



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### What the Hurricanes are doing to start turning things around

By Chip Alexander

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November 20, 2017 12:19 PM

UPDATED 9 HOURS 3 MINUTES AGO

With the Carolina Hurricanes approaching the 20-game mark, some areas of their game remained worrisome.

The power play wasn't producing.

The penalty killing wasn't as airtight as it has been in recent years.

Finally, the Canes' goaltenders, Scott Darling and Cam Ward, weren't consistent enough in their play, making it a game-to-game question of how good – or not so good – the Canes would be in net.

But there are signs things are turning – for the Canes, in the right direction. In a 4-2 victory Sunday over the New York Islanders at PNC Arena, all three came together, leaving Canes coach Bill Peters smiling after the game and the locker room a confident place.

The Canes (9-6-4) scored twice on the power play – by Sebastian Aho early in the game and later Teuvo Teravainen, who had two goals and an assist. Still 30th in the NHL on the power play before Sunday, the Canes now have four power-play goals in the past three games.

"It's been a little struggle and finally it's paying off for a little bit," Teravainen said.

Peters made some personnel changes, pulling center Victor Rask and defenseman Noah Hanifin off the power-play units. On Sunday, Rask was a healthy scratch.

The Canes led the NHL in fewest penalties before Sunday but had seven penalties called against the Islanders. Holding, tripping, high-sticking ... the Isles and their top-end talent can force teams to do those things.

But the Islanders scored on just one power play, in the third period with the Canes leading 4-1. John Tavares, who always seems to score against the Canes, did it again for his 15th goal of the season.

The Canes' Derek Ryan (7) and Brock McGinn (23) fight the Islanders' Mathew Barzal (13) for the puck during the second period at PNC Arena on Nov. 19, 2017.

Chris Seward [cseward@newsobserver.com](mailto:cseward@newsobserver.com)

On the Isles' other six power plays, the Canes got sticks on pucks and Ward made some scrambling stops in the crease. Slavin and defenseman Brett Pesce each had 9:43 of shorthanded time, which might be a career high for both, and Slavin blocked seven shots.

With the Isles on the power play in the final moments of the second period, Tavares lined up a slap shot only to have Slavin get the block. Tavares retrieved the puck and tried again, but Slavin was there again.

"But it starts with 'Wardo' in net," Slavin said. "He played a heck of a game and had some huge saves to make us as successful as we were."

Veteran defenseman Ron Hainsey was an underrated penalty killer, and the Canes' P.K. took a dip last season when Hainsey and Viktor Stalberg, another savvy penalty killer, were traded around the NHL trade deadline.

Assistant coach Scott Smith, who handles the penalty killing, has filtered in some different faces this season such as forward Marcus Kruger, defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk and a rookie defenseman, Haydn Fleury. It has taken some time to mesh.

One of the biggest questions coming into the season was whether Darling was prepared to be a No. 1 goaltender for the first time and how Ward, long the Canes' franchise goalie and the only remaining member of the 2006 Stanley Cup champions, would accept a lesser role.

Darling has had good games and bad, including the 6-4 loss to the Islanders on Thursday in Brooklyn. But he responded with a strong, determined effort Saturday as the Canes won 3-1 at Buffalo, and Ward was at his best Sunday in the second half of the back-to-back.

Ward was playing his first game since Nov. 10 against Columbus – a 3-1 road win – but was efficient with his movement and calm in net.

"He's dialed in," Peters said. "He's had some games where he has been so sharp with his stick down around the blue paint. And mentally sharp. Physically, he's been excellent."

"Prior to the weekend he said, 'Whenever you call my number, I'm ready to play.' I give him a lot of credit the way he's handled the situation. We need both of them."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

## Hurricanes' Teravainen is NHL's first star of week

By Chip Alexander

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November 20, 2017 12:56 PM

UPDATED 9 HOURS 3 MINUTES AGO

Teuvo Teravainen went into his second season with the Carolina Hurricanes saying he felt more comfortable with his teammates, the Canes' system, his surroundings.

The evidence has been in the Finnish forward's play. Teravainen, who leads the Canes in points, on Monday was named the NHL's first star of the week.

Teravainen, on a line with center Jordan Staal and winger Sebastian Aho, had five goals and five assists, and a plus-5 rating, in four games. The Canes won three of the four, including a 4-2 victory over the New York Islanders spurred by Teravainen's two goals and an assist.

The Helsinki native, 23, had his first career hat trick, and added an assist, in a Nov. 13 victory over the Dallas Stars.

He scored the three goals in 7:05, the second-fastest natural hat trick in franchise history.

Teravainen, who describes himself as more of a playmaker than goal-scorer, has 19 points (8 goals, 11 assists) in 19 games this season.

A former first-round draft pick by Chicago, Teravainen was obtained from the Blackhawks in the June 2016 trade that also included forward Bryan Bickell. Used at center and on the wing last season, he wasn't a consistent offensive contributor.

"I had ups and downs but I think overall I'm getting better and better every season," Teravainen said before the season. I always knew it was a process. When I was younger, I was a little smaller all the time, so I needed to build my strength. I knew that would take time.

"I'm 23 now. I still feel I'm not there yet, but I'm getting there."

Asked Sunday about the torrid play of his line – Aho has goals in four straight games – Teravainen said, "We're just out there having fun."

## Hurricanes scratch Victor Rask, and what took so long?

By Luke DeCock

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November 19, 2017 06:27 PM

UPDATED November 20, 2017 03:05 PM

RALEIGH

After going eight games without a point and struggling through the first month of the NHL season, the Carolina Hurricanes finally did what long needed to be done with Victor Rask. They sent their alleged second-line center to the press box to watch.

Rask was a healthy scratch for Sunday's game against the New York Islanders, and the only uncertainty about it was what took so long. The Hurricanes certainly didn't miss him, scoring twice at even strength and twice on the power play in a 4-2 win with Elias Lindholm moving to center to replace Rask -- and scoring.

Even if it should have happened before – Rask has gone scoreless for eight games, has one point in the past 11 and is on pace for a 23-point season – Hurricanes coach Bill Peters' decision to bench one of the team's core players is a welcome blow to the culture of complacency that has proven so difficult to root out of the Carolina dressing room.

Rask's production declined last season after he signed that six-year, \$24 million before falling off the face of the earth this season, and he finally got the embarrassing night off his performance long ago deserved.

Rask played a season-low 11:50 in Buffalo on Saturday, failing to record a shot on goal, and at 3 p.m., two hours

before Sunday's opening faceoff, Peters was asked what else he could do to get Rask going.

"We're going to look at it some more and try and find a solution to that problem that we have," Peters said. "If we can do that, we'll become a much more balanced team and a much more dangerous team."

He must not have liked what he saw when he looked at it. Ninety minutes later, Rask was a healthy scratch for the first time since his rookie year. And he could be watching for a while, because Peters gave no indication he was eager to work Rask back into the lineup.

What's more disturbing than Rask's lack of production is his apparent lack of interest. His first two seasons in the league, he displayed a wicked shot and incisive vision on the rush. He wasn't the passive perimeter player he was at times last year, and all of this year.

"Does he need to be better? Yes. Does he know that? Yes. Can he be better? For sure," Peters said. "He knows that. We believe in him and we'll help him get better and we'll support him and we'll get him with the right people to make him effective."

The Hurricanes aren't built to win with Rask as a passenger. He has to be driving a scoring line, producing, for them to be successful. And his failure to do that has been a major factor in the team's inability to take a leap forward this year. He lost his alternate captaincy amid the still-bizarre decision to go with co-captains in October and has been a complete nonfactor since, although the two hardly seem related.

On the strength of Rask's 48-point sophomore season, Hurricanes general Ron Francis signed him to a six-year, \$24 million contract, believing he was getting a bargain



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

because Rask would continue to improve. In Francis' thinking, \$4 million per season would be a bargain for a player locked in as the Hurricanes' No. 2 center, and maybe even a future No. 1.

Instead, Rask regressed to a disappointing 16 goals and 45 points last season. The Hurricanes look at that kind of production from Rask wistfully now.

Maybe Rask's contract will yet be a bargain. There's a lot of hockey left this season, and four seasons left to go after this one. Getting scratched like this could be a healthy wake-up

call for a player who has so far appeared all too satisfied to collect a hefty paycheck without doing anything to earn it.

Even if not, it will send a healthy message to the rest of the dressing room that playing time has to be earned, no matter the salary – a message that, in Rask's case, should have been sent a long time ago.

Read more here: <http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/luke-decock/article185546778.html#storylink=cpy>



## Teravainen leads 3 Stars of the Week

**Hurricanes forward, Maple Leafs goalie Andersen, MacKinnon of Avalanche earn honors**

by NHL Public Relations [@PR\\_NHL](#) / NHL.com

November 20th, 2017

### Teravainen earns 1st star of week

Hurricanes' Teuvo Teravainen, Leafs' Frederik Andersen and Avalanche's Nathan MacKinnon are named NHL's 3 Stars of the Week ending Nov. 19th

**NEW YORK** - Carolina Hurricanes left wing [Teuvo Teravainen](#), Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender [Frederik Andersen](#) and Colorado Avalanche center [Nathan MacKinnon](#) have been named the NHL's "Three Stars" for the week ending Nov. 19.

### FIRST STAR - TEUVO TERAIVAINEN, LW, CAROLINA HURRICANES

Teravainen led the NHL with five goals and 10 points in four games (5-5-10) to propel the Hurricanes (9-6-4, 22 points) to a trio of victories. He posted 3-1-4, his first career hat trick and second career four-point performance, in a 5-1 triumph over the Dallas Stars Nov. 13. Teravainen then registered two assists in a 6-4 loss to the New York Islanders Nov. 16 and one helper in a 3-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres Nov. 18. He capped the week with 2-1-3, his third three-point outing of the campaign, in a 4-2 victory over the Islanders Nov. 19. The 23-year-old Helsinki, Finland, native paces the Hurricanes with 8-11-19 in 19 contests this season, nearly

half his career-high point total from 2016-17 (15-27-42 in 81 GP).

### SECOND STAR - FREDERIK ANDERSEN, G, TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

Andersen was perfect in two starts, stopping all 75 shots he faced to help the Maple Leafs (14-7-0, 28 points) extend their winning streak to six games. He made a season-high 42 saves in a 1-0 overtime victory against the New Jersey Devils Nov. 16, followed by 33 stops in a 6-0 triumph over the Montreal Canadiens Nov. 18 - the second time he has earned consecutive shutouts in his career (also Jan. 23-25, 2017). The 28-year-old Herring, Denmark, native shares first place in the NHL with three shutouts and ranks second with 12 wins in 18 appearances this season, compiling a 2.88 goals-against average and .914 save percentage.

### THIRD STAR - NATHAN MacKINNON, C, COLORADO AVALANCHE

MacKinnon collected 2-5-7 in three games to power the Avalanche (10-8-1, 21 points) to a pair of wins. He established career highs with four assists and five points in a 6-2 victory against the Washington Capitals Nov. 16. After being held off the scoresheet in a 5-2 loss to the Nashville Predators Nov. 18, MacKinnon bounced back with the primary assist on the tying goal in the final minute of regulation and then the overtime winner in a 4-3 victory over the Detroit Red Wings Nov. 19. The 22-year-old Halifax, N.S., native leads the Avalanche with 7-15-22 in 19 outings this season, including 6 11-17 in his past nine games.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

## THE ATHLETIC

### Dellow: Abandon hope, all ye who enter — which NHL teams are at the point of no return?

By Tyler Dellow 22 hours ago

This week marks the completion of the first quarter of the NHL season, that magical time of year where everybody churns out their thoughts on the first 20 games of the year and pedants scream about the “quarter pole” actually being something that comes up when a quarter of the race remains. (I think the reason nobody stops saying quarter pole is that the actual quarter pole comes around the trade deadline, so people are writing trade deadline stuff and nobody's casting about for a clever title for their column, which would probably prompt proper use of quarter pole. If you aren't going to get to use such a nice sounding turn of phrase in March, you might as well use it now.)

I've always found those columns a little forced so I thought I'd take a different approach to things: which teams (if any) are beyond the point of return? Who's close to it? Conversely, has anyone punched their ticket yet or gotten close?

The point of no return is the point from which no team has come back to make the playoffs since the NHL went to the current points format in 2005-06. Essentially, a team is below the point of no return if it has fewer points in whatever number of games that it's played than any team to make the playoffs since 2005-06. (Obviously, this doesn't include the 2013 Lockout III season.) Conversely, a team has punched its ticket if it has more points in whatever number of games it's played than any team to miss the playoffs since 2005-06.

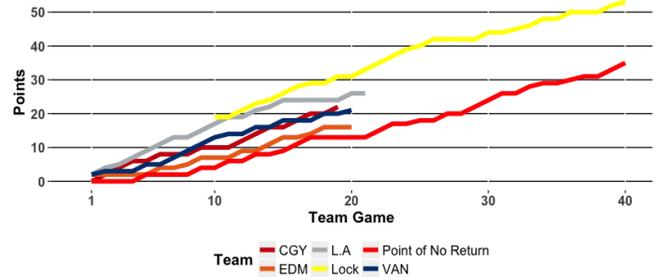
It's not dissimilar to Elliott Friedman's fabled November 1 test but has the advantage of being something that you can look at at any point in the season because it's tied to games played rather than a date. This will come up below but it's not appropriate to call this a projection: it doesn't take into account a team's strength. Unlike a projection though, it does provide a concrete point at which we can say “No team in this team's position has managed to get out of it.”

In order to illustrate progress by game, I've proceeded on a divisional basis. In order to deal with colour clashes — this league loves blue and red — I've split each division on to two graphs. The bright red line at the bottom is the point of no return — fall below that and no team has made the playoffs since 2005-06 from your team's position. The bright yellow line at the top represents the point at which your ticket is punched — get to that line and no team has missed from your position since 2005-06. Through games played Sunday night, two teams have punched their ticket and one team has hit the point of no return.

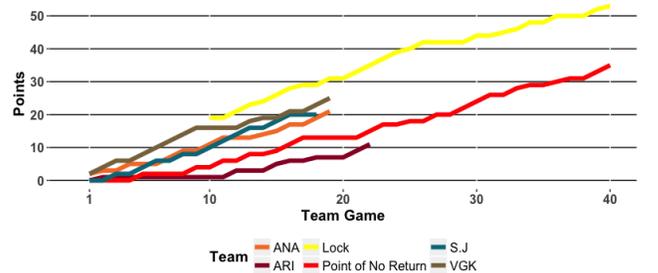
A technical note: you'll notice the line representing a team punching their ticket doesn't start until game 10. This is, of course, the fault of the 2015-16 Montreal Canadiens, who missed the playoffs after starting 9-0-0.

1 Pacific Division

Lock/Point of No Return, 2017-18



Lock/Point of No Return, 2017-18



I don't even know what to say about Arizona. The Coyotes passed the point of no return after their fifth game of the year.

The real stunner is, of course, the Edmonton Oilers. The Oilers have 16 points through 20 games. They're slightly above the point of no return, which stands at 13 points after 20 games but if you look closely, you'll notice that it kind of flatlines for a few games around that point. By game 23, it's up to 17 points.

Being three points above the point of no return kind of undersells the gravity of the Oilers' position. Over the 11 full seasons played since Lockout II, 36 teams have been below 17 points after 20 games. Only one of them made the playoffs — the 2007-08 Washington Capitals, who fired their coach after their 21st game and traded for Cristobal Huet, and went 11-1 in their final 12 games to crawl across the finish line with 94 points. The Capitals made the playoffs with two points to spare.

On the one hand, this is pretty ominous for the Oilers. On the other, they've got the talent to escape from the situation they're in, which wasn't true of the vast, vast majority of teams in their situation. They're at the point where they're staring into the abyss though. A bad week — the Oilers have a set of back-to-back games in St. Louis and Detroit, followed by games in Buffalo and Boston — and the Oilers could conceivably drop below the point of no return by next weekend.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

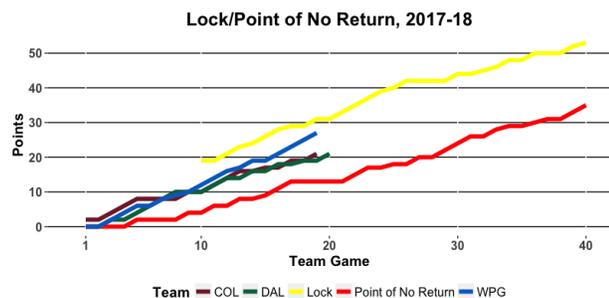
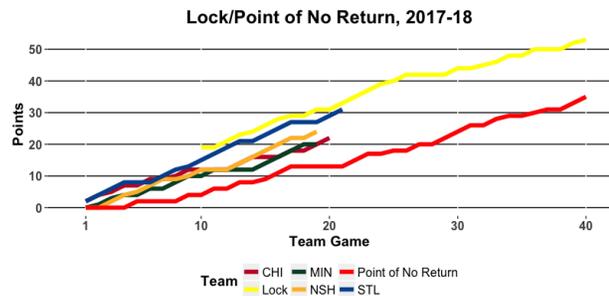
I would disagree with anyone saying that the Oilers have a 1-in-36 chance of getting into the playoffs at this point. Colleague Dom's projections [put the likelihood of the Oilers making the playoffs at 22 per cent](#). The difference between that number and the much less favourable historical likelihood is the result of bringing some assessment of a team's talent into the equation.

It's somewhat amusing that Colleague Dom's model is now so much more bullish on the Oilers than history would suggest is warranted. He was more bearish on the Oilers entering the season than many in Edmonton felt recent history warranted and was duly chastised for his stupid, broken model. Six weeks later, his model is the optimistic one.

However you slice it, it seems like it's more likely than not the Oilers will miss the playoffs, which is a pretty shocking development.

Los Angeles has cooled off since their hot start but the Kings have already hit the point at which a team's ticket is, historically speaking, punched. L.A had 19 points in their first 11 games, nobody who's accomplished that has managed to miss.

### 2 Central Division

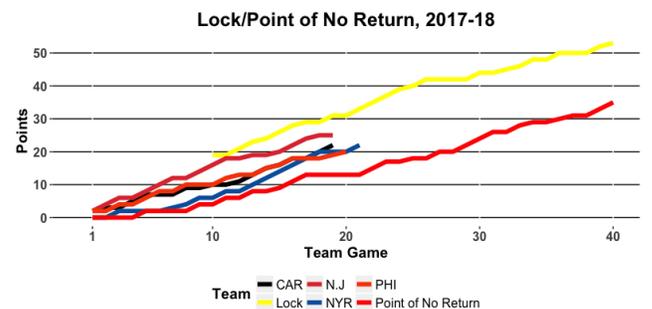
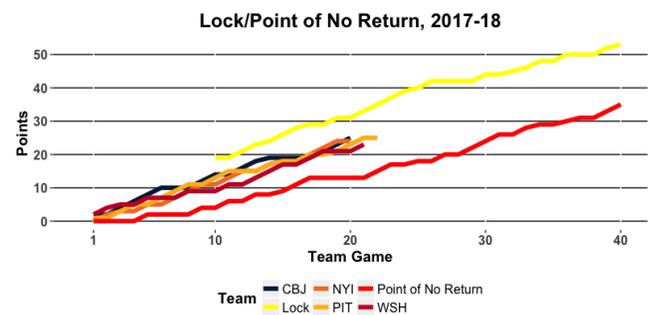


Nobody in the Central Division is particularly close to the point of no return, with everyone having at least seven points worth of breathing room.

St. Louis on the other hand, is closing in on having its ticket punched. Only two teams with at least 31 points in their first 21 games have missed the playoffs since Lockout II. The 2013-14 Coyotes were one of those teams — they weren't particularly good but still finished with 89 points. The 2015-16 Canadiens were the other. That involved Carey Price getting injured and set off a series of events that saw them trade PK Subban for Shea Weber. Now that Price is injured again, Montreal looks to be on the edge of disaster.

So St. Louis is in a very comfortable spot. Its top six has been excellent. It will be interesting to see if the Blues try to add some depth for the playoffs. When you look back over the Blues history, they've kind of suffered from having their best teams at times when the Western Conference was loaded. In particular, I'm thinking of the turn of the century, when the Blues would run into Dallas or Detroit or Colorado. More recently, they've run into loaded Los Angeles and Chicago teams. That isn't the case this year — it sure looks like this might be a good year for St. Louis to try and find some depth before the playoffs.

### 3 Metro Division



The Metro is similar to the Central, in that nobody's close to the point of no return, although the Rangers sure danced with it for a while. The Rangers and Flyers won't have been pleased with their starts, they're both still well ahead of the Capitals at the same point in the 2007-08 season. The first 20 games has eliminated nobody from the discussion.

I'm a long way from sold on the Devils and when you look at how teams with 25 points in their first 19 games have done, there are lots of misses in there. Only 22 of the 30 teams with the same start have gone on to make the playoffs. If you thought that the Devils were awfully thin before the season (I did) and haven't been wowed by their play or underlying numbers (I haven't), then you're probably still justified in not expecting them to make the playoffs. (The same is true of the Vegas Golden Knights, by the way.)

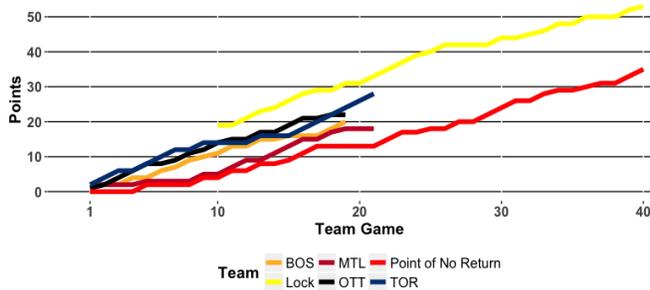
### 4 Atlantic Division



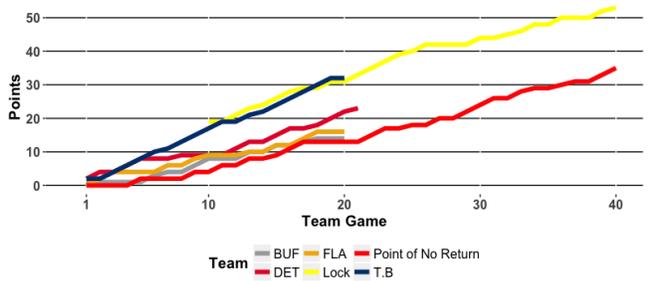
# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Lock/Point of No Return, 2017-18



Lock/Point of No Return, 2017-18



In many ways, the Atlantic Division has had the most decisive opening quarter of the season. The Lightning have, by historical standards, punched their ticket. All that's keeping Buffalo and Florida above the point of no return is the 2007-08 Capitals. Nothing about either team makes me think they can be the 2007-08 Capitals, although Florida has

a phenomenal first line and Buffalo's group of forwards seems pretty good to me. The Panthers get crushed when the first line isn't on the ice and Buffalo's defence corps is horrific. Both seem likely to be fatal flaws.

Which brings me to Montreal. The Canadiens are in a slightly better position than the Oilers in terms of points, with one more game played and two more points. The mood seems more catastrophic around Montreal than it is around the Oilers though. Part of this is probably down to Montreal's talisman Price being injured (after playing badly for long stretches) while Connor McDavid's healthy. Part of it's probably down to the fact the Canadiens seem like they've had more hideous losses than the Oilers, most recently an ugly 6-0 beatdown on *Hockey Night in Canada*.

Part of managing or coaching a team in Canada is dealing with the noise and chaos that envelops Canadian teams whenever they're doing poorly. In Montreal, that noise and chaos is louder than anywhere else in the NHL. As bad as Montreal's start has been, they aren't out of it, although like Edmonton, they're on the edge of being out of it.

Nobody else in the Atlantic is in imminent danger of hitting the point of no return or particularly close to punching their ticket. If you're interested in the gradual winnowing that ultimately produces a field of 16 teams for the playoffs, Buffalo, Florida, Edmonton and Montreal are the teams worth keeping your eye on over the next couple of weeks. All have time to get out of their current uncomfortable position, although it's by no means assured, but it basically has to start now. Another week or two of aimlessly dropping points and, barring something unprecedented, the season is lost.



### Sebastian Aho has found his scoring touch again

By [Scott Billeck](#) Nov 20, 2017, 2:45 PM EST

There was a time just over a week ago that people were hitting the panic button on second-year Carolina Hurricanes forward [Sebastian Aho](#).

Many of these people fell into two groups:

Group No. 1 consisted of Hurricanes fans desperate for their young budding star to get going and rekindle the scoring touch he possessed last season

Group No. 2 was made up of Aho's fantasy league owners, thousands across North America, who were growing impatient with the 20-year-old's unproductive start to the season.

And then there was Aho himself, but he chose to stay positive despite the drought.

"I think I've played better and better every day, and I think the goals are coming," [Aho told The News & Observer in Raleigh at the beginning of November](#). "I just need to stay



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

positive. Just relax my game. Obviously, work hard, but still when I get the chances just relax.”

The above concerns of all parties involved were genuine, of course, Hurricanes management, too, were likely chomping at the bit as they awaited the Finn’s scoring touch around the net.

Perhaps Aho just doesn’t like running with the big pack out of the gate. Slow and steady, as the old saying goes. Despite the lack of pucks behind goalies, Aho has been a strong possession player this season and his expected goal numbers are equally as good.

Aho also has his brief history in pro hockey on his side.

Indeed, Aho’s rookie season didn’t start much different. Last season, it took the Finn 13 games to score his first NHL goal,

but he managed to finish the season with 24, an impressive number from a new commodity.

He was only off that pace by two games this season.

It took him 15 games (over four-and-a-half hours of ice time) to register his name and number in the goal section of the scoresheet.

It was just a matter of time, and now, he just can’t help himself.

Aho has been on a tear since that Nov. 13 coming out party where he scored his first marker and added two helpers in a dominant 5-1 win against the Dallas Stars.

After adding another goal and another apple on Sunday, Aho now has 13 of his 17 points this season in his past 10 games. He’s also the proud owner of a four-game goal-scoring run.



