired the way they play. And they play hard. They don't shy away in the corners. As far as them being in the league together, they're one of the best one-two combos I've seen in the last 20 years, to be honest with you."

Look beyond nationalities and the fierce intensity of their NHL games and it's easy to understand the mutual admiration between Sedin and Thornton.

They are two of the best playmakers of their generation. Since the 2004-05 NHL lockout, Thornton leads all players with 754 assists. Henrik is second with 685. (Sidney Crosby is third at 653).

Just as there is a brotherhood of goalies and a union of enforcers, there is a kind of fraternity of passers in the NHL.

"Yeah, you do watch those guys," Thornton said. "I watch less now. But I like watching (Nicklas) Backstrom, I like watching the Sedins. It's a craft that sometimes gets overlooked because you're not a goal-scorer. You set up that stuff. But I look at old tapes of Adam Oates, guys like Craig Janney. For me, it's an art and a great art to be a part of."

"I think he's the best, for sure," Danny Sedin said of Thornton's place among the great playmakers. "I didn't get the chance to watch Gretzky and those guys. But from what I've seen, he's No. 1, absolutely. Hank might be a little bit angry, but you've got to admire what Joe's done."

There is something else Thornton and Henrik have in common. They have long been under-appreciated for what they've accomplished. Both have won an NHL scoring title and Hart Trophy. Both have won Olympic and world championship gold medals.

But neither has a Stanley Cup. The Canucks lost in seven games to the Bruins in 2011, while Thornton's Sharks were beaten in six games by Crosby's Pittsburgh Penguins in 2016. Sedin and Thornton play on the West Coast, so few people in the east actually see their games. And their style of play, patient, measured, never frantic, can make them look like they're not trying as hard as the guys who are all butt-and-elbows when they dart around the ice and crash the net.

The great assisters are now in the final acts of their career. Thornton still logs 17:39 a night for the Sharks and has eight assists and 10 points in 15 games this season for the Sharks. Henrik is averaging 14:08 for the Canucks but has just four assists and five points in 17 games.

Henrik was the better of the two in Saturday's game, but neither had a point as the Sharks won by five despite being outplayed.

They remember that altercation in front of the referee six years ago.

"I was just having fun," Thornton smiled. "You know what? (The Sedins) are dirtier than you think. I'm telling you. They'll stick you. They're ultra-competitive, and that's another thing I've liked about the way they play. Every time they're on the ice, they want to score a goal. That's pretty cool."



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"We've had some heated battles for sure," Henrik said. "But we had good teams, they had good teams. That (combativeness) comes with it."

Can they at least talk on the ice, passer to passer, two great rivals near the end of their careers?

"In the past, it was just screaming back and forth," Henrik said. "It's now maybe a little more respect."

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Sportsnet.ca / The Great One heaps praise on Devils rookie Nico Hischier

Sonny Sachdeva

November 12, 2017, 3:51 PM

In the days leading up to the 2017 NHL draft—perhaps even in the final moments—the hockey community remained divided on who was most deserving of the No. 1 crown.

With Swiss-born Nico Hischier and Canadian Nolan Patrick both vying for the honour, New Jersey Devils general manager Ray Shero ended the speculation when he called Hischier to the stage, making the teenager the first No. 1 pick to ever hail from Switzerland.

Five months later, the young pivot has thrived with his new club, tallying 11 points through 16 games and looking every bit a star in the making.

And that performance hasn't gone unnoticed, it seems.

If there was any doubt that the young Devil was the right pick, the club recently got as good a vote of confidence as they could hope for: props from The Great One himself.

That's according to former Devils star Ken Daneyko, now serving as a broadcaster for MSG, who recently recalled Wayne Gretzky reaching out to compliment Hischier after the Devils' overtime loss to Edmonton on Thursday.

"I pick up my phone, I look at my texts right after the game, and some guy goes 'Hey tell that No. 13 I love watching him play. He's so enjoyable,'" Daneyko said on a recent broadcast. "I asked 'By the way who is this?' and he responded '...99.' It was Wayne Gretzky, texting me to tell me he loves watching Nico Hischier."

The Devils broadcasters relayed Gretzky's message to the young centreman on Saturday. Unsurprisingly, the 18-year-old was glad to hear he had a fan in the game's all-time leading scorer.

"Really? Wow, that's pretty impressive," Hischier said. "If the greatest one of all time is saying that, it's pretty neat. If that's true, it kind of shocks me. I'm a little bit speechless. It's a big compliment."

Just one month into his rookie campaign, Hischier has already made waves for New Jersey, showing off his silky smooth mitts on more than one occasion while showing plenty of two-way promise as well.

Along with star winger Taylor Hall and a few other fellow rookie standouts, the Swiss phenom has the Devils entering a new era. The club currently sits first in the absurdly competitive Metropolitan Division, emerging as the biggest 2017-18 surprise out of the east thus far.

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