## Hurricanes’ Teravainen & Aho on Fire

**By Mark Shiver** November 20th, 2017

Sebastian Aho scored again on Sunday night. At 1:50 in the first period, he notched the first goal in the contest between the New York Islanders and the Carolina Hurricanes. Not to be outdone, a couple of minutes later his teammate Teuvo Teravainen followed up with a goal of his own. The score was 2-0 in favor the ‘Canes, and some fans were still getting settled in their seats.

By the time the final horn sounded, the Hurricanes had beaten the Islanders, 4-2. Aho ended up with a goal and two assists, and Teravainen had two goals and an assist. This dynamic duo has caught fire, and it could not have happened at a more opportune time.

With the quarter-pole that is the Thanksgiving weekend just days away, the Hurricanes are not so far behind that catching up and making the playoffs is a pipe dream. They are in the thick of what is a bunched-up Metropolitan Division. If Aho and Teravainen stay hot, the team’s trajectory looks to continue to climb.

The pair have had quite the week for the Hurricanes, and both have been white-hot. They have executed the kind of offense that, if continued long-term, will propel the team into the playoffs. Of course, there are a lot of games to be played before playoff determinations are made. But, a momentary daydream under the heading, “what if” leaves Hurricanes fans giddy with the possibilities of what their team could do if these two stay hot.

Carolina Hurricanes forward, Teuvo Teravainen is on fire ([Amy Irvin](#) / The Hockey Writers)

After Sunday night’s game, I asked Teravainen about how he was able to have such a solid week. He said,

“I feel good. It’s all about confidence I think. Our line is doing good right now, it’s kind of fun to make some plays.”

As a member of the media, and as a fan of hockey, I’ll say it’s kind of fun to watch him make some plays, too.

### Teravainen Named First Star of the Week

Hurricanes television color analyst, Tripp Tracey was emphatic during Sunday night’s broadcast that Teravainen should be in the mix for one of the NHL’s Three Stars of the week. Monday, Teravainen was named the NHL’s First Star of the Week, an honor he earned without question. [The press release from the Hurricanes](#) says it all about Teravainen’s week:

Teravainen, 23, totaled 10 points (5g, 5a) and was plus-five in four games last week, as the Hurricanes went 3-1-0 with victories against the Dallas Stars, Buffalo Sabres and New York Islanders. The Helsinki native recorded his first career hat trick and added an assist against the Stars on Nov. 13, scoring three goals in a 7:05 stretch for the second-fastest natural hat trick in franchise history. He registered his fifth multi-point game of the season with a pair of assists in Carolina’s loss against the Islanders in Brooklyn, and earned the primary assist on Sebastian Aho’s game-winning goal on Friday in Buffalo. Teravainen capped the week by scoring



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

two goals and adding an assist in the Hurricanes 4-2 win against the Islanders on Sunday.

Teravainen had an incredible week, and he deserves the recognition. But, his current linemate, Aho, had a pretty special week, himself.

## Aho Finally Dialed-In

Last season it took a while for Aho to get hot. In fact, [it was not until after the 13th game that Aho got his first goal](#) as a member of the Hurricanes. Once he flipped the switch, however, he showed why he was playing in the NHL at age 19, and, at times, looked downright amazing. He wound up with 24 goals and 25 assists last season, including [a marvelous hat trick against the Philadelphia Flyers](#).

This week, Aho finally broke the ice with his first goal of the season, scoring against the Dallas Stars on November 13. He has scored in the three games since then, now riding a four-game goal-scoring streak. If last season is any kind of indicator, Aho could really become a problem for Hurricanes' opponents. The natural ability that he has to find the net is something that cannot be taught. He is an instinctive goal-scorer, and, in a little over a year, has already proven his worth to the franchise. If the Hurricanes are going to continue to strive for a spot in the playoffs, they will definitely need Aho to be on fire and play to his potential.

## Peters Probably Thankful

The "TSA Line" as it is referred to by the Hurricanes, consists of Teravainen, Jordan Staal, and Aho. They played well together last season and seem to have found their stride again here close to Thanksgiving. With teammates like Justin Williams and Jeff Skinner, and a stout defense with the likes of Justin Faulk, Brett Pesce, and Jaccob Slavin, the team is put together well and should take a big step forward this season.

Carolina Hurricanes Head Coach Bill Peters – Photo by Andy Martin Jr

Seeing Aho and Teravainen on fire is most likely something head coach Bill Peters is thankful for at this time. While there was not a huge groundswell of sentiment to replace Peters, there were rumblings during the recent stretch when things were not going as well for the team. But, I have not blamed Peters, [as I wrote Sunday](#), nor does he appear on my colleague [Larry Fisher's list of NHL coaches currently on the hot seat](#). Peters is a good coach, and having two of the hottest young players in the league right now helps him stay off those kinds of lists, and quiets the discontent surrounding his tenure at the helm of the Hurricanes.

The Hurricanes play the New York Rangers on Wednesday night, the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday night, and the Nashville Predators on Sunday. With five points separating the top from the bottom of the Metropolitan Division, the Hurricanes really must get points in the next three games. If Aho and Teravainen stay hot, that should be a very attainable goal.



## Hometown Weekly Report: November 20

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: November 20, 2017

It was a tough week for the Checkers, as they limped to the end of their extended road trip on a four-game losing streak. They'll have a chance to turn things around on home ice as they head into a busy four-game week.

### Week in Review

#### Team Statistics

- Overall record 10-7-0
- Home record 2-2-0
- Road record 8-5-0

- Last week's record 0-3-0
- Last 10 games 5-5-0
- Division Standings 4th
- Conference Standings 6th
- League Standings 11th

### Springfield 5, Checkers 2

Facing the Springfield Thunderbirds in a rare morning game, the Checkers let the lead get away from them in a tough defeat. A tightly contested first was capped by strikes from both squads inside the final two minutes of the period, followed by both sides again trading goals early in the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

second. Warren Foegele's league-leading third shorthanded goal of the season gave the visitors a lead just past the midway point, but the Thunderbirds again had an answer. Deadlocked heading into the third, the games looked to be destined for overtime until the Checkers were assessed back-to-back penalties in the waning minutes of regulation. With a two-man advantage, Springfield was able to break the tie with less than 90 second to play, then tap in an empty netter to wrap up a win for the home team. [Full recap](#)

## Springfield 4, Checkers 0

The Checkers were back in Springfield two nights later with hopes of getting revenge, but those were nixed by a stifling Thunderbirds defensive effort. The home team opened the scoring in the first, then things fell silent until halfway through the third. With the Checkers surging in hopes of evening the score, the Thunderbirds lit the lamp twice within two minutes of each other to blow the game wide open. Despite outshooting their opponent 32-18 over the course of the game and 22-12 through the final two frames, the Checkers couldn't muster up any offense, suffering their second shutout of the season. [Full recap](#)

## Bridgeport 5, Checkers 2

Finally facing down the end of their longest road trip this season, the Checkers looked to finish things off on a high note in Bridgeport, but the Sound Tigers had other plans. The home squad jumped out to an early 2-0 lead thanks to consecutive strikes on Charlotte netminder Alex Nedeljkovic, but Aleksa Saarela's power-play snipe cut that lead in half heading into the second. The middle frame was bookmarked by Springfield tallies, with Connor Jones netting one in the first minute and Devon Toews getting one in the final minute. The Checkers were able to pull back within two midway through the third with Valentin Zykov's league-leading sixth power-play goals of the year, but it was too little, too late. The Sound Tigers held their ground and added one more into the empty net to skate away 5-2 winners. [Full recap](#)

## Three Stars Of The Week

- **3rd Star Philip Samuelsson** 0g, 2a
- **2nd Star Janne Kuokkanen** 1g, 1a
- **1st Star Valentin Zykov** 2g, 0a

## Notables

### ON THE SKIDS

By dropping Saturday's road trip finale, the Checkers have now lost four straight games. That marks the team's longest such skid this season and the second-longest active streak in the AHL.

Prior to this losing skid, the Checkers hadn't dropped consecutive games this season.

## POWERING UP

- Checkers To Wear Cam Newton Foundation Jerseys On Carolina Football Night [Read More](#)

## Last Week's News

- [Shaya's 10 Thoughts](#)

The Checkers continue to consistently produce on the man advantage. The team has notched five power-play goals over the last four games, with Saturday standing as the fourth time this season they have notched multiple power-play goals in a single game. In fact, the Checkers have only been held without a power-play goal in five games this season.

Leading the charge on that front have been Valentin Zykov, whose six power-play tallies lead the entire AHL, and Trevor Carrick, who has put up six helpers on the man advantage thus far. Charlotte's strong play has yielded a 20.3 percentage on the power play, which is tied for seventh in the AHL.

Looking ahead, the Checkers could be in a position to raise that percentage even more this week, as they'll face the 24th and 20th ranked penalty kill in Belleville and Providence, respectively.

### ZYKOV TAKES OVER

Valentin Zykov's success hasn't been limited to the power play this season. The forward is tied for third in the AHL with 10 goals this season and has drawn even with the injured Lucas Wallmark for the team lead with 15 points. Zykov, who is well on his way to eclipsing his career high offensive numbers from a year ago, has not gone more than two games without finding the score sheet this season.

### SHORTHANDED SUCCESS

The Checkers currently sit atop the AHL with four shorthanded goals this season, and much of that has been driven by the play of Warren Foegele. The rookie converted a breakaway Wednesday morning in Springfield to notch his third shorthanded goal of the season, a mark that not only gave him the league lead, but tied the Checkers' single-season record. Foegele now just needs one to surpass Zac Dalpe in the franchise record book.

The AHL record for shorthanded goals in a season is 11, set in 1982-83 by Gary McAdam.

## Ranks

- Valentin Zykov is tied for third in the AHL in goals and leads the league in power-play goals
- Warren Foegele leads the AHL in shorthanded goals and points, is tied for second among league rookies in goals and ranks fifth among rookies in shooting percentage
- Alex Nedeljkovic is tied for fifth in the AHL in wins

## INJURIES

- Jake Chelios missed eight games starting Nov. 3
- Lucas Wallmark missed five games starting Nov. 10
- Dennis Robertson missed 1 game starting Nov. 18

## Transactions

- **Incoming** - None



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

- **Outgoing** - None

### Coming Up

- **Tuesday, Nov. 21 at 7 pm - Checkers vs. Belleville**
- **Wednesday, Nov. 22 at 7 pm - Checkers vs. Belleville**
- **Saturday, Nov. 25 at 6 pm - Checkers vs. Providence**
- **Sunday, Nov. 26 at 1 pm - Checkers vs. Providence**

### By the Numbers

CATEGORY	RECORD	AHL RANK	LAST WEEK
<b>Power play</b>	20.3%	t-7th	7th
<b>Penalty kill</b>	83.8%	t-10th	13th
<b>Goals per game</b>	3.59	3rd	2nd
<b>Shots per game</b>	28.35	23rd	21st
<b>Goals allowed per game</b>	3.24	19th	t-12th
<b>Shots allowed per game</b>	29.82	15th	21st
<b>Penalty minutes per game</b>	13.00	9th	10th

CATEGORY	LEADER(S)
<b>Points</b>	Lucas Wallmark, Valentin Zykov (15), Andrew Miller (14)
<b>Goals</b>	Valentin Zykov (10), Warren Foegele (8), Andrew Poturalski, Andrew Miller (5)
<b>Assists</b>	Lucas Wallmark (11), Andrew Miller (9), Trevor Carrick (8)
<b>Power play goals</b>	Valentin Zykov (6), Nick Schilkey, Andrew Poturalski (2)
<b>Shorthanded goals</b>	Warren Foegele (3), Nicolas Roy (1)
<b>Game-winning goals</b>	Warren Foegele, Valentin Zykov, Andrew Poturalski (2)
<b>Shots on goal</b>	Andrew Poturalski (35), Trevor Carrick (32), Valentin Zykov (31)
<b>Penalty minutes</b>	Trevor Carrick (27), Patrick Brown (25), Zack Stortini (23)
<b>Plus/minus</b>	Philip Samuelsson (+8), Lucas Wallmark (+7), Patrick Brown (+6)
<b>Wins</b>	Alex Nedeljkovic (7)
<b>Goals-against average</b>	Alex Nedeljkovic (2.69)
<b>Save percentage</b>	Alex Nedeljkovic (.904)

### TODAY'S LINKS

- <http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article185615673.html#navlink=Lead>
- <http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article185623413.html#navlink=SecList>
- <http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/luke-decock/article185546778.html>
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/teuvo-teravainen-frederik-andersen-nathan-mackinnon-named-nhl-3-stars-of-week/c-293172802>
- <https://theathletic.com/159382/2017/11/20/dellow-abandon-hope-all-ye-who-enter-which-nhl-teams-are-at-the-point-of-no-return/>
- <https://thehockeywriters.com/carolina-hurricanes-teravainen-aho/>
- <http://nhl.nbcsports.com/2017/11/20/sebastian-aho-has-found-his-scoring-touch-again/>
- <http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/hometown-weekly-report-november-20>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

## SportScan

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

1084333 New York Rangers

Brady Skjei enjoys SNL skit featuring his jersey and inability to pronounce name

JUSTIN TASCH

Updated: Monday, November 20, 2017, 2:06 AM

Brady Skjei was watching Saturday Night Live when suddenly an actor wearing his jersey appeared during a skit featuring Chance the Rapper playing a Knicks reporter filling in on Rangers coverage who had no idea how to pronounce Skjei's name.

The Rangers defenseman quickly found himself with about 30 text messages and seemingly endless notifications on Twitter and Instagram.

"I thought it was hilarious," Skjei said Sunday morning. "It was kind of weird seeing your jersey on SNL. He did a great job, Chance the Rapper. I thought it was really funny. It was a pretty cool experience."

Brady Skjei's jersey was on an SNL skit.

In the skit, Chance the Rapper is playing Lazlo Holmes, who is tasked with interviewing Skjei, played by Alex Moffat. He asks Skjei to turn around so he can see the back of his jersey and find out his name.

"Yes, that is an S, a K and a J all next to each other, so that's a nope," he says.

Skjei — pronounced "shay," — is used to people not knowing how to say his last name. Sometimes even his first name gets mispronounced. At least once during a road game this season an announcer called him Brandon.

Skjei says his ancestors are from Northern Norway, and when he went there for Mats Zuccarello's charity All-Star game during the summer, he said everyone recognized his name and knew how to say it.

Chance the Rapper appeared on an SNL skit as a Rangers reporter who couldn't pronounce Brady Skjei's name.

Skjei received a text during the week regarding SNL wanting to do a skit with some of the Rangers' players but was unable to participate. He said he's a fan of Chance the Rapper and said he'll have to tweet at him, while also welcoming him to the Garden.

Rangers need more from Brady Skjei and they expect to get it

"It's an open invite. I'll give him my tickets," Skjei said.

And now that his name and jersey have been on SNL? "I'm done," Skjei joked. "Life's complete."

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084334 New York Rangers

Rangers blank Senators, 3-0, in first meeting since 2016-2017 playoffs

JUSTIN TASCH

Updated: Monday, November 20, 2017, 2:05 AM

The end result of this play wasn't reflective of what led to it. Ottawa's Mark Borowiecki was out cold once he hit his head crashing into the end boards after Brendan Smith's shoulder-to-shoulder hit.

Borowiecki was eventually helped to his feet and off the ice while Smith was assessed a major interference penalty and game misconduct at 7:32 of the third period. But the Rangers allowed only one shot on goal during the ensuing five-minute power play en route to a 3-0 victory over the Senators Sunday night at the Garden in their first meeting since the Rangers were eliminated in the second round of the playoffs.

Senators coach Guy Boucher said Borowiecki was unconscious on the ice and suffered a concussion, according to the Ottawa Citizen.

Smith said he and Borowiecki had made eye contact before the hit. "He's a big, strong guy. You see those plays happen all over the ice," Smith said. "I think it was a little harsh. At worst, two minutes."

Alain Vigneault felt it "just looked like more of an unfortunate hockey accident than anything else."

The Rangers (10-9-2) killed off nine minutes worth of Ottawa power-play time for the game, blocking six shots during the five-minute man-advantage in the middle of the third period. Marc Staal blocked three of those six. Brady Skjei blocked one and finished the game with six blocks.

"The focus was there and the determination was there to really kill off every power play," said Henrik Lundqvist, who made 20 saves for his second shutout of the season. "It set the tone in the first with some big kills."

Kevin Hayes scored the only goal over the slog that was the first two periods.

Kevin Hayes had the only goal through the slog of the first two periods, a top-shelf rip from the right dot. Michael Grabner briefly tied Mika Zibanejad for the team lead in goals with nine at 4:52 of the third when he redirected a Staal shot in the high slot, but Zibanejad scored an empty-netter with 2:29 left — which is how Grabner has scored four of his goals.

Lundqvist made some crucial stops when needed, like his stacked-pads denial of Mike Hoffman late in the first period on a two-on-one.

"That's old school right there," Lundqvist said. "I think the last few weeks I have been playing a little more aggressive so my side-to-side movements are sometimes a little longer. I felt like in that situation there was a long way to go so that's why I decided to go two-pad stack there and it worked out."

It's no coincidence that the Rangers have been winning more often as Lundqvist's form has improved in recent weeks, and his teammates made up for wasting his great effort Friday in Columbus. Over his last five games, Lundqvist has a 2.12 goals-against average and .937 save percentage.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

"I think the last couple of weeks we played with a little more urgency and determination because we know we're in a tough spot," Lundqvist said. "We can't let it slide."

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084335 New York Rangers

Examining Rangers extremes: Joe Thornton run, Ryan McDonagh sell-off

By Larry Brooks November 20, 2017 | 4:35PM

A quarter of the season down and the Rangers are essentially as projected: a flawed bubble team capable of capturing an eighth consecutive playoff but unlikely to end the franchise's 23-year Stanley Cup drought.

The downward progression for this group is stark in the wake of the trip to the 2014 final and of finishing with the NHL's best record a year later. The Blueshirts rank 16th in five-on-five goals scored, after finishing seventh in that category a year ago, third in 2015-16 and first in 2014-15. They are 25th in five-on-five goals-against after finishing 18th last year and seventh two years ago. They are 24th in five-on-five GF/GA percentage after finishing 12th last season and third in the league each of the previous two years.

But this does not appear to be an especially strong league or conference. Of course not. The toll of the punishing cap combined with the expansion draft that produced a stronger club in Vegas at the expense of the other 30 teams whose fans had paid their dues for years has created the lowest-common denominator NHL envisioned for years by Sixth Avenue.

So you watch the Rangers every night, pick apart every flaw, and inevitably reach the no-brainer conclusion that a Cup is out of the question and that pending free agents Rick Nash, Michael Grabner and Nick Holden must be bartered for futures while potential 2019 UFA's Ryan McDonagh and Mats Zuccarello should be aggressively marketed as well.

But then you watch other teams, identify all of their flaws, and you think that if Henrik Lundqvist's revival holds, the Blueshirts could win a round the way they did last year and then based on the draw, maybe even another one, and then, well, what if Neal Pionk and Filip Chytil are ready to contribute the second half and the club is augmented by adding Joe Thornton as a rental?

But it is not important if that is my thought process or your thought process. It is only important if that is the thought process of general manager Jeff Gorton, who in my opinion faces the diceiest challenge approaching the Feb. 26 trade deadline as any Ranger in that position since Neil Smith in 1994.

Because it is going to be on Gorton, with advice if not necessarily consent from hockey department personnel including president Glen Sather and coach Alain Vigneault — but most certainly with both advice and consent from Garden chairman Jim Dolan — to make the call between taking a rather far-fetched run at a title with many of the same guys who have come close before or to divest and kick the can down the road by investing in a future that is always more uncertain in practice than presented in theory.

Everyone knows the history here, from Emile Francis dealing Curt Bennett, Syl Apps, Jr., Don Luce and Mike Murphy (the second time) for immediate help to Sather and then Gorton wheeling a succession of first-rounders and high picks to go for it all. The temptation when as close as the clubs of the early '70s and through this decade were is understandable.

Wrong deals, maybe, but for the right reasons. It is not that yielding a pair of seconds and a prospect for Eric Staal in 2016 was necessarily misguided, it was that the Blueshirts didn't know what to do with him when he got here. It is not that sending away Anthony Duclair and a handful of first-rounders was more ill-advised than dealing Doug Weight, Tony Amonte and Todd Marchant, it is that the 1994 team won in the wake of a series of dramatic deadline trades whereas the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 clubs fell short.

The Rangers have never quite been in this position before as a bubble team with pending free agents whose value to the team on the ice may be outweighed by their value on the market. Could the Rangers get a first-plus for Nash, and if the first is in the lower third of the order, is that enough for one of the team's best two or three forwards? Could the Rangers wheedle a first (or a high second) for Grabner?

The bounty, though and of course, could be expected in the return for McDonagh, who is eligible to go free in 2019 and who will command seven years for between \$45 and 50 million on his next deal. This is a legit, blue chip top-pair defenseman whose acquisition would immediately vault the Maple Leafs and Lightning into prime position.

If Gorton could create a bidding war between the clubs that appear the East's elite, perhaps the Rangers could come back with Mitch Marner from Toronto or perhaps Mikhail Sergachev from Tampa Bay in exchange for the player who for a half-decade has been the Rangers' most important athlete other than Lundqvist and who still would have another year and another playoff remaining on his contract.

Of course, trading McDonagh would represent as dramatic a course correction as possible and all but eliminate any chance the 2017-18 Rangers have of winning anything, including a playoff berth. It would represent Gorton saying in so many words, wait 'til next year, with next year no more of a guarantee than 75 of the last 76 seasons.

New York Post LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084363 Toronto Maple Leafs

Coyotes snap Maple Leafs' six-game winning streak

DAVID SHOALTS

6 HOURS AGO

NOVEMBER 20, 2017

In a tale of two winning streaks, one was broken and another continued Monday night.

But it was the Toronto Maple Leafs who saw theirs come to an end at six games with a 4-1 loss to the last-place Arizona Coyotes. And the Coyotes finished a terrific road trip with three consecutive wins.

Even though the Leafs did not start playing hard until well into the evening, it seemed they would escape a loss when Auston Matthews, who was until then noticeable only because he wasn't earlier, scored at 16:10 of the third period. But Coyotes head coach Rick Tocchet challenged the goal on the basis of goaltender interference by Leafs winger Zach Hyman and won, which erased the tying goal. The Leafs kept the heat on and a minute later Matthews hit the post.

But that was it, as the Coyotes survived a wild ride with Leafs goaltender Frederik Andersen pulled for an extra skater. Max Domi and Tobias Rieder scored empty-net goals in the last two minutes to ensure the win.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

The Coyotes also made their power play count, as the unit produced two goals on four opportunities with Brendan Perlini and Oliver Ekman-Larsson scoring. The Leafs were one-for-one on the power play thanks to James van Riemsdyk's goal but it wasn't enough to overcome their inability to get through a team that jams up the neutral zone.

There has been an epidemic of overconfidence greeting the Coyotes on their road trip through Canada over the last week with the Leafs providing the latest sample. Yes, the Coyotes are the worst team in the NHL – they now sport a 5-15-3 record – but most of those wins came in the last three games of the trip when the Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators and then the Leafs figured they could take the night off and still bag a couple of points.

"In my opinion, that didn't affect the outcome of the game," Leafs head coach Mike Babcock said of the goaltender-interference ruling. "The one-on-one battles affected the outcome of the game and the ready to compete at the start affected the outcome of the game.

"They were better than us. The first 10 minutes they were better. When you don't start on time and you're not prepared to go right, you don't deserve good results. We got what we deserved."

While it was Matthews' worst game of the season, the Leafs' other flashy players, William Nylander and Mitch Marner, also had bad nights. And as a group, with the exception of goaltender Frederik Anderson, the Leafs did not take the Coyotes seriously.

"It's one thing when the other team, because of their record, makes you respect them," Babcock said. "When the record is like [the Coyotes] record is, even though we tried to tell the players how good they've been playing lately and they've won two in a row and come from behind and all that, we weren't prepared and so we got what we deserved.

"A lot of the guys that have been driving us, the young skill guys, not today. They weren't here today."

As Babcock noted, the Leafs did not start on time, finally showing up in the second half of the first period, then sliding out of view again late in the second before turning up again as the third period wound down.

Even though the Leafs took a six-game winning streak into the game and were riding the karma of Matthews playing his 100th NHL game against his hometown team, things fizzled quickly.

Perhaps the Leafs' desultory effort was the result of some noses out of joint when Babcock, as advertised, went back to his original line combinations. In Saturday's 6-0 win over the Canadiens, Babcock finally played Matthews and Marner together for a long stretch, in the former's first game back after a four-game injury absence, and they combined for two goals to give the fans a tantalizing glimpse of what was possible when the two most offensively creative players on the team were together.

But against the Coyotes, Marner was back on the fourth line with Dominic Moore and Matt Martin while Matthews was back between Zach Hyman and William Nylander. Matthews, in particular, was mostly invisible which in itself stood out, although he announced his presence with the aborted goal.

Matthews admitted his second game back from his injury was a backward step.

"I didn't play very well tonight," he said. "I don't really like a lot of plays I made, just turned the puck over. I think it's just a means of getting back to the level I was playing at before I was injured.

"It's obviously frustrating but it's what you're working towards, each and every day. Each and every game you want to get back to the point but yeah definitely [Monday night] I wasn't very good myself."

Earlier in the day, Babcock was unapologetic about moving away from the Matthews and Marner combination.

"The beauty of this is when you get to coach the team, you'll get to do what you want," he said after the game-day skate. "When I coach the team, I do what I want.

"This is what I think – I like to win every night. That's what I try to do. So I try to put the right people together for that. They're not together tonight."

But by the end of the game Babcock had second thoughts about his flippant response to the question posed about Matthews and Marner at the morning skate. He opened his post-game press conference with an apology to the person who asked it, probably because he put them back together as the third period played out.

"It was embarrassing," Babcock said. "I was a jackass. That's not the right way to treat anybody. It was disrespectful."

Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084364 Toronto Maple Leafs

Shades of Matthews in Coyotes' Keller

By MARK ZWOLINSKI Sports reporter

Mon., Nov. 20, 2017

Arizona Coyotes super rookie Clayton Keller and the Leafs' Auston Matthews have had something of a mutual admiration society for the past several years.

The two came up through the U.S. national team development program, where they also formed a close friendship that continued into Monday night's game at the Air Canada Centre.

Keller received high praise from Matthews, and just about every other player in the rink, before the contest. The 19-year-old has had a superb start to the season, leading his team with 11 goals and 20 points — a run which has propelled him to first in scoring among first-year players and frontrunner status for top rookie honours.

Matthews essentially occupied those same shoes a year ago, building on his four-goal NHL debut to earn an all-star appearance and ultimately win the Calder Trophy.

That Keller's progress has mirrored that of Matthews is a tribute to the U.S. system, which has fed more and more young stars in the making over the past several seasons.

It's also a tribute in a smaller way to Matthews, who Keller admires and takes advice from.

"I always keep in touch (with Matthews). If I have any questions, I can ask him any time," said Keller, who had two assists during the Coyotes' 4-1 win against the Maple Leafs at the Air Canada Centre on Monday. "We talk about things like other team's defence and who's hard to play against, things like that."

Matthews had an eventful weekend, with a two-goal return to the Leafs' lineup Saturday after missing four games with an injury, and a ticket to the Argos' big win over Saskatchewan in the CFL East final Sunday.

Matthews still follows the Coyotes, the hometown team he cheered for growing up in Scottsdale, Ariz., so he has kept tabs on Keller's rise in his rookie season. The one thing that surprised Matthews, he said, was that Keller has more goals than assists.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Keller admits he's a pass-first type. He is the career leader in assists for the U.S. development program with 70 — Leafs prospect Jeremy Bracco held the previous mark of 64 — and points with 182.

"I guess I am a pass-first guy, but it helps to get the puck to certain areas of the ice. It opens up seams for other things," Keller said.

Keller also admires Matthews from a distance, and realizes just how big a star the Leaf is in Arizona hockey circles.

"Anyone who plays hockey in Arizona knows who he is," Keller said.

Keller recalled playing a video hockey fantasy game with Matthews in a group that also included Coyotes winger Christian Fischer, another U.S. development program product.

Through 20 games, Keller has produced every bit as much as Matthews did when he started his career last season, more in some areas.

After 20 games, Matthews had nine goals and eight assists, while averaging 17:20 of ice time. Keller, at the same point, had more goals (11) and points (18). He also leads NHL rookie forwards in ice time with an average of 19:28 per game.

"He's fun to watch," Matthews said. "I'm not surprised by what he's done. He's a guy on their team that you don't want to give time and space to, and they have a number of those guys."

While Keller has strong hockey ties to Matthews, he says he "would not be in the NHL" without playing AAA hockey in a St. Louis program developed by former Blues stars Jeff Brown, Keith Tkachuk and Al MacInnis.

Keller is one of four products of that program who have entered the NHL as first-round picks in the past two years. The others: Logan Brown (Ottawa Senators), Matt Tkachuk (Calgary Flames) and Luke Kunin (Minnesota Wild).

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084365 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs miss last call vs. Coyotes

By ROSIE DIMANNO Star Columnist

Mon., Nov. 20, 2017

Nazem Kadri lifted his head from scanning the league literature Monday morning and said to dressing room cubicle neighbour Matt Martin: "Hey look, we've won six in a row."

Kind of weird that this would come as a news flash to Kadri since everybody with even a passing interest in the Maple Leafs was giddily aware that the team had racked up half a dozen consecutive Ws, a feat unmatched since Dec. 6 to 16, 2014.

How clearly many of us recall the self-congratulatory tone around the Leafs' inner sanctum back then.

What's not often mentioned now is that the club immediately afterwards slumped 2-7, triggering the cashiering of coach Randy Carlyle, and subsequently staggered through a 2-17 record under the interim tutelage of poor Peter Horachek.

Perhaps Kadri, among the few holdovers from that era, has erased the disaster from his memory iPod.

It should remain a cautionary tale about how quickly the zig can turn into a zag.

But of course these high-voltage Leafs, beneficiaries of some suddenly stellar goaltending from Freddie Andersen — back-to-back shutouts over 48 hours — won't suffer a similar fate with Mike Babcock at the helm.

No cashiering for Babcock either, come what way. Just a heap o' cash, far as the eye can see.

So, staring up at the crest of Seven Beauties — last achieved by the Leafs in December 2003, and which would simultaneously be the longest streak in the NHL this season — against the sad-sack league-worst Coyotes.

Although . . .

Coming off a micro two-win streak of their own, with a snoot-full of rekindled pride and positivity, having knocked off a pair of Canadian clubs on the road and doubtless all those Ontario-raised 'Yotes were eager to flash some shine here at the centre of the hockey universe, in front of family and friends.

Toronto couldn't surmount that serial-seven peak, matched speed for speed and throttled by Arizona's ferocious trap/forecheck two-step in a 4-1 defeat, third and fourth into an empty net after Andersen streaked to the bench, slamming his stick furiously on the boards.

He was least to blame, frankly.

It was on Arizona's 10th shot of the first period — actually, what would be their last shot of the first period — that Andersen surrendered his first goal in 141 minutes and 27 seconds, a power-play marker by Brendan Perlini.

On a night of all-around atrocious officiating — figment felonies for Mitch Marner and Ron Hainsey — the most jaw-dropping game-changer was the reversal on Auston Matthews' whip-around wrister that appeared to knot the score at 2-2 with 3:50 left in regulation time.

It was the only good chance Matthews had the entire game to that point — he'd ring one off the crossbar in a Leaf flurry of desperate offence with two-plus minutes remaining and the extra attacker — and it almost salvaged a point for Toronto.

But Arizona coach Rick Tocchet challenged it on goalie interference and, to everyone's surprise, the gambit paid off.

Technically, hang the horns on Zach Hyman, whose stick indisputably made contact with Antti Raanta's pad, if fleetingly and lightly, certainly not enough to impede the Arizona netminder, a couple of seconds later, from coming across for a save on Matthews' shot. For goodness sake, Hyman was in that crease-crush surrounded by four hack-a-whack Coyotes, all shoving.

"My stick hits the pad. Obviously you can see that. I was pushed in. But I think the goalie had enough time to get across and get positioned well. But that's how they're calling goalie interference, so tough break for us."

A negative outcome — from the Leaf perspective — appeared more likely as the review period ground on. "It's not good when they take so long," said Hyman. "I thought it was going to be upheld, but that's how it goes."

From James van Riemsdyk's corner of the locker room, there was even a whiff of conspiracy, or chicanery. "There's lots of time where I think goalies are smarter than we give them credit for," said van Riemsdyk, who accounted for Toronto's lone goal, his sixth in the last seven games. "They may try to incite some of that contact and then you never really know. Once there's contact, it's hard to say what's going to happen with the call."

And Raanta did immediately point an accusatory finger at Hyman.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Here's the thing, a takeaway to ease the loss. Even in what was arguably Matthews' worst game of the year, he came this close to ensuring at least a kiss-your-sister ending and overtime.

Buzz-buzz in the waning minutes couldn't ultimately make up for a flat, utterly choked-off opening 10 minutes.

"We should start on time," Matthews observed sternly. "Tonight, we just didn't get much going. They clogged up the neutral zone. They've got a really good power play and we took too many penalties again. It cost us a couple of goals there."

Not really such a great power play for Arizona, middle-of-the-league middling, but it's been pistol hot over the past few games.

Matthews was uncharacteristically cold on offence and sloppy on defence, with a gobsmacking giveaway in the third period, butt rescued only by Andersen's coming up razor-sharp.

"I didn't play very well tonight," Matthews said. "I don't really like a lot of plays I made and just turned the puck over."

Of course he's just one comeback game removed from four games on the sidelines with an upper-body injury. But Matthews looked more sketchy against the Coyotes than he did in Saturday's 6-0 stomp over Montreal.

"It's just a matter of getting back to the level I was playing at before I was injured. It's obviously frustrating, but it's what you're working towards — trying to get back to that point. But definitely tonight, I wasn't very good myself."

State of body aside, it's fair to wonder how much of an emotional wrench this particular game was for Matthews, playing against "my hometown team" with all the folks back in Arizona watching but no family in the stands here. He looked over-wired.

Matthews reached the century mark of his eye-popping arriviste NHL career in games played, with Mitch Marner just one tick behind as they and their sophomore 'mates ripen into a potent, steadfast roster.

"Not like it's game 1,000," Matthews had noted dryly after the morning skate. "It's game 100."

Milestones are mere pebbles for Matthews.

For grand-plus territory, you'd be talking Patrick Marleau, who leads by a Route 66 mile in all categories against Arizona but was persona non visibilis Monday night. Ditto William Nylander.

Arizona-raised Matthews clearly has immense affection for the Coyotes (though maybe not so much this morning-after). "When they're not playing the Leafs, I root for them," he'd said.

"A lot of good friends on that team. You want to see them succeed because you want to see hockey stay in Arizona."

Indeed, if you squint hard enough, these youth-laden Coyotes, forged in the smithy of chronic losing are a bit of a fun-house mirror image of the Leafs a year ago.

Thus he concurs with Marner about the Coyotes' longer-range upside. "They obviously haven't gotten off to as good of a start as they wanted. A lot of those games were really close, could have gone either way. But they've won two in a row, they have plenty of skill, a lot of explosive dynamic players that can beat you. If you take them lightly, they can make you pay."

Exhibit 4-1.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084366 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leivo contract hints at Leafs' master plan: Cox

By DAMIEN COX Sports Columnist

Mon., Nov. 20, 2017

On its own, the Josh Leivo signing by the Maple Leafs last week was hardly earth-shattering news or something likely to be a pivotal transaction this season.

But it was intriguing nonetheless, a glimpse into the dynamics of the team's salary and personnel management strategy, which could be as interesting to watch in the coming years as the team's on-ice performance.

That's the NHL, of course, in 2017. There's the games on the ice, and the fascinating salary-cap games off the ice.

The Leafs have received a lot of undesired attention for the manner in which they've handled high-salaried veterans they no longer want (hello, Joffrey Lupul), but less attention for what they're trying to create with the organization in general.

Leivo gave us some insight into that. On the surface, it seemed a bit unusual that a player who, to some degree, seems trapped within the organization would choose to extend his contract to the end of next season rather than become an unrestricted free agent in July.

Why would he do that? He's not dressing much. Wouldn't he want out?

Tough call for the young man, for sure, and it helped that he had an experienced adviser in agent Ian Pulver, who has seen the NHL business develop from a number of perspectives over the past 20 years. Leivo concluded that it was better for him to stay in Toronto and fight for work rather than take a chance in free agency that he might find a better home.

"He's from the Toronto area, he wants to make it here and be part of what they're doing," said Pulver. "He's prepared to wait his turn to perform on a regular basis. If he gets a repeated chance to do that, he believes he can have success here."

In other words, Leivo decided the grass wouldn't necessarily be greener somewhere else, that the Leafs are now an organization worth being part of and that an opportunity for a bigger payday would be enhanced if he took this deal now.

Needless to say, this is exactly the situation Brendan Shanahan, Lou Lamoriello and Co. are hoping to create.

Remember, the Leafs are heavily influenced by people who were once in the New Jersey (Lamoriello) or Detroit organization (Mike Babcock, Jim Hiller). Shanahan, meanwhile, was part of both. Both the Red Wings and Devils during their heydays were exceptionally good at accumulating talent, keeping that talent as long as possible and creating the conditions under which, in some cases, talent was convinced to stay and play for below-market salaries.

The Devils knew as long as they had Martin Brodeur content at a certain salary, it was nearly impossible for any other player to ask for more. Plus, players liked winning Cups and living in suburban New Jersey.

Detroit, meanwhile, was very good at keeping players in their farm system for as long as possible, both as an apprenticeship technique and to make it difficult for those players to demand higher salaries early in their careers. While other teams were rushing kids to the NHL, the Wings would take a more gradual approach, understanding it was also a way to control costs.

How can you ask for the moon on your second contract, after all, when you've played most of your entry-level years in Grand Rapids?



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Teams require long-term stability in management to consistently pursue these kinds of strategies. Detroit and Jersey both had that, and the Leafs appear to now.

The overall goal is to be better able to afford the expensive, irreplaceable players by making sure there's lots of choice and competition among the more affordable, replaceable athletes.

The only current Leaf guaranteed to get paid to the max is Auston Matthews. Forget the big hometown discount there. The Leafs need to then manage their cap intelligently to afford William Nylander and Mitch Marner, with the dollar amounts depending on how those players progress.

After that, it's a matter of having lots of competition for jobs and available cap space. Ideally, the organization will progress to the point where some of those players will be willing to take less to be a Leaf. Tampa surely felt it got that kind of a bargain at the upper end of the payroll with Steven Stamkos last summer, and that could really pay off down the line.

In Toronto, Morgan Rielly, Nazem Kadri, Connor Brown and Zach Hyman have signed what could be considered team-friendly deals in the past two years. Freddie Andersen is the 18th-highest-paid goalie in the league. Meanwhile, with more than \$16 million coming off the books next summer, you'll have James van Riemsdyk, Leo Komarov and Tyler Bozak all looking for new contracts, probably with the choice of trying to get more as UFAs or settling for less to stay in Toronto.

Beyond that, you've got Leivo, Kasperii Kapanen and Nikita Soshnikov all fighting to get into the current Leaf lineup, with Curtis McElhinney, Garret Sparks and Calvin Pickard each with an eye on the understudy role to Andersen next year. In training camp, you had Eric Fehr and Dominic Moore fighting it out for one fourth-line centre position. On the farm, there are nine defencemen with the second-place Marlies, at least half of whom are legitimate NHL prospects, including 2017 No. 1 pick Timothy Liljegren.

The Leafs have made 27 selections in last three drafts after making only 17 in the three before that, putting more bodies into the organizational churn. They've now picked in the first round seven years in a row (from 2003 to 2007 they had no first-rounder three times) and have basically all of their picks for the next three years in place.

More bodies. More competition. More assets to trade if needed.

Although they failed to attract either Stamkos or Jimmy Vesey two summers ago, the Leafs appear to be creating a dynamic in which players want to play in the GTA, and for salaries less than what they theoretically could command elsewhere. The old myth that players from the Toronto area didn't want to play for the Leafs has been proven to be just that, a myth.

Leivo was one example of all these elements of the Leafs' grand strategy. We'll see if he can find a way to become a regular.

All of this only works, of course, if the right players are drafted and acquired, and the right players are identified as worth keeping, and if those players perform.

So far, 3 ½ years into the Shanaplan, the signs are certainly encouraging.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084367 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs' Frederik Andersen gets NHL weekly honour, watches Argos advance

By MARK ZWOLINSKI Sports reporter

Mon., Nov. 20, 2017

Coyotes winger Max Domi is one of several players on the team with ties to Toronto, so a game against the Leafs Monday was special for the 22-year-old.

Naturally, the subject of his famous father, Tie Domi, came up Monday. Part of the lore with the elder Domi was his appearances with the Toronto Argos as a place kicker.

With the Argos advancing to the Grey Cup Sunday, the younger Domi had a little fun with his father, who kicked field goals in pre-season games for the Argos in 1996 and 97.

"He (father) says he was a pretty good football player . . . guess I'll have to do some research on that," Domi, who was born in 1995, said with a smile.

Domi had a goal and an assist during the Coyotes' 4-1 win.

Shutout star: Leafs goalie Freddie Andersen was named the NHL's second star of the week in the league's weekly release Monday.

Carolina winger Teuvo Teravainen was the first star, while Colorado centre Nathan MacKinnon took third.

Andersen picked up his second star nod on the strength of back-to-back shutouts, where he stopped 75 shots combined.

Gridiron gang: Leafs centre Auston Matthews took in the Argos win over Saskatchewan in the CFL's East Division final on Sunday, joining teammates Mitch Marner, Andersen, Morgan Rielly, and Tyler Bozak.

Matthews also knew head coach Mike Babcock, a steadfast Saskatchewan fan, was also at the game. While Marner won a bet with Bozak (also a Saskatchewan fan), Matthews decided to remain neutral when it came to inside bets among teammates and the coaching staff.

Matthews said Babcock has yet to pay up a bet — a bottle of wine — from last Christmas, when Matthews bet Babcock the USA would win the gold medal over Canada in the world junior championships.

On Sunday, Matthews said he left the Argos-Saskatchewan game in the third quarter. "I was tired . . . Then I hear the game turned into a barn burner . . . I wish I would've stayed," he said.

Man of the people: Babcock knew his players were in the "secure suite," the private suite where Leafs players watched the CFL East Division final.

Babcock "took a different route . . . with the fans (in the stands)."

"I grew up a Roughriders fan, but it was good to see the Argos win, good for the ownership group. Any time you have an opportunity to play with for a championship, it's special."

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084368 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs' Auston Matthews still shaking off a little rust ahead of game No. 100

By MARK ZWOLINSKI Sports reporter

Mon., Nov. 20, 2017



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Auston Matthews says he will approach his 100th career National Hockey League game Monday night with the same approach he has had for every one before it: to get better.

"It's not like it's game 1,000, it's 100," Matthews said as the Maple Leafs prepared for their home tilt against the Arizona Coyotes. "It will be fun for sure, but you try not to have too many expectations. You have fun, you're playing in the NHL and ever since day one, you try to get better every day."

Matthews will also be playing his second game since returning from a four-game absence because of an upper-body injury. Even though he scored two goals in his return Saturday night in a 6-0 victory over the Montreal Canadiens, the 20-year-old star admits to still feeling a little rusty.

"Just a little of everything, your touch with the puck, agility ... usually it takes a couple of games to get it back, so I hope that's the case here," Matthews said.

Matthews remains one of the NHL's most prolific players over the past 100 games: he's notched 52 goals and 38 assists over that span, and feels he is in a day-to-day challenge to improve.

Leafs coach Mike Babcock concurred, saying Matthews, like a lot of young players, must focus on becoming a total pro. And that means more dedication and consistency with defensive play, as well as conditioning and body development.

"With two goals the other night, you'd think he's back, but he's not," Babcock said of Matthews. "We've got to get him skating like he was (before his injury). He's had a really good 99 games, but the one thing about the league, you have to be ready all the time. He wants to get better all the time, so that won't be an issue."

Babcock extended that to Mitch Marner, who will be playing career game No. 99 Monday night as Toronto aims for its seventh straight victory.

"Mitch is trying to find his game and the level's he's at," Babcock continued. "It's not all about skill, you have to work hard and look after your body every day ... be a pro every day."

Meanwhile, Arizona will have defenceman Niklas Hjalmarsson back in the lineup for Monday night's game. The 26-year-old blueliner has missed the last 10 games with an upper-body injury.

"He gets the puck out in pressure situations, which is big in this league," Coyotes coach Rick Tocchet said. "He's a great shot blocker, great in our room, we've really missed him."

Hjalmarsson has played in 12 of the Coyotes' 22 games so far, registering three assists and a minus-7.

The Leafs are expected to start Frederik Andersen in goal, while the Coyotes will counter with Antti Raanta.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084369 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs winning streak snapped by frustrating Coyotes

Lance Hornby

November 20, 2017 11:21 PM EST

It seems whenever the Desert Dogs come to Toronto, they drop a cold front on the Maple Leafs.

What looked like a mis-match on paper, the Leafs on a six-game winning streak at home against the NHL's last-place club, became a complete dog, a 4-1 result decided by power-play goals, two by the Coyotes to the Leafs' one — and a coach's challenge that reversed an Auston Matthews' tying goal with 3:50 to play. Zach Hyman was judged to have used his stick to knock netminder Antti Raanta off his angle. Matthews later hit the post.

That's points in eight straight games at the Air Canada Centre for Arizona, but Matthews and coach Mike Babcock thought the Leafs shouldn't have left their fate in the hands of the replay gods anyway.

"We should start on time," Matthews said, as the Leafs reached a season-high three games without a first-period goal. "They clogged up the neutral zone, they have a really good power play, we took too many penalties (with only one power play themselves)."

"I didn't play very well tonight, I didn't like the plays I made, turning the puck over."

As the game wore on, Babcock started changing his lines as he did in Montreal on Saturday. He didn't go as far as putting fourth-liner Matt Martin back with Matthews and Mitch Marner, but did have Matthews and Marner out with Hyman when the goal was overturned.

Babcock started his post-game comments by apologizing for his flippant remark to a reporter who wondered in the morning briefing if he'd keep the odd assortment lines together. Babcock said "the beauty of this is when you get to coach the team, you get to do what you want. When I coach, I do what I want. I like to win every night."

In any case, it ended the Leafs' attempt to match the seven victories last compiled here by Pat Quinn's club in 2003-04 and Frederik Andersen's bid for three straight shutouts.

"In my opinion (the Hyman call) did not affect the outcome," Babcock said. "The one-on-one battles, not being ready to compete at the start affected the outcome. When you don't start on time, you're unprepared to go, you don't deserve good results."

Arizona, with wins over the Canadiens and Senators earlier on this Eastern road trip, no doubt had a few in Leafs Nation snickering, have hardly looked like pushovers north of the border.

"It was pretty frustrating for awhile," said Coyotes forward Max Domi. "But we stuck with it and knew it was going to come. We're playing good hockey right now. We have to find a way to put everything else behind us."

Monday's result spoiled Matthews' 100th NHL game as Toronto's leading scorer celebrated what he thought was the equalizer, sweeping around the net and going up top.

"That's always tough," said James van Riemsdyk, who had Toronto's only goal. "There are lots of times when the goalies are smarter than we give them credit for, maybe try to incite some of that contact."

"I like at least now (the league) is taking a closer look at that where before it was just a guess."

Matthews was blanked, while Clayton Keller had two points to stay in the race atop the rookie scoring parade and perhaps follow Matthews to the Calder Trophy table in June.

Keeping the score close was Anderson, named NHL second star of the week before the game with a record of 6-1 this month before Monday. He made 27 saves, but Raanta slammed the door on Toronto at even strength.

"We can all speculate, but November seems to be kinder to him than October," Babcock said of two straight uneven opening months since Andersen came to Toronto. "I don't know why. Is it harder for the goalie to be ready at training camp? Or was it our team being so loosey-goosey they didn't care as much and wanted to race you to 10 (goals)? That probably led to it as well, but I don't know."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Andersen had begun the evening with 75 straight saves on as many shots and a chance at becoming just the third Leafs goalie since the start of 1930-31 to get three bagels. Lorne Chabot and Turk Broda (1950-51) were the others as posted by the Elias Sports Bureau.

But the slow-starting Leafs fell back into over reliance on their Danish defender and though he did make it to double figures in saves, the Coyotes broke his streak midway through the first period. Brendan Perlini, whose father Fred wore Matthews' 34 among many others in his brief Leafs career, was alone near the end of a Connor Carrick minor. With the penalty-killing tandem of Nikita Zaitsev and Ron Hainsey near exhaustion as Arizona kept the puck inside the line for a long stretch, Perlini collected his fifth.

Nazem Kadri drew a Kevin Connauton penalty in the dying seconds of the first period, costing the Coyotes when the puck was dropped after intermission, Kadri assisting on van Riemsdyk's club-leading fifth power-play goal.

With Marner off in the third, Arizona controlled the face-off in short order with a successful screen shot by Oliver Ekman-Larson.

"This is what I was concerned about today," Babcock said. "Their record, even though we tried to tell our players how they've played lately and come from behind, we got what we deserved. You get ready for the game you're playing today, that's what good pros do. A lot of the guys who were driving us, the young skilled guys ... not today."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084370 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs' Marner basking in Argos Grey Cup run

Lance Hornby

November 20, 2017 10:57 PM EST

Rarely have the Toronto Argonauts been of such interest to the Maple Leafs.

But with mutual playoff success of late, and shared ownership, the hockey gang was out in force for Sunday's CFL East Final win over Saskatchewan.

"It was exciting," said forward Mitch Marner, a regular attendee this season at BMO Field. "I was worried that last little bit with 10 minutes left, but I had no doubt."

Marner won an undisclosed bet against Regina-born centre Tyler Bozak, who had provincial native and coach Mike Babcock on his side, too.

"I walked in here this morning and Babs and Ty were at the breakfast table," chortled Marner. "I walked in with my Argos hat, arms up and celebrating. It was time to rub it in."

"I'm going with the Argos again (in Sunday's Grey Cup over Calgary), no doubt. It's going to be great."

Ironically, the Leafs' first game after the CFL title tilt will be in Calgary next Tuesday, which would be an even better stage for Marner to bask in if Toronto wins.

Marner brought a few teammates, including Auston Matthews, to BMO on Sunday, the latter's first live CFL game. Marner said the Arizona resident liked it — once he got used to three-down football.

"I left after the third quarter," a sheepish Matthews said. "It was a bit cold and I was tired. When I got home and watched on TV, it turned into a real barnburner. I probably should have stayed."

Babcock endured the elements with the green-garbed Rider Pride gang in the stands.

"I took the different route with the fans, instead of the sitting in the secured suite and watching it on TV," Babcock said. "It was a great experience. I grew up a Roughrider fan (but) I'm really happy for Toronto, for the team and for Larry Tanenbaum and the ownership. It's a great opportunity. Anytime you have a chance to win a championship, it's really special."

Saskatoon-born ex-Leaf and now Coyotes' defenceman Luke Schenn was also at the game, set up by a high school friend who has a Rider connection.

"We pretty much watched the whole game from the Roughriders bench," Schenn said. "It was a great experience."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084371 Toronto Maple Leafs

Babcock returns to regular lines as Maple Leafs go for seventh straight win

Lance Hornby

November 20, 2017 3:29 PM EST

TORONTO — Mike Babcock is sorry for all those hockey poolies who picked up Matt Martin on the weekend, but the Auston Matthews experiment is one-and-done.

The Maple Leafs coach is returning to regular lines on Monday against the Arizona Coyotes as the club chases a seventh straight victory for the first time since 2004.

In the midst of Saturday's scoreless stalemate in Montreal, Babcock got out the blender and among the new creations was Matthews centring the equally creative Mitch Marner and fourth line forechecker Martin on the same line. They produced two of the nicest goals at the end of a 6-0 rout.

But Marner was to be restored to right wing with James van Riemsdyk and Tyler Bozak, Matthews between William Nylander and Zach Hyman, while Martin was given back his pick and shovel.

"When you get to coach the team, you get to do what you want; when I'm coaching, I'm going to do what I want," Babcock said of those who wanted to see him stick with Saturday's set a little longer. "I like to win every night. So I try to put the right people together for that. I think it was good entertainment for us, but the score was 6-0 and the shifts in a lot of it didn't matter."

"With two goals (people) think he's back (from a four-game back injury), but he's not. We have to get him back skating like he can, playing without the puck and being dominant."

Matthews will be playing his 100th NHL game, a fortunate bit of scheduling as he was born in Scottsdale, Ariz. and played against some of the Coyotes such as centre Clayton Keller, a candidate to follow Matthews as Calder Trophy winner.

"It's always fun to play your hometown team and I have a lot of friends over there," said Matthews, the Leafs leading scorer.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

"He's had a nice 99 games and we expect him to get better and better," Babcock added. "One thing about leadership, you have to do it right every day. It's not what you say, it's what you do. He has to keep improving, but he knows that, he wants that so it shouldn't be an issue."

"They're (still) kids, trying to learn how to get better, trying to learn how to play," Babcock said. "Brownie's level of consistency is different than Mitch's. Mitch is still trying to find his game every day, what he's going to be and what level's he's at. He's a lot younger and so he's got time."

"It doesn't matter how much skill you have, you have to become a pro. He has to continue to work on his body like he is. He's wants to be great, but it will take some time."

The Coyotes are last in the NHL, but two of their four wins have been rallies on the Canadian leg of this road trip and three victories have been on the road. Lots of Canadian players and personnel with Toronto connections also populate the roster. That includes ex-Leaf first rounder Luke Schenn, Tie Domi's son Max and Scarborough-born coach Rick Tocchet.

"There's no better hockey city for me," Tocchet said. "I get to see my family and it's good for our guys, too. There was a little extra juice in their step at the morning skate. Hopefully we have it tonight."

Babcock warned: "They're fast, skilled and do a lot of things right. We watched their two wins. We have to take care of the puck tonight; if you don't, it's going to be a track meet. That might be fun for the fans, but it doesn't guarantee winning."

Frederik Andersen, who recorded back-to-back shutouts of the Devils and Canadiens and was named NHL second star of the week on Monday, starts for the Leafs. Antti Raanta will be in goal for the Coyotes, who have a seven-game points streak in Toronto.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084372 Toronto Maple Leafs

Matthews about to hit 100 games with Leafs

Lance Hornby

November 20, 2017 9:44 AM EST

Time seems to have whipped past like one of his quick-release goals, but Auston Matthews is on the cusp of his 100th National Hockey League regular season game.

So just what has he done in the first 99? Merely justified much of the hype surrounding his arrival as the first overall pick in 2016. He led the Leafs in scoring his first year, is ahead this term despite missing four games, with 21 points to make it 90 points in 99 regular-season appearances. He has been to the World Cup, the all-star game, the playoffs, his highlight goals top the sportscasts and, though the media grind sometimes isn't his favourite part of the day, he has become savvy enough to know how it works, home and away, using the podium to praise or poke his teammates.

Hero-hungry Toronto has embraced the kid from Arizona, his No. 34 is a best-selling sweater and chants of his name echoed down from the cheapseats at the Bell Centre on Saturday night after two goals, the 'real' Leafs fans who take such road trips letting him know he's appreciated.

"It's flown by," Matthews said as he prepared for the milestone match against the Coyotes here Monday in a bit of scheduling kismet. "Tyler Bozak told me I was at 98 (before Montreal) so it would be pretty cool if

it's the hundredth, especially against the hometown team. A lot of good friends are playing for them now."

As an old NHL sea dog, Ron Hainsey knows when rough weather is on the horizon.

That's why the 36-year-old defenceman wasn't getting too excited about a six-game winning streak that coincided with the start of a new five-game team segment in Montreal and what appears to be favourable conditions much of this week, with Montreal disposed of, Arizona next and middle-of-the-pack Florida and Carolina later on.

"We have a big stretch of five in eight games," Hainsey said, "which gets tougher by the end. Then we go out West for three tough ones (both Alberta teams and the Canucks). So we'll take any points we can bank. We're a good team, but the next two weeks, with the travel and where we're going, it's tough. We're not going to win them all. We're going to try to do it, but that's just reality."

"As long as you're getting wins, you want to keep them going. We had a lead going into the third period (against the Habs) and I thought the third was our best period."

Maybe Mike Babcock knew how tight Matthews, Mitch Marner and Matt Martin are away from the ice, perhaps not. But the three certainly were fired up to be placed on the same line as part of the coach's mid-game shift of lines in Montreal that turned a tight game into a laughter.

"We play video games together and it's exciting when you get a chance to be out there," Marner said. "We're joking around and having fun. It would be nice to stay with (Matthews) but we'll see what happens."

Babcock said Saturday the changes in Montreal were not permanent, but now that he knows the results, especially with Martin, it could become a nice option. Part of ripping everything up was getting back to Patrick Marleau between Zach Hyman and Connor Brown, a line that worked well when Matthews was out.

Martin said he didn't see his big break with Matthews and Marner coming until it happened, but his backhand feed though the legs to Marner and on to Matthews for a goal was the talk of the Leaf room after Saturday's win.

"It was obviously a pretty good opportunity for me," said the usual fourth line grinder. "My first two shifts, I was just trying to get Matty the puck and turned a couple over. But he and Mitch are obviously elite players and you just want to get it to them as much as possible."

Marner has often praised the veteran Martin's offensive attributes.

"I think a lot of people underestimate his skill. He's got great vision, he makes plays and he's terrifying to play against. He created that entire chance on that goal. He drove down the wall, created a turnover from their defenceman and made a pass to me. If he doesn't make that (first) play, that goal doesn't happen."

Yet Martin knows his limitations.

"Listen, there are different roles you play in a game and if you're on in a fourth-line situation, you can't be making behind-the-back passes. I can't be turning pucks over or I'll be off that line quickly. I just want to get them the puck. Once they get it, they'll do some creative stuff. Mitchy always seems to be in good support, he's easy to find and he's pretty vocal. He wants it and he's calling for it. It makes it easy for me to get in their end and make little pop plays to him."

Toronto hasn't won seven in a row since Nov. 22 to Dec. 6, 2003, an eight-game run under coach Pat Quinn with Ed Belfour in net ... Marner on goalie Frederik Andersen and his back-to-back shutouts: "Freddy has been a brick wall back there. It's nice to see, but maybe we have to start helping him out a little more and hopefully the streak keeps going." ... Marner was hoping to go to Sunday's Eastern final with pals to see his beloved Argos, the difficulty being many of them are still in school or out of town and couldn't get there. He had a small bet with Regina native Bozak. "It's going to be nice when he pays me," a confident Marner said



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

a day before the game. "I have no doubt the Argos are going to win. It will be nice to text him and say thanks."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084373 Toronto Maple Leafs

Auston Matthews had off night against Arizona, but first 100 games have been pretty spectacular

By Jonas Siegel 4 hours ago

Auston Matthews' 100th NHL game didn't look like most of the 99 preceding it.

Though he appeared to score the game-tying goal late in the third period, Matthews was mostly out of sorts against his hometown Arizona Coyotes on Monday night and said so afterward.

"I didn't play very well tonight," he said after a 4-1 loss that snapped the Maple Leafs' six-game win streak. "I don't really like a lot of plays I made — just turned the puck over. I think it's just getting back to the level I was playing at before I was injured."

"It's obviously frustrating," he added, "but it's what you're working towards."

The 20-year-old, who was raised in Scottsdale, was playing for only the second time following an absence (upper-body injury) that lingered for four games and nearly two weeks. It's clear that Matthews, who returned to the lineup on Saturday, is still trying to catch up and regain his previous level, which had him in the early running for the Art Ross and Rocket Richard trophies.

Still, he almost tied the game with less than four minutes left in regulation, only to have what would've been his 13th goal of the year called back on account of Zach Hyman interfering with Coyotes goaltender Antti Raanta.

Matthews seemed to be missing his usual burst and precision with the puck. He was uncharacteristically sloppy at times, attempting a weak backhand pass to William Nylander at one point in the offensive zone that led to an offensive rush for Clayton Keller, the player who seems most likely to follow in Matthews' Calder Trophy-winning footsteps.

Leafs head coach Mike Babcock felt his team stumbled into a trap game against the league-worst Coyotes. He concurred with Matthews' post-game assessment.

"A lot of the guys that are driving us, the young skill guys, not today — they weren't here today," Babcock said.

"With the two goals last game, you think he's back," Babcock said, referring to Matthews two-goal return in a blowout win over the Habs. "We need to get him back and going and skating and playing without the puck like he can, being the dominating force like he can. Obviously, he's had a real nice 99 games or whatever he's had."

"Real nice" is an understatement. Matthews first 100 games in the NHL are pretty spectacular. His 52 goals and 90 points stand up to and even exceed a sampling of the NHL greats of today:

And of the past 30 years (data is available only since 1987):

One stunning stat is how destructive Matthews has already been as a goal-scorer. Only six players since 1987 have scored more in their first 100 games than Matthews: Teemu Selanne (84), Eric Lindros (67), Pavel

Bure (64), Alex Ovechkin (64), Rob Brown (61) and Joe Nieuwendyk (59).

Ilya Kovalchuk had 50. Sidney Crosby had 49. Brett Hull had 46.

Matthews had more than all of them.

Even more impressive than that is how Matthews has done his damage. Nearly all of his goals have come at even strength. Under that light, only two players have fared better in the last three decades in their first 100 games:

Matthews, for that matter, is on pace right now for 48 even-strength goals this season, a mark that's been reached only 13 times in NHL history. Steven Stamkos was the last player to do it in 2011-12. He is the only one, in fact, since 1993.

"It's flown by," Matthews said of his first 100 games. "I guess that's what everybody says, 'It flies by when you're in this league,' and it sure has."

Monday was only the fifth game all season that Matthews, who finished the game again playing with Mitch Marner, has been held without a point. He's yet to go consecutive games without hitting the scoreboard.

"We just expect him to get better and better," Babcock said. "One thing about leadership is you've got to do it right every day. It's not what you say, it's what you do and, so, he knows that and understands that. He's got to keep improving, but he wants to so it shouldn't be an issue."

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1084324 Nashville Predators

Nashville Predators 5, Winnipeg Jets 3: 3 things we learned

Adam Vingan, USA TODAY NETWORK — Tennessee Published 9:52 p.m. CT Nov. 20, 2017 | Updated 10:50 p.m. CT Nov. 20, 2017

Let's be honest — a late November matchup between the Predators and Winnipeg Jets usually doesn't inspire much fanfare.

Monday's game, however, presented some intrigue. The Jets' quietly impressive start has put them in second place in the Central Division, a gap that the Predators closed to one point after a 5-3 victory, Nashville's seventh in nine November games.

Here are three observations from Monday's victory:

The offensive force awakens

The Predators' red-hot offense largely has been responsible for their recent success. They averaged 2.45 goals per game in October, 28th in the 31-team NHL, according to FOX Sports Tennessee.

No such problem has existed this month, with Nashville scoring at least five goals Monday for the fifth time in eight games. The Predators slumbered through most of the first period, but overwhelmed the Jets in the middle period with three goals and a 19-7 shot advantage.

Nashville's offense Monday derived from its principal sources. Captain Roman Josi, defenseman P.K. Subban, centers Ryan Johansen and Kyle Turris as well as forwards Viktor Arvidsson and Kevin Fiala each had two-point games.

The most noteworthy contribution belonged to Predators defenseman Mattias Ekholm, who extended his goal-scoring streak to four games in the second period, the longest by a defenseman in franchise history.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Fiala starting to flourish

Fiala has discovered a groove. His pinning backhand goal on a delayed Winnipeg penalty in the first period was the first of multiple displays of his skill Monday.

The 21-year-old's offensive resurgence has coincided with the arrival of Turris, who has centered his line. In the five games since Turris made his Predators debut, Fiala has six points and is averaging three shots per game.

Fiala, who has recorded consecutive multi-point outings for the first time in his 79-game NHL career, is skating and attacking with confidence.

Want some top-notch movement? You'll wanna see this play from @PKSubban1 ➡ @KevinFiala22.  
#WPGvsNSHPic.twitter.com/7RcdeZst5q

— NHL (@NHL) November 21, 2017

Late-game hiccups

The Predators' recent lead protection hasn't been as formidable as their offensive production. After Nashville allowed two late goals Saturday against the Colorado Avalanche, players vowed to tighten up. But the Predators continued to play loose with the lead Monday, giving up two third-period goals to the Jets off turnovers.

Predators coach Peter Laviolette said that "our game management has to be better."

Tennessean LOADED:

1084392 Websites

The Athletic / LeBrun: What do the GMs who passed on Clayton Keller think today?

By Pierre LeBrun 18 hours ago

Watching Clayton Keller electrify this season, the 19-year-old seemingly genetically engineered from DNA cultivated off Johnny Gaudreau and Patrick Kane, well, it already makes you wonder how the heck he only went seventh in the 2016 NHL draft.

Not that the Arizona Coyotes are complaining, mind you.

"I mean, we're happy with it certainly," smiled Coyotes GM John Chayka when asked that very question last week. "We felt like we were getting top value for picking seventh. It was a strong draft, a lot of good players, but we feel like Clayton has the ability to be special. For us, we're always drafting for ceiling, and we think he's a guy with unlimited ceiling. He's playing well now, but we think he's still just scratching the surface."

It is way too early to pass final judgment on a draft conducted just 17 months ago, but certainly not too early to begin to ask questions.

So we did just that.

Auston Matthews went first overall, of course, followed by Patrik Laine.

Then, well, it got mighty interesting.

The Columbus Blue Jackets produced gasps from the crowd that Friday evening when they selected Pierre-Luc Dubois with the third overall pick. The surprise wasn't that they passed on Keller, but rather that they didn't take presumed No. 3 Jesse Puljujarvi.

Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen chuckled when I approached him Friday after the GMs meeting in Montreal, pointing out how much flack he

already took on draft night for not taking Puljujarvi and now I was asking him about another player that perhaps he could have taken.

"Coming from the background of scouting and how hard and how important a job that is, we rely on our scouts who do the work all year long to see those players over and over and over again," said Kekalainen, whose own scouting talents over the years were as good as they got in the hockey world.

"Studying them inside and out, everything from head to toe. They do the list. That's how we do our drafting. That's the way it's supposed to be in my opinion. That was their order, I respect their work, and that's how we drafted," added Kekalainen. "In 10 years we'll see how the order should have been. Until then, I'm not going to judge the order. We're very happy to have Pierre-Luc Dubois. He's getting better every game and more and more comfortable with the league. He's a wonderful player that we really like a lot."

Kekalainen added that perhaps Dubois may not be the most prolific point producer in the draft group but players are impactful in many ways.

"Look at Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane. Patrick Kane is always going to score more points, but who's more valuable for the team? Some people take Kane, some people take Toews. That's the way the game is," Kekalainen said.

The Coyotes exhaled once Columbus took Dubois at No. 3, they were worried Keller would go there.

"Yeah, we had some concerns," said Chayka. "The Columbus pick was the action pick at that point. Nobody was sure what would happen. Obviously, Matthews and Laine were 1-2. Once we understood what (the Jackets) were doing, we felt there was a good chance we'd get him there (at No. 7)."

At No. 4, the Oilers took Puljujarvi, which again at the time seemed like a no-brainer. Which is not to say the Oilers didn't know a talent like Keller was there.

"For us, he (Keller) was in our discussions, but we had a lot of centres, so made a winger a priority," Oilers GM Peter Chiarelli said Friday. "I mean, his talent was indisputable, it was a little position-based for us."

At No. 5, the Canucks took defenceman Olli Juolevi. Again, it's not like the Canucks didn't have Keller on their radar, either.

"He had played centre that year with the U.S. team, and he was very skilled," Canucks GM Jim Benning said Friday after the GMs meeting. "The same type of things he's doing in the NHL he did with the U.S. national team. For us, we wanted to take a defenceman. We liked Juolevi. We had taken some forwards the previous years, and Brock Boeser is playing very well for us, we just really like Juolevi. He's having a very good year in the Finnish Elite League, and it seems like he's playing with a lot of confidence and scoring. So he's on the right development curve. But more than anything, I think everyone knew how skilled Keller was going to be, but it was more about some teams liking a different player for fit and that's what we did."

At No. 6, the Flames were thrilled to land Matthew Tkachuk, who has not disappointed at all.

"We really liked our guy," Flames GM Brad Treliving said Friday. "But our guys were also high on Keller. Real skilled guy. We thought he was a heck of a player, but we were excited how it ended for us."

Finally, No. 7 came and the Coyotes, despite at the time having a clear need for help on the blueline, knew who they were taking.

"Everyone seemed convinced we were taking a defenceman, we did have a lot of internal discussion about the need for defence. But we just wanted the best available player," said Chayka.

The Sabres were No. 8 and former GM Tim Murray says, had Keller not been taken, it would have been a really interesting decision, as he recalls.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

"We liked him a lot," Murray said Friday of Keller. "Highly skilled. Quite sure he was a one-year in college type of guy. Certainly right off the bat, if he wasn't a complete player, he had that offensive flash and probably run your power play from down low. ...

"I know that it would have been a real lively discussion between (Alexander) Nylander and Keller for sure. Yes, those were the two best forwards by far left on our list."

With Keller gone, the Sabres took Nylander.

Looking back, it's easy to judge, but it's not like people overwhelmingly were screaming around the hockey world for Keller to go No. 3.

Keller's smallish size no doubt was a factor, too.

"Dubois, Puljujarvi were stud players," said Craig Button, TSN's scouting director. "Puljujarvi was the MVP of the World Junior Tourney as a 17-year-old. Juolevi was a standout as a 17-year-old at the same World Junior and in London. The Flames weren't taking Keller ahead of Tkachuk then or now. Keller was damn good and teams knew he was good, including the teams selecting ahead of Arizona, but at that time, there wasn't any signal that he was better than any of those players. It's still early and Keller is demonstrating elite ability and the others have some doing to do for sure."

Chayka says the Coyotes' scouting meetings kept bringing them back to one player.

"I remember midterm meetings is when we were going through some numbers, talking as a scouting staff about some players, and he was the guy that stood out," Chayka said of Keller. "We must have spent 75 percent of our time talking about the one player."

As for Keller, well, the Kane comparisons make sense since he's the player of his youth.

"He's definitely someone I watched a lot growing up, just the way he's able to carry the puck and how he's so smart on the ice, and his shot, and how he makes plays on the power play," Keller told The Athletic last week. "I tried to take as many things from his game and put them into mine. I also like to watch Gaudreau. He's a small guy, as well. I got to play with him a bit at the world championships. He's unbelievable. He's smaller than me and look at what he can do in this league. His smarts and hockey IQ, he just thinks one step ahead of everyone else. I like to watch him, too, I can learn a lot from him."

Wait until Keller grows into his body. No question the best is yet to come.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084393 Websites

The Athletic / Dellow: Abandon hope, all ye who enter — which NHL teams are at the point of no return?

By Tyler Dellow 17 hours ago

This week marks the completion of the first quarter of the NHL season, that magical time of year where everybody churns out their thoughts on the first 20 games of the year and pedants scream about the "quarter pole" actually being something that comes up when a quarter of the race remains. (I think the reason nobody stops saying quarter pole is that the actual quarter pole comes around the trade deadline, so people are writing trade deadline stuff and nobody's casting about for a clever title for their column, which would probably prompt proper use of quarter pole.

If you aren't going to get to use such a nice sounding turn of phrase in March, you might as well use it now.)

I've always found those columns a little forced so I thought I'd take a different approach to things: which teams (if any) are beyond the point of return? Who's close to it? Conversely, has anyone punched their ticket yet or gotten close?

The point of no return is the point from which no team has come back to make the playoffs since the NHL went to the current points format in 2005-06. Essentially, a team is below the point of no return if it has fewer points in whatever number of games that it's played than any team to make the playoffs since 2005-06. (Obviously, this doesn't include the 2013 Lockout III season.) Conversely, a team has punched its ticket if it has more points in whatever number of games it's played than any team to miss the playoffs since 2005-06.

It's not dissimilar to Eliot Friedman's fabled November 1 test but has the advantage of being something that you can look at at any point in the season because it's tied to games played rather than a date. This will come up below but it's not appropriate to call this a projection: it doesn't take into account a team's strength. Unlike a projection though, it does provide a concrete point at which we can say "No team in this team's position has managed to get out of it."

In order to illustrate progress by game, I've proceeded on a divisional basis. In order to deal with colour clashes — this league loves blue and red — I've split each division on to two graphs. The bright red line at the bottom is the point of no return — fall below that and no team has made the playoffs since 2005-06 from your team's position. The bright yellow line at the top represents the point at which your ticket is punched — get to that line and no team has missed from your position since 2005-06. Through games played Sunday night, two teams have punched their ticket and one team has hit the point of no return.

A technical note: you'll notice the line representing a team punching their ticket doesn't start until game 10. This is, of course, the fault of the 2015-16 Montreal Canadiens, who missed the playoffs after starting 9-0-0.

Pacific Division

I don't even know what to say about Arizona. The Coyotes passed the point of no return after their fifth game of the year.

The real stunner is, of course, the Edmonton Oilers. The Oilers have 16 points through 20 games. They're slightly above the point of no return, which stands at 13 points after 20 games but if you look closely, you'll notice that it kind of flatlines for a few games around that point. By game 23, it's up to 17 points.

Being three points above the point of no return kind of undersells the gravity of the Oilers' position. Over the 11 full seasons played since Lockout II, 36 teams have been below 17 points after 20 games. Only one of them made the playoffs — the 2007-08 Washington Capitals, who fired their coach after their 21st game and traded for Cristobal Huet, and went 11-1 in their final 12 games to crawl across the finish line with 94 points. The Capitals made the playoffs with two points to spare.

On the one hand, this is pretty ominous for the Oilers. On the other, they've got the talent to escape from the situation they're in, which wasn't true of the vast, vast majority of teams in their situation. They're at the point where they're staring into the abyss though. A bad week — the Oilers have a set of back-to-back games in St. Louis and Detroit, followed by games in Buffalo and Boston — and the Oilers could conceivably drop below the point of no return by next weekend.

I would disagree with anyone saying that the Oilers have a 1-in-36 chance of getting into the playoffs at this point. Colleague Dom's projections put the likelihood of the Oilers making the playoffs at 22 percent. The difference between that number and the much less favourable historical likelihood is the result of bringing some assessment of a team's talent into the equation.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

It's somewhat amusing that Colleague Dom's model is now so much more bullish on the Oilers than history would suggest is warranted. He was more bearish on the Oilers entering the season than many in Edmonton felt recent history warranted and was duly chastised for his stupid, broken model. Six weeks later, his model is the optimistic one.

However you slice it, it seems like it's more likely than not the Oilers will miss the playoffs, which is a pretty shocking development.

Los Angeles has cooled off since their hot start but the Kings have already hit the point at which a team's ticket is, historically speaking, punched. L.A had 19 points in their first 11 games, nobody who's accomplished that has managed to miss.

## Central Division

Nobody in the Central Division is particularly close to the point of no return, with everyone having at least seven points worth of breathing room.

St. Louis on the other hand, is closing in on having its ticket punched. Only two teams with at least 31 points in their first 21 games have missed the playoffs since Lockout II. The 2013-14 Coyotes were one of those teams — they weren't particularly good but still finished with 89 points. The 2015-16 Canadiens were the other. That involved Carey Price getting injured and set off a series of events that saw them trade PK Subban for Shea Weber. Now that Price is injured again, Montreal looks to be on the edge of disaster.

So St. Louis is in a very comfortable spot. Its top six has been excellent. It will be interesting to see if the Blues try to add some depth for the playoffs. When you look back over the Blues history, they've kind of suffered from having their best teams at times when the Western Conference was loaded. In particular, I'm thinking of the turn of the century, when the Blues would run into Dallas or Detroit or Colorado. More recently, they've run into loaded Los Angeles and Chicago teams. That isn't the case this year — it sure looks like this might be a good year for St. Louis to try and find some depth before the playoffs.

## Metro Division

The Metro is similar to the Central, in that nobody's close to the point of no return, although the Rangers sure danced with it for a while. The Rangers and Flyers won't have been pleased with their starts, they're both still well ahead of the Capitals at the same point in the 2007-08 season. The first 20 games has eliminated nobody from the discussion.

I'm a long way from sold on the Devils and when you look at how teams with 25 points in their first 19 games have done, there are lots of misses in there. Only 22 of the 30 teams with the same start have gone on to make the playoffs. If you thought that the Devils were awfully thin before the season (I did) and haven't been wowed by their play or underlying numbers (I haven't), then you're probably still justified in not expecting them to make the playoffs. (The same is true of the Vegas Golden Knights, by the way.)

## Atlantic Division

In many ways, the Atlantic Division has had the most decisive opening quarter of the season. The Lightning have, by historical standards, punched their ticket. All that's keeping Buffalo and Florida above the point of no return is the 2007-08 Capitals. Nothing about either team makes me think they can be the 2007-08 Capitals, although Florida has a phenomenal first line and Buffalo's group of forwards seems pretty good to me. The Panthers get crushed when the first line isn't on the ice and Buffalo's defence corps is horrific. Both seem likely to be fatal flaws.

Which brings me to Montreal. The Canadiens are in a slightly better position than the Oilers in terms of points, with one more game played and two more points. The mood seems more catastrophic around Montreal than it is around the Oilers though. Part of this is probably down to Montreal's talisman Price being injured (after playing badly for long stretches) while Connor McDavid's healthy. Part of it's probably down to the fact the Canadiens seem like they've had more hideous losses than

the Oilers, most recently an ugly 6-0 beatdown on Hockey Night in Canada.

Part of managing or coaching a team in Canada is dealing with the noise and chaos that envelops Canadian teams whenever they're doing poorly. In Montreal, that noise and chaos is louder than anywhere else in the NHL. As bad as Montreal's start has been, they aren't out of it, although like Edmonton, they're on the edge of being out of it.

Nobody else in the Atlantic is in imminent danger of hitting the point of no return or particularly close to punching their ticket. If you're interested in the gradual winnowing that ultimately produces a field of 16 teams for the playoffs, Buffalo, Florida, Edmonton and Montreal are the teams worth keeping your eye on over the next couple of weeks. All have time to get out of their current uncomfortable position, although it's by no means assured, but it basically has to start now. Another week or two of aimlessly dropping points and, barring something unprecedented, the season is lost.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084394 Websites

The Athletic / Pronman: Comparing Clayton Keller to Auston Matthews and Jack Eichel, it's clear Arizona's rookie was always elite

By Corey Pronman 18 hours ago

Clayton Keller has emerged as one of the better players in the NHL in his rookie season. As of this writing, the Arizona Coyotes' 19-year-old forward is seventh in goals, 43rd in points and ninth in shots on goal in the NHL. Despite logging heavy minutes, his Corsi is north of 51 percent on a team where most of the players are under, if not well under 50. He's a dynamic offensive player whose combination of high-end skating, skill and hockey sense allows him to tilt the ice in his team's favor whenever he takes a shift.

Keller was the seventh overall pick in 2016. One could argue Arizona just got lucky getting a player of this caliber at that slot. I would argue it was completely foreseeable and that Keller has actually been an elite prospect for years before he was drafted.

To illustrate this, I will show his development season by season and use some recent elite USNTDP prospects in Jack Eichel and Auston Matthews to do a side-by-side analysis.

One key distinction is the age at the time these players were drafted. Eichel (born Oct. 28, 1996; drafted in 2015) and Matthews (born Sept. 17, 1997; drafted 2016), as late birthdates, were nearly a full year older than Keller (born July 29, 1998) at the time of their respective drafts. Thus, when comparing them, we won't use proximity to draft season, but rather their actual age. We can be pretty accurate doing so given Keller was one of the youngest players in his draft class, whereas Eichel and Matthews were among the oldest, so by adjusting their stats back one year, you get a clearer picture.

Sixteen-year-old season

At 16, the hype machine for the NHL was just starting for Eichel and Matthews. It was around that time they started to become more frequently mentioned in the NHL media. However, at the same age, Keller was being the most productive USHL player ever from the USNTDP at the same age, outpacing both Eichel and Matthew in point production.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

There was some luck on the part of Keller, as shown by his lower shot rates, but it was still a highly impressive display in the USHL.

It wasn't just in the USHL though. Keller's production against college teams and international teams — the USNTDP's other opponents in the season — matched or surpassed the other American superstars.

Keller scored 25 goals and 59 points in 45 games for the USA U17 team, and after he was called up to the U18 team, he scored nine goals and 23 points in 14 games. Eichel had 19 goals and 34 points in 36 games for the U17 team, and 10 goals and 18 points in 22 games for the U18 team. Matthews had 12 goals and 33 points in 24 games for the 17's, and 12 goals and 17 points in 20 games for the 18's.

Keller was dominant at the World Under-17 Challenge, scoring more than two points per game to put him among the tournament's all-time scoring leaders. He was also given a big role at the IIHF U18's as an underage player.

IIHF Under-18's:

You could have made reasonable arguments Keller was not at the very same level of Eichel and Matthews — be it his size or a more pinpoint scouting evaluation. However, a reasonable person could see that it was close.

Seventeen-year-old season

This was Keller's draft season and the season preceding Eichel's and Matthews' drafts. While Keller's point production was a little lower than the other two Americans in the USHL, his shot production was in line. And you could have argued, unlike the previous season, he was getting a little unlucky.

In the USHL:

Over the entire USNTDP season, Matthews took his game to an extreme level, with 55 goals and 116 points in 60 games. Eichel was at 38 goals and 87 points in 53 games, whereas Keller had 37 goals and 107 points in 62 games. He wasn't at Matthews' level, but he was at Eichel's.

All three suited up in the IIHF Under-18's versus their age group, where they were all dominant players in their respective tournaments, although Keller was a notch below the others in shot generation.

IIHF Under-18's:

Eichel and Matthews both played at the World Juniors this season, while Keller was a final cut, so you can't line them up. One might argue this is a knock against Keller, that he wasn't advanced enough at 17 to line up for the USA two years behind his age group like the other elite prospects.

It would be hard to see how the three Americans did at 17 and conclude Keller was better. However, like in the previous season, a reasonable person would likely conclude he was in the ballpark of an elite prospect when using the other Americans as benchmarks.

Eighteen-year-old season

This is the season after Keller was drafted and when both Eichel and Matthews became draft-eligible. Both Eichel and Keller played college hockey in the Hockey East conference, whereas Matthews played pro hockey in Switzerland. Instead of going through complex steps to try and adjust for the league Matthews was in, we'll just compare the college players.

NCAA:

Eichel was one of the greatest freshmen in the history of college hockey, leading the nation in scoring and winning the Hobey Baker Award. Keller was notably behind in point production, but he was ahead of Eichel in shot generation per game.

World Juniors:

Onto the World Juniors, where Keller was a standout last winter and played about as well as Eichel or Matthews at the same age. Matthews

has always had an edge over Keller in goal scoring, though, as he has a superior shot and can get into the dirty areas easier.

World Championships:

Finally, these seasons for the elite Americans ended with trips to the World Championships. Matthews was ridiculously good for a player his age, as he and Patrik Laine made for one of the most entertaining international tournaments in recent memory. The play of Eichel and Keller were not too far behind though, even if Keller had not yet shown the ability to earn tough minutes versus pros.

And as stated in the previous seasons, there was not conclusive evidence Keller was at the same level or superior to the other elite young Americans. However, he was within reasonable distance.

The point of this exercise was not to try and create a ranking between Eichel, Keller and Matthews. Rather, it was to illustrate that there were signs for the last few years — not just when Keller was 18, but in his earlier seasons as well — that he could be an elite NHL player.

I was not the only one to notice this and neither was Arizona (he was ranked fourth on my draft board over at ESPN). There was certainly a loud minority in NHL scouting circles during his draft season who backed him. However, he didn't gain massive support. Maybe it was due to his size and worries he'd be pushed off to the wing without as much defensive value.

Those concerns are valid and have come to pass to an extent as he no longer plays center, as he did at the USNTDP. But he works hard at both ends and whatever value he's lost by playing the wing doesn't seem to take away from all the good things he does. Also, he seems to be another example of a top talent being underrated because he can't reach the highest shelf.

When you watch Keller play for Arizona, his talent stands out instantly. He's incredibly creative, skates very well and shows elite offensive instincts in making the most of his natural gifts. These traits have been evident for a long time. Someone should have taken notice of that fact prior to the seventh slot in the 2016 NHL Draft.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084395 Websites

The Athletic / In-depth breakdown: former pro goalie on Sergei Bobrovsky's save of the year candidate

By Justin Bourne 15 hours ago

You've all seen the clip by now: The Montreal Canadiens are on a 2-on-1 against the Columbus Blue Jackets. Andrew Shaw and Jacob De La Rose enter the Columbus end, and the puck goes from Shaw to De La Rose, who has a wide open net. Then Sergei Bobrovsky made the most ridiculous, stupid, how-can-one-person-be-that-good-at-goaltending saves I've ever seen.

But I was mostly flummoxed by his decision to drop his stick, and wondered if that's something that goalies are taught, or is even logical, or just ... why?

So, I reached out to a friend of mine from college to get some answers (well, we were opponents, but the boys at St. Cloud were always lovely hosts on Saturday nights after the game).

Bobby Goepfert was drafted by the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2002, and his journey around pro hockey finally wrapped up in 2016 after four seasons



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

with Dusseldorf in the DEL. Bobby used to periodically do a little writing while he was still playing, so he's the perfect guy to walk us through the anatomy of that ridiculous Sergei Bobrovsky save.

I'll chime in occasionally, but for the most part, I'm handing the keys to him for analysis. Enjoy!

11.21.2017=

So, there is a lot going on here.

As a goalie, 2-on-1 chances are common in a game. You're likely going to get one, if not a couple against you. But every 2-on-1 is different. Each their own animal. Each presents different challenges.

What type of player is the puck carrier? Does he tend to shoot or does he look to pass? What hand is he? On what side of the ice is he carrying the puck? What hand is the player without the puck? Is it a one-time threat? And the biggest variable of them all, how does my defenseman play the 2-on-1?

As goalies, we are constantly gathering information and then processing it, so that we can make the best decision in making the save. There is a lot to like here with Bobrovsky. Let's try to think like him:

First, we have a right-handed player with the puck on our glove side. We have to play the shot obviously, but in this situation, our angle is a little more torqued to the boards than say, it were a left-handed shooter. In that case, the goalie would be more square to the center ice because of the position to the puck in relation to the handedness of the player.

The player without the puck is a lefty driving to our blocker side. So in this scenario, it is the greatest distance possible to cover if that pass gets across. Righty on the right wing, lefty on the left wing. Bobrovsky comes out far and challenges the shooter, a good three feet above the crease when the player crosses the blueline.

(Bourne's note: one thing I learned sharing an office with a goalie coach, is how much goaltenders analyze their positioning as the puck comes across the blueline entering the zone. Are they coming out too far too early? Questions like those dictate how much ice they have to cover when the puck goes laterally, which varies how hard they have to work and a host of other outcomes. Anyway, they make those reads much earlier than I had imagined.)

At this time, he is stopped and set, holding his ground as to analyze the puck carrier's speed, waiting for the player to continue with the puck and then he will retreat with backward momentum. Shaw makes a high pass around the top of the circle, surprising Bobrovsky and the defender alike.

(Bourne's note: If I wrote a book on hockey tips and tricks, this would be the one I'd push hardest: pass the puck early on 2-on-1s, ideally as soon as you cross the blueline. One, you often have room above the D still to make a safe, unimpeded pass. Second, the goaltender leaves his net on his line — a pass makes him at least have to go side-to-side and hope he's re-found his square line to the net. Three, your teammate will still have time to make a pass or shot, instead of on later passes, where you're almost always forced to shoot. So, you give yourself the most options, the safer play, and you've moved the goalie. Check, check, check.)

And this is where it gets good. The pass is completed, and look at all that net.

As I mentioned earlier, this situation here, where the puck carrier is a righty on the right and the other player is a lefty on the left means with that pass, it will be the furthest a goalie has to push. Here, Bobrovsky gets a slight wiggle of backward movement, as seen above.

Then he drops his stick and loads up for an explosive push that only a few NHLers could muster — and I say "a few" having the utmost respect for them all.

Bobrovsky is such a great skater and is in the upper tier of goalies in the league with edge control and explosiveness. So he is able to get over

with power and puts himself, at the very least, in the best "net coverage" position.

And he gets just enough of it with the very end of his out-stretched blocker.

(Bourne's note: Obvious player's comment coming here: De La Rose HAS to get that off sooner, or at the very least, shoot it higher. This to me looked like a player who's played in the AHL for a while and has never seen any reason to believe a goalie getting back to stop the puck in that situation is even possible. So, he's just taking extra care to ensure the puck is controlled to deposit his "free goal.")

Okay, "The Stick Drop." Now I can't know for sure without hearing it from the horses mouth, but I have some theories. The first: The stick can be a hassle sometimes, both its weight and dimensions. Bobrovsky likely thought he could stretch more freely and quickly without his stick, and get his arm higher. He turned his blocker over instinctively which assumes that he knew what he wanted his blocker hand position to be. He's optimizing the full coverage of the blocker like a mini leg pad. Keeping your stick in that position is awkward. In that situation especially when you are in desperation mode and your body is contorting, it's easy for the shaft to hit your back and you can't get full mobility of your extremity. So, it makes sense.

My second theory is that he dropped his stick for another purpose: to prevent the pass back. Bobrovsky is in full "sell-out" mode. He is pushing and this is the only push he is going to make. There is no way he will be able to get back if that pass comes back across. So he drops his stick, one, for full mobility, but two, because it presents a major obstacle for that pass coming back across. Notice where he drops it and the speed of the initial puck carrier. That pass would have been on a collision course for it, and if not it would have been in the players skates.

This is the first time I have seen it in a game. In practice, or after practice shenanigans, you see it often. You play "Rebound," a game with five-to-nine shooters against the goalie where, the shooters can make one pass before a shot, and that only rule resets only after the goalie makes a save. It's pure chaos. So occasionally, a goalie will drop his stick to dissuade a player from passing so he can have peace of mind and only focus on the shot.

Considering it all: the push, the dropped stick, the extension, the play. The read of it all. The gathering of information, the processing of it, the decision on how to play it and then the execution is remarkable. Then the battle after the initial save, demonstrating more of his intricate, calculated and precise edge work. Then the full legged post-to-post coverage while his team has the puck and no pressure, as he barks at his defenseman to get his stick for him.

As a former goalie, and eternal admirer of the position, I feel like Vince McMahon in that oft-circulated clip every time I watch this play.

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The Athletic / The drive and training secrets that took Clayton Keller from a St. Louis gym to an NHL star

By Jeremy Rutherford 12 hours ago

In the back corner of Elevated Performance, there is a shooting target at which St. Louis' five first-round picks from the 2016 NHL draft take aim in the summer.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Arizona's Clayton Keller, Calgary's Matthew Tkachuk, Minnesota's Luke Kunin, Ottawa's Logan Brown and Boston's Trent Frederic spend hours shooting pucks into the five pockets.

"Those guys are just automatic," says Jon 'Crash' Benne, who owns the center and has been their offseason strength coach for several years. "They can just hit 'top right, top right, top left, top left ... it's pretty cool."

The "pig" games, a la the basketball drill in which shooters must make the same shot as the player prior to them, can become dull when everyone is spot on, so the ultra-competitive Keller decided to take it up a notch.

"Yeah, he calls it a 'one bounce,' or something," says Brown, the son of former NHL defenseman Jeff Brown. "He'll throw a saucer, land it right before the bottom hole, and it bounces right in."

We're not talking about a fluky once-a-week bounce.

"Seven out of 10 times," Benne says.

After Keller finished up a dinner with Toronto's Auston Matthews on Sunday, one night before last year's Calder Trophy winner and the leading candidate for this year's award will face each other at Air Canada Centre, the 19-year-old Coyote told The Athletic his secret on the bounce shot.

"The flooring there, it's kind of like golf turf," Keller said. "So if you pass the puck the right way, it kind of just bounces up perfectly into the pocket. I try to get the one-bounce in the corner or the one-bounce in the five-hole, which is even harder. I can usually win a few pig games just because of the bounce shots."

It is killing Keller that Arizona has not won more games this season, as the Coyotes carry a last-place record of 4-15-3 (11 points) into their matchup with the Maple Leafs. Though he isn't taking any solace, it makes his early season performance — 11 goals and 17 points in the club's first 16 games of the season — that more impressive.

Keller, who was the No. 7 overall pick in the 2016 NHL draft, has shown the type of talent that makes you wonder what NHL general managers were thinking when they passed on him, a topic The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun addressed with those GMs, while The Athletic's Corey Pronman examined why they should have thought higher of Keller. Obviously, there were some tremendous players who went ahead of Keller, including his good friends Matthews at No. 1 overall and Tkachuk at No. 6, but what did those clubs not know about him that could have them missing out one day?

We visited Benne at Elevated Performance last week and spoke with Tkachuk, Brown and couple of other of Keller's offseason workout partners — Dallas' Ben Bishop and Ottawa's Chris Wideman — to find out what makes him tick and the training secrets behind his success.

It was a few summers ago when Keller walked into the doors at EP as a 5-foot-10, 162-pound prospect, basically as a referral from those other players who had been training under Benne, who spent 15 years with the Blues including some as an assistant strength coach.

"Small build, but an athletic make-up," Benne said. "I could see the skillset. He had some of the best hands I'd seen. I'd compare them to Doug Weight or T.J. Oshie, who had ridiculous hands. But there's nobody that the Blues have had in the timeframe I was there that was like Keller. And his shot, you know who has an NHL shot ... when you can see the puck go off their stick, you see that flex, you know. When you saw Clayton pick up a stick, you knew he had the skill, the mindset and the confidence to do it."

Brown, a teammate of Keller's from age five, had seen it for years.

"He was doing what he is now when we were young, he was just doing it every shift," Brown said. "He was the best player by far. He was a little rat out there, but somehow he came out of battles with the puck. He just made plays that not many people can make. And his hockey sense, I remember we were probably 12 years old and watching hockey with my

dad and one his assistant coaches with the St. Louis Bandits. Clayton was saying stuff about the game and my dad's assistant was like, 'Holy crap, kid, you noticed all that?' I still remember that. He said, 'You should be a coach, kid.'"

Keller wanted to be a player, an NHL player, and he knew that being undersized he'd have to bring more to the table.

"I've always had a little bit of an extra drive just because I was always a little bit smaller than everyone else and had to work twice as hard," said Keller, who is now listed at 168 pounds. "The bigger guys can maybe get away with a little more. So ever since a young age, my dad and I realized that I had to work even harder than them to get to the next level. The rest of the stuff takes care of itself, the hockey I.Q. and the stick skills. You practice all of that, but at the end of the day, it comes down to hard work."

But to play at the next level, Keller needed to add size and agility and pick up a few tips on how to stay healthy. So like Benne does with many of his NHL clients, he put Keller on a program that encompasses body and speed training, along with drills that are preventative steps to avoiding injury.

"It's developing strength, it's developing coordination, it's developing hand-eye," Benne said. "We try to make them a well-rounded athlete, we try to build protection of their joints, we try to make sure they're flexible. Why can you squat? Why can't you squat? There's limitations that we might need to address, whether it's lack of flexibility or previous injury. There's steps that we take to get them to squat, to get them to do the exercises properly. There's a progression that we do."

One of the machines that Benne uses at EP is a treadmill. No, not that kind of treadmill. This one has no motor, so you have to make it move yourself by physically producing ground force. The players take fast reps and the idea is that it's akin to driving the steel of the skate blade and thus giving you more power on the ice.

"That's a unique piece there," Keller said. "Logan and I were the first guys to get on it. He might have got sick."

"I don't think I threw up when he was there," Brown said. "I'm trying to think ..."

Tkachuk was not there, so he couldn't confirm it, but replied: "I wish I was there, though, after hearing that."

To work on hand-eye coordination, Benne uses a "sliding board" with his hockey players, in which they are moving their feet side to side, back and forth, while stick-handling a puck. Here's video of Keller doing it for the first time at the facility this past summer:

"We're doing it for 20-30 seconds just like a hockey shift, just working on those lateral push muscles," Benne said. "Anybody can hop on a slide board, but to hop on the slide board and stick handle, that is really challenging."

The players also take plenty of shots in the summers and not just in the pig games. But one mandate from Benne is that, whatever side they shoot from, they must also take shots from their offside. The purpose is to help balance the body.

"That was one of the things I learned from Paul Kariya when I was with the Blues," Benne said. "When we were rehabbing his hip surgery, Paul was having me pass him pucks on the ice and, with a right-handed stick, he's shooting it right off the bar and in. So I have all the kids at a young age start shooting pucks on their off hand to get them firing on the other side of the body that they're not dominate on, so we have a better structure."

"The biggest thing at that age is fixing imbalances. You think of a hockey player that takes 5,000 shots lefthanded like Clayton. Well, how many shots righthanded has he taken in his life? If we have a house on stilts and all the weight is on one side, eventually it's going to cave. Our goal is to build a structurally sound athlete."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Keller hasn't gotten used to shooting with a right-shot stick, but he believes the concept is beneficial.

"It's a little bit weird at first," he said. "I'm not the best at it, but it's definitely good to stickhandle and shoot that way to feel the puck."

Late in the summer, Benne takes his group to a local high school for what they call "Saturday Track Day." Two things you'll learn about Keller on these days is that he's always going to be early, and he hates to lose.

The drive from Keller's home in Swansea, Ill., to the school is about 50 minutes, and they start at 8 a.m. on some days.

"I'll be pulling into the parking lot about 15-20 minutes early and there were times when Clayton is sitting there in his Jeep," Benne said.

"It's really early, but sometimes I'd go the night before and stay at Trent Frederic's house, so I didn't have to wake up as early."

The sprints at the track are typically short distances because, again, Benne is trying to mimic a shift in hockey.

"I'm basing it more on the time of the run, the duration, more so than [the distance]. ... They're not skating 100 percent for 30 straight seconds, but it's four to sevens [seconds], like they would be in full-blown skate to backcheck," Benne said.

When Keller first started coming to EP, there were NHL players already in the group, so he wasn't among the fastest. But a few years later, he's among the first to cross the finish line. And if he's not?

"He gets pissed off when he loses," Brown said. "He's definitely looking around to see if he wins. Everyone does, but he's different about it. He's got a quiet confidence to him. He won't come out and say anything to anybody. It's not cocky like 'F that guy.' It's just like, 'FU, I can do this. I'll show you.'"

Tkachuk recalled that chip on Keller's shoulder when they were playing in a tournament in Chicago one season.

"Our parents got us these bright yellow gloves," Tkachuk said. "Let's just say that even though we weren't doing anything great on the ice, we were really, really noticeable on the ice. I remember the first couple of games people were kind of all over us. Clayton just completely lit up the whole tournament. Say we played six games, he had like 20 goals, or something crazy. This was while people were in his ear about these new yellow gloves."

"All the moms would call them the 'banana' gloves," Keller said. "Yeah, I try to just keep my head down and work as hard as I can. But I kind of like it sometimes when people kind of give it to me. I don't really say anything, I just keep my head down and try to get them back by scoring a goal. You see players like (Calgary's Johnny) Gaudreau, everyone is trying to get in his head and all he does is keep playing and he makes them pay. I like that."

Keller has already scored his share. He had 21 goals in 31 games in his only season at Boston University before turning pro. He had three goals and eight assists for Team USA at the 2017 World Junior Championships, leading in assists and points for the club that won the gold medal. And now he's up to 11 goals and 20 points in 25 games with Arizona.

Those who have played with or against Keller — or both — say it's like he has a bubble around him.

"It's crazy, I don't think he's ever been hit," said Brown, who's currently playing for the Windsor Spitfires of the Ontario Hockey League. "You think you got him and then you don't have him. It's because he's so quick and he's so deceptive. He's got such good skill that he can be looking one way but he knows what's going on over there. When I played with him at the U-18s, I was just on the bench watching him, saying he might be my most favorite player to watch."

Tkachuk added: "He never put himself in bad situations where he was going to get outmuscled. Obviously his hands, his shot, everything is

world-class, but I just think it was his mindset where he never put himself in bad positions that maybe other guys would. I don't know, but whatever he's doing, send that over my way. It's impressive to see just the way that he's able to move in and out of spots without people touching him. That's a great skill to have."

Earlier this season, Keller scored twice and had an assist on Bishop, the Dallas Stars goalie who is another St. Louisan that trains at EP. The Stars beat the Coyotes 4-3, but Bishop knows he lost personal bragging rights.

"He had a breakaway and, obviously with his skill, you're not quite sure what he's going to do," Bishop said. "He made a good move, going backhand-forehand, five hole. He's kind of a smaller kid and you would never expect him to be one of the dominant NHL players right now. But he's got some of the best hands I've seen in a long time, and he's got that hockey sense that allows him to make the right plays, the smart ones, that kind of keeps him a step ahead of guys. He's got the skill that kind of reminds me of a (Chicago's) Patrick Kane. It just comes down to he thinks the game so well and that's kind of hard to find."

Last week, Arizona played in Ottawa, and though Wideman, a defenseman with the Senators, missed the game with an injury, he took note of Keller.

"He made a few plays where it looks like he's just completely run out of room, shut down and he's in a situation where most guys kind of cut their losses," Wideman said. "But he's able to somehow make plays in tight areas and without a lot of time. If you can do that, and not many people can, you're going to have a lot of success. I was really impressed watching him. I shot him a text right after the game and we talked for a bit. I just said, 'Good game.' I think he's a special player and I just couldn't be happier for him."

Keller, now up to 175 pounds, has turned himself into one of the NHL's top young stars, defying the odds with his diminutive stature.

"He actually told me that he likes it, he likes being a small guy because he's learned how to do things," said Brown, who is 6-foot-6, 220 pounds. "He's been small his entire life, so he's adjusted. He does things that I'm physically not able to do because he's sneaking under guys, sneaking under guys, popping through holes. I'm sure he gets tired of talking about it, but when we were talking about that during a workout this summer, he said he likes it."

"It could be good and bad," Keller said. "But I've learned how to be a successful player just with me being the size that I am. I like having the puck on my stick, and being a smaller guy, I just focused on the little skills when I was younger and now that's a huge part of my game. I think if I were bigger, I wouldn't be able to be the same player that I am. That's just what I think about that."

Keller's attitude has done more than mold his game. It's molded his character.

"Clayton is a guy who showed up, worked his butt off, never questioned anything, had faith in what we were doing," Benne said. "You see some kids that are here for an hour and then leave. He's not the guy that's rushing out of the gym. He's back there working on his stick-handling, shooting pucks, stretching. He was the first kid I ever had come in on a holiday. He texted me last Thanksgiving and asked if he could come in. What am I going to say, No? That's his drive. His whole life, he knew he wanted to be a pro hockey player and he was going to do it no matter what, and with his ability, it was bound to happen."

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084397 Websites



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

The Athletic / Ottawa Senators to be tested as tough stretch of their schedule looms

By James Gordon 6 hours ago

With back-to-back losses over the weekend, the Ottawa Senators find themselves in a place that's been fairly unfamiliar to them over the past couple of seasons: outside the playoff picture.

This isn't a disaster, in and of itself. Every team goes through ups and downs over the course of an 82-game schedule, and Ottawa was probably due for a blip.

They dropped their first game after returning from two wins overseas in Sweden to Pittsburgh on a night when everyone — the coach included — looked exhausted. Chalk it up to jet lag. Then they fell in overtime to the Arizona Coyotes, the league's worst team — a game they should have won — and dropped the second of a back-to-back set to the New York Rangers Sunday. They currently sit at 8-5-6.

With two days off before facing the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night, the Senators have an opportunity to hit the reset button before perhaps their most difficult stretch of the season.

If they don't, they could find themselves in trouble come December.

Not only is the stretch difficult because they're about to play nine of out 10 games on the road, but also the quality of opponents they'll be facing represents a big bump from what they've seen so far this season. More on that shortly.

With most teams within a game or two of the 20-game mark, I thought it would be useful to see which squads might have benefitted from a soft early schedule (and thus might be due for a bit of a correction), which teams have had to work extra hard to accumulate points and where the Senators fit in.

While home ice advantage is significant — 54.05 per cent of all games so far this season have been won by the local team — I'm a little more interested in opponent quality. The better team usually wins no matter what the venue is. That's borne out by the fact that 56 per cent of betting favourites have also won, regardless of game location.

To measure opponent strength, I'll keep it fairly simple. I gathered every team's opponent goal differential for every game, averaged them out, and then found the median for good measure. While averages can give us some idea of the level of competition any given team has faced, the median smooths things out for teams that have, say, faced the Arizona Coyotes and Buffalo Sabres a lot (-31 and -25 goal differentials, respectively) but have also played a lot of good teams, too.

This isn't a perfect measure, of course, but I do think it can give us a ballpark idea of what every team has been up against so far this season. We'll start with Ottawa's division.

A few things jump out here. Although the Florida Panthers lead in average opponent goal differential, a couple of games against the Tampa Bay Lightning (+28 goal differential — first in the NHL) will do that to you.

However, you could argue the Montreal Canadiens have had the toughest schedule so far in terms of overall opponent quality, which may go some way toward explaining their atrocious start to the season. The Boston Bruins, who are also probably underachieving in the eyes of many, are next.

Ottawa's had a fairly balanced schedule so far, but they've also faced some really bad teams. The good news for the Senators? All signs point toward the Detroit Red Wings — currently third in the division — falling back at some point.

This is great news if you're a Carolina Hurricanes or Columbus Blue Jackets fan. Despite a very tough start to the season, both squads have handled themselves really well.

While few are surprised to see the Blue Jackets near the top of the division, in spite of the tough competition, the Hurricanes have handled themselves really well. They're a point out of a wild-card spot with games in hand. Could this be the year that people predicting they'll be a "surprise playoff team" are finally right?

If you're a Capitals (second wild card) or Rangers (out of the playoffs) fan, however, this should be distressing. Both teams have faced two of the softest schedules so far and aren't in particularly strong positions.

As with the 'Canes, the Winnipeg Jets have been a popular dark horse playoff pick for years. And as with Carolina, this might be the year they finally pull it off. While they've faced a relatively poor slate of opponents, they have, unlike the Rangers and Capitals, really capitalized early on (currently fourth overall in the NHL). If goalie Connor Hellebuyck keeps his save percentage anywhere near the current .931, they'll be fine regardless.

If anyone should stumble along the way, keep an eye on the Minnesota Wild as a possible surge candidate.

What a nice story it would be if the expansion Vegas Golden Knights could find a way to make the playoffs in their first year. Like the Jets, they've managed to pile up some points thanks in part to a soft schedule, but if they don't find a goaltending solution soon, they're at risk of throwing away a lot of good work as their schedule turns tougher.

11.21.2017=

Turning back to the Senators and using the same numbers as above, you can get a sense of the proving ground they're about to step onto. Not only do they play nine of their next 10 on the road, the median goal differential of their opponents over that time is an intimidating 5.5.

If they find a way to thrive, they'll be in the driver's seat en route to another trip to the playoffs. If not, it could be a bumpy ride the rest of the way.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084398 Websites

The Athletic / Q&A: Catching up with former Maple Leaf Luke Schenn

By Joshua Kloke 14 hours ago

On Monday night, the future of the Maple Leafs franchise, Auston Matthews, will play his 100th NHL game against the team he grew up cheering for, the Arizona Coyotes. Less than 10 years ago, however, the Leafs had a different player who was expected to be the future of the franchise: defenceman Luke Schenn.

Schenn, drafted fifth overall by the Leafs in the 2008 NHL entry draft, lasted four seasons in Toronto. While he might not have become the player many expected in Toronto, he has now found a place as a physical and reliable blueliner on a young Coyotes team.

"I'm an old guy now," said Schenn Monday, now in his 10th NHL season. "It goes by fast."

Throughout his career, the Saskatoon-born defenceman has suited up for four NHL teams: the Leafs, the Philadelphia Flyers, the Los Angeles Kings and the Coyotes. While the NHL has evolved into a younger



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

league filled with more speedy and skilled players, Schenn has not abandoned his hard-nosed style. He finished third in the NHL in total hits last season and currently sits third this season.

The Athletic caught up with Schenn ahead of Monday night's Leafs-Coyotes game to talk the CFL, being a mentor on a young team, bodychecking and some divisive local cuisine.

11.21.2017=

JK: As a Saskatchewan guy, how are you taking yesterday's Roughriders loss?

LS: I was at the game yesterday actually. I was with a buddy from Saskatoon. My buddy, who I went to high school with, (Jorgen Hus) is actually the long snapper for the Roughriders. We pretty much got to watch the game on the Roughriders bench, which was a really cool experience.

JK: Growing up in Saskatchewan, for those of us that don't know, which team has more passionate fans? The Riders in Saskatchewan or the Leafs in Toronto?

LS: I'm going to honestly have to lean towards the Roughriders. Well, you know what, 50-50. It's crazy. People are born and bred into the Leafs. The cool thing is about the Roughriders is that they hold the attendance record for the league. They aren't just coming from Regina. People come from all over the province. They'll drive six, seven hours for every game. It's a lot like Leafs fans too. A lot of people move away from Saskatchewan and I live in Kelowna in the summertime and on game day, you'll see people wearing Roughrider jerseys. It's pretty cool.

JK: You had a big overtime win over the Senators on the weekend. What feels better: beating the Senators now or beating them when you were with the Leafs during the Battle of Ontario?

LS: That Battle of Ontario was obviously real special. You go into their building and there's a ton of Leafs fans. It's obviously really exciting to be a part of that atmosphere. But live in the present moment. It was a big win for us and wins have been tough to come by right now.

JK: When you started with Toronto, you were talked about as the future of the franchise, a future captain. What did you learn as a young player in Toronto that you can now share with the Coyotes young crop of players?

LS: I just think that you have to come to the rink every day ready to learn. It's a lot different coming from junior and college hockey. Every day you have to want to learn from coaches and everyone else around you. In saying that, time flies, so you have to choose to enjoy it and not take anything for granted. You might think you have this great, long future, which obviously a lot of guys do, but you have to enjoy it as much as you can.

JK: You had a pretty special mentor in Shea Weber back when you roomed with him during your Memorial Cup run. What don't we, the media, fans, see in terms of the impact of a mentor on a hockey club?

LS: I even think, to this day, it's good to have people to talk to because there's tons of ups and downs throughout your career and even a season. A lot of the time you're caught up, emotionally, in wins, losses and personal play. But you have to sit back, reflect a bit and go to a trusted source who was with you in the process growing up. They can have a calming influence on you. It's good to have people that will have your back, who know you and you can trust.

JK: You're coming up on 10 years in the NHL. It seems to happen quickly. What's been necessary for you to stay in the NHL for 10 seasons?

LS: You always have to make adjustments. When I first got into the league to now, it's a totally different league. I don't want to sound like I'm super old but back then there were fourth lines that were heavyweights, third lines that were checkers and now you have four lines that can score. There's a ton more skating now. You have to be able to adjust to that on the fly. And you have to be willing to put in the work. There's so

many young, fast guys. You want to stick within your strengths but you also have to make adjustments and you've got to have some luck along the way, for sure. I'm very fortunate and I feel lucky to have gone this far.

JK: What's been the biggest change you've seen in the way the game is played from your rookie season to now?

LS: When I came in, there was just a couple of teenagers in the league. I think Stamkos, just a couple others. But now, every year it seems like every team has just two or three of them. I don't know the exact number on our team but I bet we have 10 players under the age of 24, 25. Just the youth that comes in.

It also hasn't changed that much that you can't be sound positionally. It's a bit of a copycat league. You're going to see another team that's going to come in with size and do well, and then teams are going to go back to that too.

JK: You've played for three teams in around two seasons now. As you bounce from city to city, what sort of effect does that have on the way you play the game?

LS: I don't know if it's bouncing around. Los Angeles was just a trade deadline thing. This is year two in Arizona. Obviously you get new coaches and teammates all the time but you have to be able to adjust as quick as you can. Wherever you play, I wouldn't trade any situation I've been in. I've met a lot of great people and that's the biggest thing I take away: The people you meet along the way.

JK: We all get a little nervous walking into a new job on that first day. What's the one thing you have to do when you walk into a new NHL dressing room for the first time?

LS: I don't think you want to come in there and step on anyone's toes. You want to sit back, and let things take their course and see where you fit in. You don't want to be overly pushy, so you have to sit back and analyze things for a while.

JK: So maybe stay a little more quiet early on?

LS: That depends on your personality. Some guys come in and they're a little more louder and they're expected to be like that. Sometimes sitting back and getting to know guys in the room is the biggest thing. You want to show your work ethic.

JK: Of the few players left in Toronto from your time, one is Jake Gardiner, who was a rookie. He's now a veteran on the team, he's the GM of the team's fantasy football league. But what was Jake like as a rookie?

LS: Jake is super laid back and casual and he's got all the skill in the world. He's got an unbelievable skating ability that's so effortless. But, like any young guy, especially as a defenceman, you come into the league and there's a learning curve. I think, in particular, just watching him from an outside perspective since the Leafs new coaching staff has come in, he's done a great job at creating offence but also playing solid defensively.

JK: You've been top three in the NHL last season and this season in hits. You know what you're doing. But throughout your NHL career, who laid the most punishing check on you?

LS: Great question. Anytime you get a guy like (Milan Lucic) coming down on the forecheck, you're looking over your shoulder a little bit. He can get going really good. He's 240-pounds, he's strong and he's somebody I've played with so you can see what can do to other guys too.

JK: Two weeks ago you fought Tom Wilson for the third time in your career now. But it didn't last very long. Are you at the point where you know each other's moves before they happen?

LS: One time it was after he hit my brother in Philadelphia. I fought him after that. And then another time, I was playing in L.A. and he ran into Jonathan Quick and in the last game, I hit a guy so he came up to me. I



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

don't think he's looking for it and I'm not looking for it. I've met him a couple of times off the ice and he's a great guy.

JK: The Leafs have a player like that, Matt Martin. Mike Babcock has said he "keeps the flies off" players. So do you think that type of player is still around and still needed in this league?

LS: I'd put Matt Martin on my team 10 times out of 10. I think there's a place for him. There's no question that with a young team like this, with all this skill, definitely, he's as big a part of the team as anyone.

JK: It's been long enough since you left Philly now that you can tell me: Philly cheesesteak, overrated or actually good?

LS: Oh man, Philly fans aren't going to like this, but I think it's a little overrated.

The Athletic LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084399 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Babcock places blames of Maple Leafs loss to Coyotes on young stars

Chris Johnston

@reporterchris

November 20, 2017, 9:47 PM

TORONTO – There were a lot of different avenues Mike Babcock could have taken this.

His Toronto Maple Leafs had just squandered a six-game winning streak against Arizona, the NHL's worst team through the opening quarter of the season.

They had been undisciplined and lost the special teams battle. They had seen a potential tying goal overturned on a mildly controversial goaltender interference review.

Babcock had easy options when it came time to shining the coach's light on a talking point afterwards, and instead took the road less travelled: "A lot of the guys that are driving us like the young skill guys, not today. They weren't here today."

It felt like a calculated message from a man trying to push his group from good to great. There are very few unintentional asides delivered from his lectern.

In the big picture, this 4-1 loss to the Coyotes isn't likely to matter much. But it's the kind of game a team with ambitions believes it should win, and here we had Babcock placing blame at the feet of the organization's most prized assets.

Consider it the next stage in transition as Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and William Nylander seize more control of the team. There's a built-in expectation from behind the bench that they'll find a way to push through on the inevitable nights during an 82-game season where the group isn't at its best.

"It was the only game we were playing today," said Babcock. "Get ready for the game you're playing today. That's what a good pro does, that's what you do each and every day."

The coach is smart enough to realize what tomorrow's story will be now.

He's granted everyone license to scrutinize his young stars a little more closely.

It will be lessened, somewhat, by the fact Matthews issued a mea culpa for his performance against his hometown team. The 20-year-old centre is clearly playing at something less than 100 per cent after missing four games with an undisclosed upper-body injury, and was unusually quiet before beating Antti Raanta twice in the dying minutes on Monday – seeing one shot hit the left post and his potential tying goal brought back because linemate Zach Hyman had caught the Coyotes goalie with his stick.

"I didn't play very well tonight," said Matthews. "I don't really like a lot of plays I made. Just turned the puck over. I think it's just kind of me getting back to the level I was playing at before I was injured. It's obviously frustrating, but it's what you're working towards – just each and every day, each and every game, you want to try to get back to that point.

"Definitely tonight I wasn't very good myself."

In Babcock's third season in Toronto, we have seen him push more buttons than the previous two.

He's been much quicker to shuffle his lines over these opening 22 games – again putting Marner beside Matthews while looking for offence with time ticking down against the Coyotes. That's a duo he's resisted forming on a regular basis since they entered the league together last fall because he believes in creating balance across his forward units.

"The beauty of this is when you get to coach the team, you'll get to do what you want," Babcock said Monday morning when asked about breaking up Matthews and Marner after they had clicked in Saturday's win at Montreal. "When I coach the team, I do what I want. This is what I think – I like to win every night. That's what I try to do.

"So, I try to put the right people together for that."

Above all, he is trying to push this group to a championship level. He said as much after abruptly ending practice last month and ordering his players off the ice following a disappointing loss to Carolina.

He came to the rink on this night concerned that the Coyotes offered a trap game – "we weren't prepared and so we got what we deserved," said Babcock – and now he is looking for his young stars to respond.

"You have to," said Matthews. "We're going down and playing a team in Florida [on Wednesday], a team in Carolina [on Friday], they all play pretty similar. They don't give you any space, it's a tight game and you've got to outwork them."

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1084400 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How I caught the Toronto Maple Leafs in the act of 'salute-gate'

Gord Stellick

@@GordStellick

November 20, 2017, 4:07 PM

Happy days are certainly here again for long-suffering Toronto Maple Leafs fans as the team is currently riding both a six-game winning streak and their third-longest shutout streak in the last 30 years. They're also coming off a 6-0 drubbing administered in the best of all circumstances: against the Montreal Canadiens... in Montreal... on Hockey Night in Canada.

They're also marking an anniversary.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

In order to make progress and remedy a situation, the common refrain goes, one has to hit rock bottom. The current edition of the Maple Leafs did just that on Nov. 20, 2014, and I had a front-row view (granted from a little higher up in the broadcast location at Air Canada Centre).

The high of the Leafs' seven-game playoff series against the Boston Bruins in 2013 left fans believing that they would more be on an upward climb like the one the Leafs are now during that fall of the 2013–14 season. They had traded for their No. 1 goaltender of the future in Jonathan Bernier and landed their biggest free-agency catch in many years with the signing of David Clarkson (seven years at \$5.25 million per). They'd also signed extensions with Phil Kessel (eight years at \$8 million per) and Dion Phaneuf (seven years at \$7 million per).

All that optimism and positive synergy would, once again, go south shortly after Tyler Bozak scored in a shootout to usher in 2014 with an exciting win in an Outdoor Classic in the Big House in Michigan. The Leafs limped to the regular-season finish line and finished well out of the playoffs. Though Brian Burke was no longer with the Leafs, his expression of a few years earlier that “the 18 wheeler went off the highway” would ring true yet again.

Shortly after the season ended and over the summer months, things got kind of confusing off the ice. Brendan Shanahan was brought in in April to oversee the Leafs hockey operations, a position he still holds over three years later, but by training camp there was little coaching and front-office clarity beyond that.

Tim Leiweke, the head of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment and the man who brought Shanahan to Toronto, had become a lame duck as it was well known that he would be leaving the organization. He went from a high-profile public figure to a no-profile public figure. Both GM Dave Nonis and head coach Randy Carlyle were retained by Shanahan, but in both cases their assistants were dismissed.

The big-name signing would be a young assistant GM named Kyle Dubas. One of the new assistant coaches, Steve Spott, garnered media attention earlier than he would have liked when he shared with minor hockey coaches, at a coaching clinic, how he had approached Kessel with some power-play ideas and Kessel had basically dismissed all his thoughts. Spott was intending to give the coaches a look into the mindset of NHL players, but it played out poorly for him and didn't look good on Kessel.

Gone was the optimism of the beginning of the previous season. As 2014–15 dawned, Leafs fans now realized that Bernier was not the No. 1 goaltender of the future as they had hoped, that Clarkson would never be a front-line Leaf mainly due to injuries, and that the Kessel and Phaneuf contracts weren't ideal for a team that seemed to be spinning its wheels rather than making progress.

The season also started with a weird and different vibe in the Leafs dressing room. There seemed to be a great deal of resentment towards the media and in some cases the fans. Some focused on the fact that a jersey had been thrown on the ice by a disgruntled Leafs fan — an event that became emblematic of the abuse players felt they were taking — rather than looking at the 18,000 other fans who were too often subjected to a below-average product.

Despite all, the Leafs started the season 9-6-2 in their first 17 games. But after a 6–2 loss to Buffalo on Nov. 15, much was made in the media about words exchanged between Kessel and a member of the media. I can't even remember what it was about, but it seemed to spotlight the grudges by some members on both sides.

The next game on Nov. 18 was a 9–2 loss to Nashville at Air Canada Centre. It was just one of those horrible, dreadful games. And the only thing worse than losing in that manner is losing like that on home ice. By the end of the game the predictable booing cascaded from the few fans who were left. Something that I have always seen and would expect to some degree from any game in which the home team loses 9–2.

Two days later, on Nov. 20, the Leafs righted the ship on the ice with a big 5–2 win over the tough Tampa Bay Lightning. The Leafs now had a decent 10-8-2 record in their first 20 games. I got set to host my Leafs Nation Post-Game show from the broadcast position at the ACC. My co-host, Mark Osborne, stood with me as we waited for the play-by-play crew of Joe Bowen and Jim Ralph to sign off.

As I stood there looking down on the ice and talking to Osborne, one of those “Am I seeing what I think I'm seeing?” moments unfolded before me. It was a little hard to figure out, but I sensed I had absorbed the gist of it.

For a number of years now, all NHL teams have celebrated home wins by skating to centre ice and raising their sticks to salute their fans. I can't remember exactly how and when it started, but I have to say I have always gotten a bit of a kick out of it and enjoyed watching it while I would get set for a post-game show. It also made for a better post-game show for me (and the radio audience) when the Leafs had won.

I noticed that there seemed to be a degree of confusion on the ice. While one player had already skated to centre ice to give the salute and one was almost there to join him (Leo Komarov and Cody Franson), the majority were strangely milling about wondering what to do. Suddenly, Kessel bolted towards Phaneuf and said something to him, and then they both gestured to the players to follow them off the ice.

It was like a slow-moving-accident scene as I tried to figure out what I had seen. Suddenly I said to Osborne, “I can't believe it — these guys are pissed at the fans and they are sticking it to them by not giving them the salute.”

As Osborne and I took our positions for the post-game show I was still stunned at what I had seen. When our post-game show began, I started by describing to our audience what had just transpired. I really don't think a lot of people at the game fully comprehended what had happened — I know the television broadcast signed off without any mention.

So the strangest post-game show I ever hosted got underway. I was dealing with the story within the story. Our gold-standard regular guest, Chris Johnston, joined us shortly after talking with the players and catching Carlyle's post-game press conference. But he hadn't seen what happened — nobody had. The media (including Johnston) had hustled down the media elevator at the game-ending buzzer and hadn't seen the players' semi-organized protest. Carlyle had no idea as well.

All of a sudden the media had a second story, and a second wave of interviews began with Carlyle and the players. Carlyle said little, but clearly wasn't thrilled. The players acknowledged they had organized a different kind of post-game response to the fans but really couldn't get their stories straight either that night or the next morning. Team leaders tried to say that they were going to do something “different” post-game to celebrate wins now. Their responses made what became known as “salute-gate” more of an enduring and sad story.

While I was doing the post-game show I was getting texts from many of my friends wondering what exactly had gone on and who exactly were the ringleaders and any further information I knew. It was so completely shocking and unthinkable to the average sports fan. I really couldn't add much more then and I wasn't prepared to “out” certain players by what I had seen. They would “out” themselves with their comments afterwards.

When I got home I watched the media coverage with interest and curiosity. It was three hours after the final buzzer, but the Leafs' win over Tampa Bay was now dwarfed by salute-gate. The television network that had signed off on the Leafs game without noticing the snub to the fans now was breaking down the video of salute-gate like crime footage.

So the “vibe” I had previously noticed from the dressing room was obviously a toxic one when it came to the disdain that some players had for the media and the fans. My suspicions were more than confirmed.

What is forgotten about that inglorious period is that it actually was the start of a brief “glorious” period. Beginning with that Tampa Bay win, the Leafs would lose only one of their next 12 games (10-1-1). So the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

perception that salute-gate began an immediate downward spiral on the ice is actually inaccurate.

But the downward spiral wasn't avoided. Beginning with a 4-1 loss to Carolina on Dec. 18, the Leafs went 2-7-0 in their next nine games. They were actually still in a playoff position when that dreadful run resulted in Randy Carlyle being fired in early January. Assistant coach Peter Horacek, one of Shanahan's off-season hires, was named the Leafs' new head coach. But the downward spiral just continued as he would win just eight of his 38 games in the role (8-25-5).

In life, when you do hit rock bottom, the important thing is what actions you take to get yourself back on track. It is here where (to me) the first key building blocks were laid in the foundation of what has become a very solid Leafs team and a strong organization.

Shanahan, to his credit, remedied the embarrassment and slight to Leafs fans in the short term. He showed that he was capably in charge over those few days. In the big picture, he recognized the serious surgery that needed to be done to the team and the organization. Key additional building blocks were the hiring of Mike Babcock as head coach and, a few months later, Lou Lamoriello as GM.

It is obvious to everyone that the Leafs have made significantly more positive moves than negative ones over the past three years and that is why they appear to be a team truly going in the right direction. Ironically, that path all started three years ago with an event that was "rock bottom."

Three years on, Salute-gate is now a distant memory rather than a recent blight. In hindsight, it really is a happy anniversary. All Leafs can salute the actions taken since then.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084401 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Three up, three down: Maple Leafs' Marner still has untapped potential

Steve Laidlaw

November 20, 2017, 7:57 AM

Welcome to the fantasy hockey stock market. Each week we will look at three players trending up and three players trending down.

Three Up

Mitchell Marner – RW – Maple Leafs – 2 Goals, 13 Assists, 36 Shots, 21 Games

The supposed sophomore slump appears to have given Marner a break this month as the talented winger has piled up nine points in nine games. Of course, this storyline was overblown. It didn't help that Marner had at times been buried on the fourth line, but that was never going to last. The buy-low window on Marner is closing, but there is still untapped potential here. Marner is skating on one of the league's most dynamic power plays but has just four power-play points so far. He'll have his fair share once the season is done, which puts him in line for 60+ points.

Sebastian Aho – LW/RW – Hurricanes – 4 Goals, 13 Assists, 54 Shots, 19 Games

With the monkey finally off his back, Aho has started to pile up the goals, scoring in three straight games. All the reasons that made Aho a popular breakout candidate still hold true. He continues to pile up shot totals, on pace for 225. His power-play time is also up to 2:56 per game, a

significant upgrade over last season. Now that Aho is finally producing, he makes a good waiver-wire grab who just might have staying power. If Aho is unavailable in your league, his linemate, Teuvo Teravainen, is similarly hot and offers a nice consolation prize.

Mathew Barzal – C – Islanders – 4 Goals, 14 Assists, 38 Shots, 19 Games

The dynamic rookie centreman has taken off since Jordan Eberle was added to his wing with three goals and 12 assists in his last 10 games. Barzal is also a key part of the Islanders' top power-play unit, giving him exposure to superstar forward John Tavares. Barzal is good enough that he could stand on his own, but it doesn't hurt to have Tavares insulating him from the toughest matchups on a nightly basis.

Three Down

Jesper Bratt – LW/RW – Devils – 5 Goals, 8 Assists, 33 Shots, 19 Games

The rookie forward was a nice story early on, but the early rush of favourable shooting is starting to wear off. He is still talented, but he has tumbled down the depth chart with Kyle Palmieri back in the lineup. That tumble will continue when Marcus Johansson returns. There is still room for Bratt to be valuable in deeper leagues but as his usage dips below 16 minutes per game he'll be much less interesting to fantasy owners.

Aaron Ekblad – D – Panthers – 3 Goals, 5 Assists, 49 Shots, 20 Games

After a hot start, Ekblad has fallen off in November with just one point in nine games. Keith Yandle has usurped his top PP minutes, which is especially damaging now that the Panthers have converted to a loaded top unit that sees two-thirds of the available minutes. Not only has Ekblad lost exposure to the Panthers' best, but he is losing valuable minutes as well. Ekblad's minutes are up this year, but the increase is almost entirely in penalty-kill time, which may simply be taxing him rather than amplifying his fantasy value. He pumped nine shots on John Gibson on Sunday night, so the capacity for extreme shot volume still exists. It may be enough to keep him in your lineup while waiting for him to grab those power-play minutes back.

Nick Foligno – C/LW/RW – Blue Jackets – 3 Goals, 5 Assists, 40 Shots, 20 Games

After discussing Alexander Wennberg's declining fantasy stock in this space last week, we will once again slag a Columbus player. Foligno offers a lot more to fantasy owners than Wennberg with his multiple position eligibility and value in peripheral categories, but he has also gone 11 games without scoring a point. One of very few forwards skating 20+ minutes per game, Foligno is receiving all the opportunity in the world, but the Blue Jackets' power play is terrible, so we must downgrade all their players accordingly. If you can extract value out of Foligno's peripheral production, you can afford to be patient. If you're in it just for points, you should seek other options.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084402 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Reversed Matthews goal shades grey over goalie interference

Luke Fox

@lukefoxjukebox

November 20, 2017, 11:50 PM



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

TORONTO – Had the goal stood up, it would've been the Toronto Maple Leafs' third straight even-strength strike from an Auston Matthews–Mitch Marner line that doesn't exist.

And it would have spun a 4-1 Arizona Coyotes victory into a 2-2 tie and, hopefully, some three-on-three fun.

Until Matthews accepted a spinning Marner backhand pass with just under four minutes remaining in a 2-1 game, the Leafs star centre had been having an off game. As he circled behind goalie Antti Raanta's net, net-front winger Zach Hyman stuck Raanta, who was pushed into his cage.

A full two seconds later, Matthews had drifted to the left circle, stickhanded and fired one of his patented snap-wristers high for what appeared to be glory.

A previously sombre ACC crowd alit, but Raanta immediately complained to the official. Arizona coach Rick Tocchet challenged the goal, citing goalie interference.

"Kevin Pollock is a veteran referee. I thought obviously the goalie got speared," Tocchet said.

"I was pretty confident [it would be overturned]. I mean, any NHL coach out of [31] would've called it. You have to call that play."

Yes, Tocchet has to challenge. Yes, Hyman made contact. But did Raanta have time to reset?

"I wasn't sure what the call was gonna be," admitted Clayton Keller, a friend of Matthews' and the night's best forward. "It was one of those where you're not really sure, so it was good to see it turned our way."

"You never know," Raanta said, wondering which way the refs would lean.

"I felt their guy speared me and I went inside the net. I couldn't get back on time, even though I was trying. I didn't try to sell it too much. I just tried to get back to my place right, but didn't have enough time. Good for us."

And bad for the Maple Leafs, who later allowed two empty-net goals and helped stretch the last-place Coyotes' win streak to three.

"My stick hits the pad, obviously. I think I was pushed in," explained Hyman, who thought it would be upheld. "The goalie had enough time get across, and I thought he got into his position well, but I guess that's how they're calling goalie interference, so tough break for us."

Pollock's gutsy reversal resulted in fans' throwing debris on and at the ice. Boos rained for minutes.

"We've had two of [goalie interference calls] the same way," Toronto coach Mike Babcock said. "The goal was going in whether he touched him or not because he had time and pushed out, but, the league decides that and not us."

Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen watched the replay and offered his opinion.

"I didn't think [Hyman] touched him that much for [Raanta] to take that much time for him to get up. That's the frustrating part," Andersen said.

"It's tough to get a consistent line on that, but sometimes it goes your way and sometimes it doesn't. It sucks."

The league itself acknowledged that goalie interference is such a grey area that it declined to institute a two-minute bench penalty for a failed challenge, the way it did for offsides.

Toronto winger James van Riemsdyk said as long as there is any contact, players never know whether a goal will be overturned or not.

"Some of the goalies, they're smarter than we give them credit for. They'll try to incite some of that contact," van Riemsdyk said. "We have a

process in place, and you'd like to think that they're making the right judgment most of the time."

Arguably robbed of his unlucky 13th goal, Matthews himself didn't complain. He was more disappointed by his own performance, which hasn't been consistent since he hurt his upper body.

Not unlike Saturday in Montreal, it wasn't until he was partnered with Marner that he showed some jump and looked his normal dynamic self. He usually eludes hits and steals pucks. On Monday, he got crunched hard a couple times and bobbled some rushes through the neutral zone. In these eyes, it was Matthews' worst game of the season—and he still was a coin flip away from playing hero.

"I didn't play very well tonight," Matthews said. "I don't really like a lot of plays I made, just turned the puck over. I think it's just a means of getting back to the level I was playing at before I was injured. It's obviously frustrating, but it's what you're working towards, each and every day, each and every game you want to get back to the point."

Babcock said the better team won regardless, and Tocchet refused to take credit for keeping Matthews off the score sheet.

"He's been out for a long time. He just got back in the lineup, what, two nights ago?" Tocchet said. "I don't know if it's so much something we did. When you play against Matthews, you need five guys."

And sometimes a sixth man in the video review booth helps, too.

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1084403 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames Thoughts: Gaudreau, Monahan cause Capital punishment

Derek Wills

@Fan960Wills

November 21, 2017, 12:55 AM

Derek Wills is the Calgary Flames radio play-by-play announcer on Sportsnet 960 The FAN. He shares his views about the Flames' latest game.

After surrendering a goal 62 seconds into the game against the Washington Capitals, Mike Smith stopped the next 29 shots and the Flames scored four unanswered goals in 4-1 win.

## 1. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The two-time defending Presidents' Trophy-champion Capitals seem to bring out the best in the Flames.

After playing what I believe was their best game this season in a 2-1 victory over the Capitals at Scotiabank Saddledome in Calgary on Oct. 29, the Flames weren't quite as good at Capital One Arena in Washington on Monday, but they were certainly the better of the two teams.

After a sluggish start allowed the Capitals to take a 1-0 lead on a Lars Eller goal 1:02 into the game, Johnny Gaudreau's game-tying goal at 4:49 of the first seemed to get the Flames going. With the exception of a five-minute stretch late in the second period when the Capitals were buzzing and came close to squaring the score, the Flames pretty much dominated the final 50 minutes to complete a sweep of the two-game season series between the two teams.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

## 2. MAGNIFICENT MIKE

If there was any doubt how important Smith was to the Flames before he suffered an upper-body injury in last Monday's 7-4 victory over the Blues, there isn't now.

Eddie Lack replaced Smith following the first period of that game and played well enough to get his first win as a Flame. Last Wednesday, in his second start of the season, Lack was pulled after allowing five goals on 15 shots. His replacement, Jon Gillies, wasn't much better, surrendering three goals on 12 shots in an 8-2 loss to the Red Wings at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit.

After missing five periods, Smith returned to the Flames net for Saturday's matinee matchup at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia and, despite surrendering four goals, he stopped 35 shots in a 5-4 overtime win. Smith made a number of timely saves in that game, including one on Sean Couturier, who had a chance to potentially put the game out of reach when he got a short-handed breakaway with his team already leading 3-1.

In Saturday's game, Smith looked a little like former Oilers great Grant Fuhr did in so many games during the high-scoring 1980s. Like Fuhr did throughout his Hall of Fame career, this season, Smith almost always seems to make big saves when the Flames need him to — and when he can't afford to give up another goal. Much like Fuhr was for most of his career, Smith has usually been the better of the two goaltenders on the ice this season.

That was the case when the Flames faced Brian Elliott and the Flyers on Saturday and once again the case when they battled Braden Holtby and the Capitals on Monday. While I'll never know for sure, without Smith the Flames are probably 1-2 or 0-3 instead of 2-1 in the first three games of their season-long six-game road trip.

## 3. DYNAMIC DUO

Gaudreau and Sean Monahan are hockey's version of Batman and Robin right now.

Gaudreau remained the hottest player in the NHL on Monday, stretching his career-long and league-best goal and point streaks to six and 10 games, respectively, with a goal and an assist in the win. Monahan might not be quite as hot as his left-winger, but on Saturday he became the first Flames player to score three power-play goals in a period since the team relocated to Calgary from Atlanta. The Flames first-line centre scored another power-play goal in Monday's win in Washington.

Monahan's team-leading 12th of the season turned out to be game-winner, his NHL co-leading fifth of 2017-18. With 31 points, Gaudreau is third in the Art Ross Trophy race, four points behind Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos and two back of the Lightning's Nikita Kucherov. With 12 goals, Monahan is tied for fifth in the Maurice (Rocket) Richard Trophy race. Opposing teams are well aware of how good Gaudreau and Monahan have been so far this season but, right now, they can't seem to find a way to stop them ... or even slow them down.

## 4. SPECIAL TEAMS SUCCESS

Prior to the last two games, special teams was the Flames' biggest Achilles heel. But the penalty kill, and to an even greater extent, the power play, seem to have turned the corner.

After going 3-for-5 on the PP and 2-for-3 on the PK in Philadelphia, the Flames won the special teams battle again in Monday's triumph over the Capitals, going 2-for-5 on the power play (for all intents and purposes they were 3-for-5 as Mark Giordano scored one second after a power play ended), while going a perfect 3-for-3 on the penalty kill versus the Capitals' lethal power play.

Assistant coaches Dave Cameron, who runs the power play, and Paul Jerrard, who is in charge of the penalty kill, have made some minor tweaks to what the Flames are doing on special teams and their hard work is starting to pay off. Ultimately, the players have to execute the

coaches' game plan — and they've been a lot sharper on both sides of special teams in the last two games.

## 5. 40 FOR 40

Since taking over behind the bench at the start of last season, coach Glen Gulutzan has stressed to his players — and anyone else who will listen — how important it is to have the lead through two periods of play. He's 100 per cent right.

In the last 40 games his team has led in following 40 minutes, they've won 100 per cent of the time. That's right, the Flames are 7-0-0 when they lead going into the third period this season and 40-0-0 since a 2-1 shootout loss to the Canucks on Oct. 15, 2016.

Since Gulutzan took over, the Flames have been the best team in the league when they start the third period with a lead. Elite teams know how to close out games. The Flames want to be — and believe they can be — an elite team. While they still have some work to do in other areas, their 40-0-1 record since the start of last season when leading through two periods is proof that they've developed the type of killer instinct that elite teams almost always have.

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Sportsnet.ca / Coyotes' Oliver Ekman-Larsson: 'I didn't think about hockey all last year'

Luke Fox

@lukefoxjukebox

November 20, 2017, 3:54 PM

TORONTO — Gripping the top of his dressing room stall with his left hand, Oliver Ekman-Larsson lets out a deep breath before trying to explain what grief can do to a young man in the spotlight.

"To be honest with you, I didn't think about hockey at all last year," the Arizona Coyotes' best defenceman and unofficial captain tells Sportsnet.

"That was a difficult year, and I don't think I'll ever have to go through something like that again. Hopefully not. I learned a lot about myself and my family and me as a hockey player."

Ekman-Larsson's mother and biggest fan, Annika, succumbed to cancer in March after a 10-year battle with the disease. She was only 52. Her health deteriorated throughout last season.

Only children who've watched a parent suffer can understand what OEL endured.

Even as Ekman-Larsson's production dropped by 16 points (to 39) and he sunk to a career-worst minus-25, only those embedded with the Coyotes know how remarkably he handled his pain.

"He's the best. I've never met a bad Scandinavian in all my time playing," says former teammate and current Coyotes analyst Paul Bissonnette, who travels with the club.

"Especially last year and this year, when things weren't going well, he never takes it out on the guys. He's always looking into himself for answers. Then to find out all year he was playing through the illness of his mother, and he kept that under wraps? To be so selfless about a thing that was probably affecting him big time? He was more concerned about not letting it wear on the guys. That tells you all you need to know."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

You should also know that when Calder candidate Clayton Keller arrived at Arizona's training camp last fall, the kid was shy and hesitant. It was Ekman-Larsson who made a point to chat with the prospect every morning, and make him feel comfortable.

"He was there to help me out and get me through it," Keller says. "You see how long he's been with this program, he's really put in his time and effort. He believes in this team. It's good to be around him. He made me feel real comfortable last year. He's a good friend of mine."

Fellow Swede William Nylander shared a IIHF world championship last spring and an unsubstantiated Toronto Maple Leafs trade rumour this week with Ekman-Larsson. His comments echo Keller's.

"He takes care of you," says Nylander, who appreciates how OEL, a player he just met, would take him out for meals during the worlds. "He's a really nice guy, a guy you want to be around and just relax."

You should also know that Arizona's appreciation of Ekman-Larsson goes both ways.

Management opened the door for its best player to leave at any point during the season and fly back to Sweden to be with his family as Annika's breast and lung cancer metastasized to other parts of her body. OEL did so during January's bye week, when he "basically said goodbye" to his mother. He took off only the final three games of a season long lost to grieve with his family.

"I think it helped me that I was around my teammates, around the game I love," Ekman-Larsson says. "The organization was great. They told me I could leave whenever I wanted. That means a lot to me, them giving me the space I needed at that point. Everybody cared. Everybody still cares. They keep asking me how I'm doing."

He's doing better, but naturally there are days when the pain is raw. He hides them.

"He believes in us. He's kind of our leader. Him and [newly acquired Niklas] Hjalmarsson and [Derek] Stepan — those three guys are who us younger guys lean on," Keller explains.

"All three of the guys come to the rink with a smile on their face and say, 'Hey, it's a new day. We've gotta focus on the next game.' It's good to see that."

Good to see Arizona winning. It took until Nov. 16, but the NHL's last-place franchise secured a regulation victory and enters Monday's game against the Maple Leafs on a two-game winning streak.

Ekman-Larsson sees daily improvement, attributing the club's horrendous 2-15-3 start to a rocky adjustment period. The Coyotes entered 2017-18 with a new top-line centre, new No. 1 goalie (who promptly got injured), new coaching staff, new trainers, and, for the first time in forever, no default dressing-room voice with the retirement of their long-serving captain.

"I respect Shane Doan's assessment of talent, and he knew in his first year this kid was going to be special," says Bissonnette, who points to Arizona's trip to the 2012 Western Conference final as OEL's coming-out party. "Ever since, he's been a top-20 or top-30 defenceman in the league."

As Bissonnette and I sit chatting in the Air Canada stands during morning-skate rushes, Ekman-Larsson calmly streaks across the blue line and beats Antti Raanta clean and high — right on cue.

"Look! He just shoved one top-corner like it was nothing," Bissonnette nudges.

"I used to play five minutes a game, maybe 10 if I was lucky, and I was f—g gassed. This guy was playing 25, 30 a night at a young age. It was remarkable how he carried himself. He wouldn't even be tired. He would just skate around like a dove. I was very envious."

Coach Rick Tocchet raves about Ekman-Larsson's rare ability to spoil a hard forecheck with that perfect first pass. Nylander says OEL can see passing lanes others miss. Keller is wowed by his skating.

"Pretty much every game he does something that brings you out of your seat," Max Domi says. "He's a guy who doesn't get nearly enough credit. Pretty down to earth, really quiet, and he knows how good he is."

Despite being a plus-18 on shot attempts 5-on-5 while logging the most minutes (25:18 per night) on the worst team in hockey, Ekman-Larsson knows his defensive numbers have been ugly.

"If you feel like you can't get better, you should probably think about retiring. My plus/minus hasn't been great over the last four or five years. That's something I want to improve," he says, noting that empty-net goals against have skewed those metrics.

"It's kind of frustrating if you look at the stat sheet and see minus-15 [the worst mark in the NHL]. I've been playing better than that."

Which is why other teams are circling Ekman-Larsson like vultures. The 26-year-old can re-sign with the team that drafted him sixth overall (and recently signed his younger brother, Kevin, to an AHL deal) as early as July 1. Or the Coyotes could see look at the return Colorado hauled for Matt Duchene, another star 18 months removed from unrestricted free agency, and be tempted to add even more youth.

GM John Chayka maintains any OEL trade conversation hasn't "lasted more than five seconds."

Ekman-Larsson says he loves everything about being a Coyote. He also believes winning is important and is curious to see how the club's shaky arena situation plays out (see: Tavares, John).

"I had four or five years here that haven't been great, but I want to be the guy who turns it around. I love everything about Arizona," Ekman-Larsson says.

"You have to keep in mind: When you're not winning, people are going to start talking, and people are going to look for changes.

"If they don't want me here, they will get rid of me. But I'm happy here, and this is the place I want to be. I want to play for Arizona."

Bissonnette watched his pal, Doan, stay loyal to Arizona and never taste a Stanley Cup Final. He says Ekman-Larsson deserves to be on a winner. Imagine what Edmonton or Montreal or [fill in the blank] might give for a poised, young driver of offence like OEL.

"I'd hope during this rebuild, as he waits for more players to develop and help this team win, he can stick around and they can work something out," Bissonnette says.

"Anytime you let go a No. 1 defenceman in today's NHL, it's not a good thing. They're hard to find. The minute you let one go, you're going to be looking for another one. Teams that let one go, it comes back and bites them in the ass."

Albeit in a different continent, in a different uniform, Ekman-Larsson did get to feel what a championship is like when he played an integral role in Sweden's thrilling IIHF victory last spring. As the gold medal was draped over his neck, he said a prayer for Annika.

"My mom passed away. It was kinda nice to have a happy ending that way. To be on a winning team, to win something, it makes you want to get that feeling every season," Ekman-Larsson says.

"That's something I will take with me."

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Sportsnet.ca / Subban set to face Canadiens in Nashville for first time since trade

Eric Engels

November 20, 2017, 7:36 PM

DALLAS — Some 16 months after defencemen Shea Weber and P.K. Subban were traded for each other in a blockbuster that shocked the hockey world, this coming Wednesday presents a first opportunity for them to match up against each other at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville.

You can imagine how difficult it must have been for Subban to have missed his first opportunity to play his former team, when the Montreal Canadiens came to Nashville and walked away with a 2-1 overtime win on Jan. 2 of last season.

Naturally both players had that first post-trade meeting circled on their calendars from the minute the NHL's 2016-17 schedule was released. Subban had made arrangements to have dozens of his friends and family members in attendance and had held out hope that he'd be able to recuperate from a herniated disc in his back in time to participate.

But as the game approached, it became clear to Subban that it wasn't going to work out.

"It was really hard," Subban said in an interview with Sportsnet last Friday. "But if you've never really been injured for a sustained period in your career and that's the one time, you just have to bite the bullet and accept it. The way I look at it is that everything happens for a reason. It wasn't my time to play. It wasn't my moment."

It was Weber's. The six-foot-four defenceman had cast an enormous shadow in Nashville as a pillar of the Predators organization over 11 seasons—several of them spent as team captain—and he was going to get the lion's share of the attention in his first return to the city, regardless of Subban's participation.

Weber ended up scoring a goal in the game and certainly offered the most memorable moment of the night, when he got emotional watching a video tribute the Predators played for him during the first period.

"It was very hard keeping it together," Weber told Sportsnet last Friday. "Very hard, I think. A lot of emotions going through those first couple of days there. Obviously, being back there and seeing familiar faces in a place I had lived for a long time and in a city I built my career in; going back there was a lot of emotions and watching that was no shortage of emotions, either."

"To be honest with you, I couldn't wait for it to be over with. Not that I didn't want to do it or go through it, but I think I'm not the kind of guy who likes it when all the attention's on me. Everyone was building it up to be this big thing when I wanted it to be just another game. I wanted to win, get the two points and move on. Now that it's over with, I don't think it'll be as big of a deal this time around."

At least part of that will be due to Subban's presence in the game. Another part of it will be about where these teams are currently at and how they've changed since that point in time.

The Canadiens were among the best teams in the NHL when they last arrived in Nashville, but the tide has turned for them this season after a six-game loss to the New York Rangers in the first round of last year's playoffs. They got off to their worst start in 76 years, turned it around by winning seven of 11 games, and then took a couple of steps back most recently with losses to the Arizona Coyotes and Toronto Maple Leafs. Canadiens coach Claude Julien and his players characterized those recent losses as "embarrassing and unacceptable."

"That team isn't the same team I left over a year ago," Subban said.

He's right.

Canadiens goaltender Carey Price will be in Nashville but might not be able to participate after being sidelined by a lower-body injury on Nov. 2. Four of the team's six starting defencemen were playing elsewhere last year. Defenceman Andrei Markov—who spent 16 years with the club—left for the KHL. Forward Alexander Radulov, who set up Max Pacioretty for the overtime winner in Nashville last season, signed a five-year deal with the Dallas Stars. And Jonathan Drouin was added via trade to become Montreal's top-line centre.

"They've had a lot of changes," Subban said. "I think last year when I looked at their team, I thought they were a team that got better in some areas."

"I had a chance to meet Radulov in Russia this summer. What an energetic guy. You could see the energy he brings. I know what it feels like to feed off the crowd and the energy in the Bell Centre, and I could see him doing that. I watched him pretty closely and was amazed at how good he was in tight and how good he was at making players around him better. I felt that he and Markov are two really skilled players. Those are two elite players that they lost, and it sucks when that happens. That's a part of the game."

Just as addition is a part of it, too.

The Predators may have lost captain Mike Fisher to retirement but they added third-line centre Nick Bonino as a free agent over the summer, former Canadiens defenceman Alexei Emelin came over via trade and is now Subban's defence partner, and second-line centre Kyle Turris was most recently added after a three-team trade was consummated between the Predators, the Ottawa Senators and Colorado Avalanche.

They were on the bubble of the playoff picture when these teams last met in Nashville but are currently among the Western Conference's best teams—and arguably much improved since falling just two wins shy of hoisting the 2017 Stanley Cup.

"Pretty special for them and the city of Nashville," said Weber, who watched everything unfold after his Canadiens were dispatched from last year's playoffs. "I think they deserve it after all they've been through—with bringing in a team first and then going through thinking they were going to lose it and people saying they can't support a franchise."

"Just playing there, you know they can. There's fans that love the team so much and love the game and love it there."

"And seeing some of the guys who I started with... I started in Milwaukee (with Nashville's AHL affiliate) with Peks (goaltender Pekka Rinne), and he had an unbelievable playoffs. And just seeing these young guys I had played with and helped along the way in their careers, and seeing them win and go through to the final was pretty special. Maybe not special, but just a cool feeling seeing them do so well. You hoped that they'd win. I wasn't there but those are my friends and guys that I went to war with before. You're not hoping that they'd lose. I genuinely wanted to see them succeed."

But it goes without saying Weber's hoping success is on Montreal's side when the Canadiens and Predators match up on Wednesday. Just as Subban is hoping his presence in the game can help turn things his team's way.

"I'm looking forward to it," said Subban.

You bet he is.

During our conversations last week, Weber and Subban each had plenty more to say... about each other and other topics.

Weber on Subban:

"He played great in the playoffs. Really simplified his game. He's a good player, obviously very skilled. We need players like him, and he really sells the game. I appreciate what he does off the ice because I'm not like



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

that. I can't do that. His personality is important for our game. We're very different both on and off the ice."

Subban on Weber:

"Playing and practising with him at the Sochi Olympics was one of my best experiences internationally. Everybody was great, let's be honest. You go through the list of players. Out of a 22-man roster, probably 17 or 18 of them were captains or assistant captains of their NHL teams. So you know they're all good guys. But Shea was just awesome for me. We got along great. We actually had the same interests in a lot of the music that was played in the room, so we kinda brought it there. But I also look up to him. He's been in the league for a long time and was the captain in Nashville and a true leader, and was really, really nice to me at the Olympics.

It's tough when you're not playing, but he was great to me; talking to me every day. You can tell what makes him a great leader in the room and why he was so well-liked in Nashville while he was here.

"I want to see Shea do well, and I'm sure he wants to see me do well. How can you not respect a guy like that who's played so long in the league and has played so well? I just think we're such different players, both on and off the ice, and it's not really fair to compare us. Is it easier to compare me with Drew Doughty or Erik Karlsson? Maybe, because we're younger and came up a bit later. But with Shea Weber, every team would love to have a Shea Weber."

Weber on which defenceman he admires:

"I was so happy for Drew Doughty when he won the Norris (in 2016). I think the game has so many great puck-movers and skaters, but he does it all. He'll block a shot, throw a big hit, he can shoot it, start the rush. He does it all game after game.

"Ryan Suter is like that. I think he's under appreciated. Does everything well and plays half the game. And he's been doing it year after year. He's one of the best, for sure."

Subban on asking Duncan Keith for advice:

"I went to the World Championships in 2012 and I asked Duncan Keith what it was like to win the Norris. And he said, 'P.K., you have to play with great players, have a great power play, have to have all kinds of help to do it.'

"That really stuck with me. I have so much respect for him."

Weber on the last time he spoke with Predators GM David Poile:

"He talked to me on that game day (Jan. 2, 2016). Whatever time I got to the rink there—4 p.m.

"To be honest, I don't remember a whole lot. At that point of the day I'm preparing for a game. I don't want to be—obviously I've got a lot of respect for him and everything he's done. It wasn't a blur. I recall he was genuine and obviously he wanted to talk, but at that point I was really focused on getting ready for the game. It was a tough time, but the hockey world's a small world and I'm sure we'll have time to sit down or meet again."

Subban on moving on from the trade:

"I'll never know why I was traded. Until someone in management tells me outright—and I've heard a lot of things—I don't know for sure. So I moved on because I had to. It sucked to have to do it that way because with the team we had I felt that we could all get on the same page, and a few other pieces would come in and we could have a really good team with a good chance. The reality is I'm on a team in Nashville right now that I feel has a legitimate chance to win a Stanley Cup. I'm excited about that.

"As a player, when I leave Bridgestone Arena and I can't wait to go back and eat scrambled eggs in the morning and watch First Take and laugh at Stephen A. Smith on TV for 25 minutes before we have to go and

stretch and get ready for a game. I look forward to that because we're really like brothers and it's just great. I don't know why that is.

"That whole time I was injured (in 2016), I was watching and noticing how special this group is. It's so sincere. I was talking to my dad last year and this year about how good of a job management has done creating such a positive environment around the team. It's so important. Really special. I can't complain. I hate to talk about it because I don't want it to sound like I'm putting down Montreal or my time there. It's not that at all. It just is that we have a great group and I'm happy here. I really am."

Weber on adjusting to life in Montreal:

"It was a lot easier to come here this year just knowing the management staff and trainers. Last year, just getting to know the guys in the room—it was like the first day of school. You come in and you have no clue about anything about the guys. When you come into the city as a visiting team, you're usually only here for a day or two. You don't know a whole lot about the city as well, and then all of a sudden it's home. Getting to know it pretty well and starting to settle in and I'm feeling a lot more comfortable now."

Subban on Montreal's start to the season:

"The toughest thing about being traded is that there's still guys on that team who are close friends of mine.

"I've been in Montreal in those years where we didn't make the playoffs or had a tough start or went through a rough stretch, and I don't wish that on anybody. I know how tough it can get in that city when things aren't going to plan. It either makes you stronger, or makes you better, or it can crush you.

"A guy like Price, who I've known for so long; I want to see him succeed because he deserves that. He's always been such a great player his whole career that he deserves an opportunity to win. A guy like Shea Weber deserves a chance to compete for it. Obviously I don't want them to beat us or be ahead of us, but I'm still a fan of the Montreal Canadiens. Anyone who's ever been a fan of them will always be a fan of them. It's always great to see Montreal in the playoffs.

"I'm not rushing to judgment on them. A team can win four or five in a row and be right back in it. I wait until the 40-game mark."

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Sportsnet.ca / Matthews and Keller bonded by Arizona, desire to be great

Chris Johnston

@reporterchris

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TORONTO — One of them is the best hockey player ever to come out of Arizona.

The other represents the present and future of a Coyotes organization still working to establish deeper roots in the desert.

But at the heart of it all, Auston Matthews and Clayton Keller are bonded by a desire to be great. They are close friends and former teammates, sure, but they're also keen students known to swap industry intel during an ongoing text conversation.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

"We kind of just talk about other teams' defence and if they're hard to play against and how this goalie is," said Keller. "Just little things like that. He's a pretty good scorer so he knows where to shoot the puck."

They will be the highest-scoring players on the ice when Monday's game begins at Air Canada Centre.

Matthews holds a slight edge in goals (12-11) and points (21-18), but he's also 10 months older than his Coyotes counterpart. A quarter of the way into the season, Keller is the front-runner to succeed him as the Calder Trophy winner for rookie of the year.

"I've been keeping an eye on him," said Matthews. "He's a pretty dynamic player, he can do a lot of different things out there. It's good to see."

It's hard to believe they are only three years removed from first getting acquainted at the U.S. National Development Team program. They wound up winning gold together at the world under-18 championship in April 2015, both scoring against Team Canada in a lopsided semifinal victory.

In those days, Keller would often drive Matthews home from practice or to school in the morning. They'd spend a lot of time talking about their NHL exploits on "Xbox" – where Matthews played as a centre and Keller a winger in an EA Sports Hockey League.

Much like Matthews last year, Keller is defying learning curves in his rookie season. He's logging the second-highest minutes among Arizona forwards and is the sole bright spot in a 4-15-3 start.

"Not scared to go into corners, wants the puck in crucial situations, not afraid just to try plays," said Coyotes coach Rick Tocchet, when asked what he likes most about Keller. "He's got a swagger, he's a great kid. He's 19 years old and he's playing against all the top defencemen – that's a tall order to ask a kid that age."

"But he loves it so we're going to keep putting him out there."

Kids, they grow up so fast.

Matthews footed the bill after taking Keller and Christian Fischer, another former teammate, to one of Toronto's classiest steakhouses on Sunday night. He first discovered a passion for hockey while attending a Coyotes game as a young boy and hopes the organization's stable of young players will help secure a brighter future.

"That's my hometown team," said Matthews. "When they're not playing the Leafs, you want to root for them. [I've got] a lot of good friends on that team and obviously the organization and the kind of spot that they've been in with the arena and everything, you want to see them succeed because you want to see hockey stay in Arizona."

He represents one of the most compelling arguments for why it should. There's no way Matthews would have developed into a NHL star were it not for the Coyotes and, with Keller now in tow, that team has an opportunity to draw more local kids to the sport.

The only thing that surprises Matthews about Keller's hot start is that he's scored more goals than assists so far. As it turns out, it's by design.

"I'm definitely a pass-first guy, but I also like to shoot the puck," said Keller. "Whenever I shoot the puck it later opens up those seams. If I'm just a pass-first guy, everyone can kind of just sit back and [think] 'Hey, he's going to pass.'"

"When I'm a dual threat it makes my game more productive."

He is a self-described hockey nerd who scours through highlights daily to pick up things he can incorporate into his game. Keller loved watching Patrick Kane and Sidney Crosby when he was young. He admires Johnny Gaudreau, too.

"It's amazing what these guys can do – these kids," said Tocchet. "They all watch YouTube and they're trying different plays. I don't even think they need coaches sometimes, they just go out there and do their thing."

Keller was raised outside of St. Louis and recalls being immediately drawn to Matthews' work ethic after they began practising together at the USNDTP.

You can count him among those who aren't surprised by how much success the Leafs centre has already had in just 99 career NHL games.

"It's crazy that he came from Arizona," said Keller. "He's an unbelievable player and Arizona's not the biggest hockey market. But him coming out of there definitely changes that. Kids, everyone in Arizona that plays hockey, pretty much knows who he is."

They are coming to learn there's a lot to admire about Keller, too.

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Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown Weekend Wrap: Canadiens hit new low

Sean McIndoe

@DownGoesBrown

November 20, 2017, 10:53 AM

Fresh off the embarrassment of becoming the first team in the league to lose to the Coyotes in regulation, the Habs had a chance at instant redemption in a home matchup against the Maple Leafs. Instead, they suffered through a third-period implosion on the way to a 6-0 loss that may have somehow been even more embarrassing.

So now what? The Canadiens are 21 games into their season, and it already feels like the drama around this team is exhausting. They started slow, including a stretch where nobody could score. But they seemed to have turned things around, winning six of eight while scoring five or more four times. They still had ground to make up, but the percentages were evening out and it felt like it was OK to sound the all-clear on any talk of disaster.

Maybe not. The Habs have now lost four of five, sinking back down to five points out of a playoff spot. GM Marc Bergevin is taking all sorts of heat. Max Pacioretty is getting his usual share of the blame. And now there's even talk that the team could be doing some "soul searching" while considering starting all over with a rebuild. That's a long-term decision and any problems with this roster didn't just appear overnight, but it's amazing how much one rotten week can change the perception of a team.

The Canadiens aren't the only team being reevaluated right now. Half the teams in the league have now hit the 20-game mark, which means it's time to do a few important things. First, we can spend the next few days referring to this point in the season as the "quarter pole" just so that the sort of people who enjoy giving lectures on proper horse-racing etymology will have something to do. And second, we can start in with some serious re-evaluation of the teams we may have been wrong about.

Every year, a few teams we thought would be good stumble through the season's first month while a few teams we'd already written off look like playoff contenders. Those are interesting stories, and we've covered plenty of them in this space over the last few weeks. But as we're constantly reminded, it's still early, and a small handful of games can't tell us all that much.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

But 20 games is... well, it's still a relatively small sample, and it's not unheard of for a team to have a good or bad stretch for a quarter of a season that still turns out to be an outlier. But we're reaching the point where it's time to start taking the standings seriously, if only because teams may have built up a cushion or deficit big enough to survive a correction down the line.

So this week, let's pick three teams that most of us thought would be good and three teams we all assumed would be bad but who aren't following the script, and ask: Were we wrong? And if so, what does that mean going forward? We'll tackle the disappointing teams in our Cup section and the surprising teams in our lottery section. For some of them, based on the first 20 games, it may be the last time they get mentioned in those sections this year.

And of course, we'll also dive into the teams that have been truly good and truly awful in our weekly power rankings. Speaking of which, you'll never guess who's sitting in the No. 1 spot in our top five.

The five teams that look like they're headed towards Stanley Cup-favourite status.

5. Winnipeg Jets (12-4-3, +12 true goals differential\*): The Jets make their debut on the strength of a four-game win streak. They'll be tested this week as they head to Nashville tonight and then onto a three-game California road trip.

4. Toronto Maple Leafs (14-7-0, +15): Make it six straight wins, and now Auston Matthews is back:

The Leafs host the Coyotes tonight, but then it's a brutal stretch where they're on the road for 15 of 19 until the new year.

3. Los Angeles Kings (12-7-2, +13): They hit their first serious turbulence of the season with a four-game losing streak, and after dropping last night's meeting with the Knights their Pacific lead is down to one point.

2. St. Louis Blues (15-5-1, +13): They dropped two straight for only the second time this season, but shrugged it off with back-to-back wins.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (15-3-2, +28): OK, who guessed Tampa for No. 1? [peers out at sea of raised hands] So... everyone. Everyone got this one right. Even with a loss to the Islanders snapping a five-game win streak, the Lightning are still in a tier of their own on top of the league.

\*Goals scored minus goals allowed, without counting shootouts like the NHL does for some reason.

So about those teams that were supposed to be good...

We've already covered the Canadiens up above, and we won't do the Penguins here since we focused on them last week. But that still leaves plenty of candidates. The Bruins, Stars, Wild and Capitals are all looking decidedly mediocre. And Rangers may be stumbling again, dropping two straight after climbing their way back into the playoff race. But we'll go with three Western teams that came into the season as Cup contenders and haven't looked like it so far.

Edmonton Oilers

The expectation: With Connor McDavid cementing his case as the best player in the world, the Oilers would build on last year's trip to the second round. Could that mean a trip to the final, or even a Stanley Cup? Plenty of us thought so.

The reality: The Oilers have been a mess, sitting 28th overall and posting one of the worst goal differentials in the league. While McDavid's putting up strong numbers, his two-way game has come in for some criticism. More importantly, he's not getting anywhere near enough support from the rest of the roster.

Why the standings might be lying to us: Cam Talbot's numbers are well under his career average. The Oilers have had excellent numbers and are suffering under the weight of a 97.5 PDO that ranks near the bottom of the league. That all suggests they'll get better results.

The verdict: The Oilers aren't this bad, and should start showing it soon. But this is still a flawed roster, and it's fair to ask some questions about how that happened. And the bigger question is whether they've left themselves too much ground to make up.

Anaheim Ducks

The expectation: After five straight division titles and with essentially the same core returning, Anaheim was penciled in for another run at top spot in the Pacific. Then they'd lose in the playoffs in heart-breaking fashion, because they're still the Ducks.

The reality: At the rate they're going, they may not have to worry about that playoff disappointment.

Why the standings might be lying to us: The story in Anaheim has been injuries, with big names like Ryan Getzlaf, Ryan Kesler and Cam Fowler missing big time.

The verdict: We're not sure that anyone was really wrong about the Ducks since we can assume they'll be better when they're healthy. But that could be a long way away.

Chicago Blackhawks

The expectation: They'd contend for the Central title and probably a Stanley Cup, just like they do every year. Sure, they were missing Marian Hossa and Niklas Hjalmarsson, but they're the Blackhawks. They always figure it out.

The reality: With 10 wins in 20 games, the Hawks are barely clinging to a wild-card spot.

Why the standings might be lying to us: If anything, the numbers might be flattering Chicago. Their plus-8 goal differential is entirely due to that season-opening 10-1 win over the Penguins, and they're struggling to put up wins despite getting some of the league's best goaltending from Corey Crawford.

The verdict: Nobody should be counting out the Hawks — we've learned that lesson well over the years. But after two straight years of first-round exits, it's getting harder to view them as legitimate Cup contenders anymore.

The five teams that look like they're headed towards watching Rasmus Dahlin highlights and playing with draft-lottery simulations.

5. Montreal Canadiens (8-11-2, -24): Here's the latest installment in the long-running series, "Max Pacioretty tries to explain what's gone wrong."

4. Colorado Avalanche (9-8-1, -1): So far they've been great at home and shaky on the road. If they can get through this week, there's a five-game homestand waiting around the corner.

3. Florida Panthers (7-11-2, -11): Those California back-to-backs are killers. They gave the Ducks a game last night, but came away from the weekend 0-for-2.

2. Buffalo Sabres (5-11-4, -24): Make it five straight losses for the second time on the year.

1. Arizona Coyotes (4-15-3, -31): We have a win streak! That's two straight for the Coyotes on their trip through Eastern Canada, with Matthews and the Leafs up tonight.

—

When it comes to being wrong, we have plenty of teams to pick from at this end of the league, too. The Avalanche have gone from laughingstock to fringe wild-card contender, while the Red Wings seem to have missed the memo about this being the year they bottom out and start over. But we'll go with three teams that went into the year as contenders for the top lottery odds, and haven't been playing along.

New Jersey Devils



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

**The expectation:** The Devils were coming off a 70-point season that saw them finish dead last in the East. They're a young team, one boosted by the draft-lottery win that brought Nico Hischier to town, so it felt like they'd already hit rock bottom and were ready to climb. A playoff spot felt like a long shot in a loaded Metro, but maybe they could at least get into the race.

**The reality:** They jumped out to a 3-0-0 start and haven't slowed much since. A quarter of the way in, they're tied for first place in the Metro.

**Why the standings might be lying to us:** At 5-on-5, the Devils are sporting a PDO of 102.3, which ranks fourth in the league. Maybe you can buy the save percentage side of that equation — last year aside, Cory Schneider has been one of the league's better goalies for years — but that 9.5 per cent seems high for this roster.

**The verdict:** The Devils are young and fast in a league where those two characteristics are becoming more important. They're going to be far better than last year, and better than we thought. But a division-title contender at the end of the year? Let's list that as doubtful.

## Vegas Golden Knights

**The expectation:** They're an expansion team. The league gave them a better draft setup than most teams of the past, so the odds were that they weren't going to look like the 1974–75 Caps or 1992–93 Senators, but they'd be bad.

**The reality:** They won their first game, won an emotional home opener, and then just kept winning. By the end of their first homestand, they were 8-1-0 and the talk of the hockey world.

**Why the standings might be lying to us:** The Knights started with an almost impossibly easy schedule, one clearly designed to make sure they picked up some early wins. Since the end of that homestand, they've gone just 4-5-1, and are giving up a lot of goals. Granted, they're also down to their fifth-string goaltender, so the fact that they're winning any games at all is still impressive. And they looked awfully good beating the Kings last night:

**The verdict:** More so than any team we're looking at today, we just can't be sure what the Knights are quite yet. Even once the goaltenders get healthy, it's hard to see them finishing the season as anything but an average team. Still, that's pretty good for an expansion franchise. And in a weak Pacific, it could actually be enough to contend for a playoff spot.

## Vancouver Canucks

**The expectation:** With the Canucks finally seeming to embrace a rebuild, dead last didn't seem out of the question. It didn't necessarily seem like it would be a bad thing either.

**The reality:** They're not setting the league on fire, but at 9-8-3 they're hanging in the playoff picture.

**Why the standings might be lying to us:** Nothing really stands out. You probably figure that Brock Boeser doesn't keep scoring a point-a-game as a 20-year-old, but you'd also think the Sedins will pick up the pace at some point.

**The verdict:** The Canucks sure don't look like a last-place team, or anything all that close to it. That may not be good news if you're a Vancouver fan who was dreaming of Rasmus Dahlin, but it's a solid sign for the young core being built.

- We had some old-school bad blood between the Leafs and Habs, and as usual Nazem Kadri was in the middle of it:
- Matthew Tkachuk missed Saturday's win over the Flyers after being handed a one-game suspension for his role in that line brawl with the Red Wings. For his part, Detroit's Luke Witkowski got the automatic 10 games for returning to the ice, and will not appeal.
- It had been a quiet season so far for the Department of Player Safety, with only one game worth of suspensions handed out before this week.

But they're busy now, with Radko Gudas getting a 10-game ban for this vicious slash and Austin Watson getting two for this hit from behind.

No word yet on any action against Dominic Roussel for what sure looked like an attempted kick, or Brendan Smith for last night's Mark Borowiecki:

- Some tough news for the surging Jets, who'll be without Toby Enstrom for up to two months.
- Speaking of tough, Alex Ovechkin took a puck to the face and returned to help the Capitals to a win over the Wild.
- The Flames looking sharp as they head to tonight's meeting with Washington.
- Sean Monahan and Anthony Duclair each had hat tricks over the weekend, joining a crowded club so far this season.
- Save of the weekend goes to Henrik Lundqvist, who robbed Mike Hoffman in last night's Rangers win. That's three straight losses for the Senators.
- The league has announced the details for the 2019 Winter Classic, which as per league bylaws will be focused on the Blackhawks.
- Finally, this is an important piece on Kevin Bieksa and the legacy of Rick Rypien.

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Sportsnet.ca / Three up, three down: Maple Leafs' Marner still has untapped potential

Steve Laidlaw

November 20, 2017, 7:57 AM

Welcome to the fantasy hockey stock market. Each week we will look at three players trending up and three players trending down.

## Three Up

Mitchell Marner – RW – Maple Leafs – 2 Goals, 13 Assists, 36 Shots, 21 Games

The supposed sophomore slump appears to have given Marner a break this month as the talented winger has piled up nine points in nine games. Of course, this storyline was overblown. It didn't help that Marner had at times been buried on the fourth line, but that was never going to last. The buy-low window on Marner is closing, but there is still untapped potential here. Marner is skating on one of the league's most dynamic power plays but has just four power-play points so far. He'll have his fair share once the season is done, which puts him in line for 60+ points.

Sebastian Aho – LW/RW – Hurricanes – 4 Goals, 13 Assists, 54 Shots, 19 Games

With the monkey finally off his back, Aho has started to pile up the goals, scoring in three straight games. All the reasons that made Aho a popular breakout candidate still hold true. He continues to pile up shot totals, on pace for 225. His power-play time is also up to 2:56 per game, a significant upgrade over last season. Now that Aho is finally producing, he makes a good waiver-wire grab who just might have staying power. If Aho is unavailable in your league, his linemate, Teuvo Teravainen, is similarly hot and offers a nice consolation prize.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Mathew Barzal – C – Islanders – 4 Goals, 14 Assists, 38 Shots, 19 Games

The dynamic rookie centreman has taken off since Jordan Eberle was added to his wing with three goals and 12 assists in his last 10 games. Barzal is also a key part of the Islanders' top power-play unit, giving him exposure to superstar forward John Tavares. Barzal is good enough that he could stand on his own, but it doesn't hurt to have Tavares insulating him from the toughest matchups on a nightly basis.

Three Down

Jesper Bratt – LW/RW – Devils – 5 Goals, 8 Assists, 33 Shots, 19 Games

The rookie forward was a nice story early on, but the early rush of favourable shooting is starting to wear off. He is still talented, but he has tumbled down the depth chart with Kyle Palmieri back in the lineup. That tumble will continue when Marcus Johansson returns. There is still room for Bratt to be valuable in deeper leagues but as his usage dips below 16 minutes per game he'll be much less interesting to fantasy owners.

Aaron Ekblad – D – Panthers – 3 Goals, 5 Assists, 49 Shots, 20 Games

After a hot start, Ekblad has fallen off in November with just one point in nine games. Keith Yandle has usurped his top PP minutes, which is especially damaging now that the Panthers have converted to a loaded top unit that sees two-thirds of the available minutes. Not only has Ekblad lost exposure to the Panthers' best, but he is losing valuable minutes as well. Ekblad's minutes are up this year, but the increase is almost entirely in penalty-kill time, which may simply be taxing him rather than amplifying his fantasy value. He pumped nine shots on John Gibson on Sunday night, so the capacity for extreme shot volume still exists. It may be enough to keep him in your lineup while waiting for him to grab those power-play minutes back.

Nick Foligno – C/LW/RW – Blue Jackets – 3 Goals, 5 Assists, 40 Shots, 20 Games

After discussing Alexander Wennberg's declining fantasy stock in this space last week, we will once again slag a Columbus player. Foligno offers a lot more to fantasy owners than Wennberg with his multiple position eligibility and value in peripheral categories, but he has also gone 11 games without scoring a point. One of very few forwards skating 20+ minutes per game, Foligno is receiving all the opportunity in the world, but the Blue Jackets' power play is terrible, so we must downgrade all their players accordingly. If you can extract value out of Foligno's peripheral production, you can afford to be patient. If you're in it just for points, you should seek other options.

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TSN.CA / Matthews has late goal called back as Coyotes snap Leafs' streak

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Mike Babcock had a feeling about Monday night's game against the Arizona Coyotes. His Maple Leafs were riding a six-game win streak into a matchup with the worst team in the NHL, a situation the term "trap game" was invented for.

Babcock didn't mention that phrase to his players. Instead he tried to underscore how well the Coyotes had played on their own two-game win streak and how their 4-15-3 record was not reflective of the team the

Leafs would see on Monday. The tactic didn't work – Toronto started slowly and never quite recovered, falling 4-1.

"New Jersey came in here [early this season] and we talked about how [that was] a trap game. So I made sure I didn't talk about that this time because I tried that and that didn't work," Babcock said of that 6-3 defeat. "My approach this time didn't work either. We weren't prepared. We deserved it, that's it."

Toronto moves to 14-8-0 on the season with the loss.

While they trailed the Coyotes 2-1 with just under four minutes left in the third period, the Leafs believed they had tied things up when Auston Matthews flipped a puck top shelf over Antti Raanta. But the goal was ultimately overturned on account of goalie interference – Zach Hyman's stick had pushed Raanta back into his net, but at first glance it appeared the netminder had sufficient time to recover before Matthews' shot.

Hyman didn't think he prevented Raanta from making the stop. Babcock didn't agree with the call either, but also doesn't believe it's the reason Toronto lost.

"The goal was going in whether he touched him or not because he had time, he pushed out, but the league decides that," said Babcock. "That didn't, in my opinion, affect the outcome of the game. The one-on-one battles affected the outcome of the game. The ready-to-compete at the start affected the outcome of the game. They were better than us."

The Leafs had little energy to speak of out of the gate, and were outshot by the swarming Coyotes 10-1 through the first half of the opening frame. Monday marked just the seventh time this season the Leafs have ceded the first goal of the game. Toronto did eventually find its legs, but not with the consistency they needed to keep up with the speedy Coyotes. The Leafs lost the turnover battle (they were credited with 17 giveaways to Arizona's 12) and the special teams battle, which ultimately decided the final score.

The first three goals of the game were all scored on the power play, with Arizona holding a 2-1 advantage after 40 minutes. The Leafs hadn't been firing on the man advantage for weeks, going 4-for-31 over their previous 12 games with the extra man dating back to Oct. 26. Going a pristine 1-for-1 against the Coyotes courtesy of James van Riemsdyk's 11th goal of the season didn't outweigh the Leafs' sloppy penalties and subpar penalty killing. The kill had gone 8-for-8 in Toronto's previous three games, but were just 2-for-4 on Monday.

"The PK has to be better," said Hyman, who took one penalty and played 1:33 shorthanded. "They move the puck around well, their D gets the puck through pretty well, they have some elite defencemen. They had a good game."

"On the penalty kill we weren't good enough today and they made us pay," added Frederik Andersen. "They play fast. Their top six forwards are fast and skilled. If you don't compete with them they're going to have some chances."

While the Coyotes drew strong performances from their young stars - rookie Clayton Keller recorded two assists - Babcock didn't feel his young players were nearly as impactful as they need to be. Matthews, Mitch Marner and William Nylander combined for just one assist and two shots on goal in the loss and weren't generating to the usual level they're capable of. In an 82-game season, games like Monday's are bound to happen, but they're not something Toronto can afford on a regular basis.

"It was the only game we were playing today," said Babcock. "Get ready for the game you're playing today. That's what a good pro does, that's what you do each and every day. We got the game [going eventually], but when you don't start on time and you're not prepared to go right, you don't deserve good results. We got what we deserved."

Matthews didn't hide the fact he hasn't felt at his best since returning on Saturday from an upper-body injury that sidelined him for four games earlier this month. On Monday it was clear the 20-year-old is still rounding back into form and trying to recapture the explosiveness that



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

makes him one of the most dangerous offensive players in the league. Matthews admitted as much post-game, saying "I wasn't very good tonight" and critiqued his overall performance. Skating in his 100th career game, Matthews is known to usually have the puck on a string but was getting stripped or turning it over with uncharacteristic frequency against Arizona. Double teams have become the norm for Matthews since last season but he's not battling through them yet with the same authority he did before the injury. The centre did have two shots on goal Monday, one of which rang off the post (and he had that goal overturned) but the details of Matthews' two-way game look a long way from where they were two weeks ago. Matthews finished the night at minus-two.

While the Leafs had been enjoying their six-game run of victories, Andersen had a streak of his own going. The goaltender had put together consecutive shutouts going into Monday night, turning aside 75 shots in the process. That streak came to a halt early against the Coyotes, when Brendan Perlini potted a power play marker less than 10 minutes into the game. By that point, Andersen had gone 1:40:01 without allowing a goal, dating back to Nov. 10 against the Boston Bruins. The Leafs' netminder has been their best player over the last two weeks and was strong once again against Arizona. He weathered much of the early siege and made a couple of great stops from in close to hold the Coyotes at bay. But while Arizona did a good job thwarting Toronto by getting in shooting lanes and taking away secondary scoring chances, the Leafs didn't do as good a job in front of Andersen. He finished with 27 saves, the first time in four games he hasn't turned aside at least 30 shots.

In his pre-game press conference, Babcock bristled at a reporter's question about why he isn't more willing to try line combinations created in-game on a long-term basis when they seem to spark some offence (he has since apologized for his "disrespectful" response). Babcock started Monday's game with his usual lines, but by the third period was once again sending out new trios. Matthews was back with Mitch Marner on his right wing, Nazem Kadri was centering Patrick Marleau and William Nylander, Connor Brown joined Tyler Bozak and van Riemsdyk and Leo Komarov slotted onto the fourth line. It didn't have the desired result of helping Toronto complete the comeback, but the top two lines especially had extra jump once they were jumbled. Whether that was the late-game situation they were in or the result of burgeoning chemistry, no one may ever know if Babcock sticks with his original lines going forward. But with the frequency he's shaking them up in-game, an overhaul wouldn't be totally unexpected.

The Leafs didn't win the ultimate battle on the scoreboard, but they were absolutely dominant possession-wise against the Coyotes. Toronto finished with 60 per cent possession, peaking at 68 per cent in the second period. Kadri, Marleau and Komarov led the way at 77 per cent or better on the night, and only the regular fourth line (Matt Martin, Dominic Moore and Connor Brown) and third defence pairing (Connor Carrick and Andreas Borgman) were at less than 50 per cent possession. Despite the numbers Toronto was still outshot by the Coyotes 31-28, underscoring even more the importance of special teams and indicating the Leafs weren't putting themselves in quality scoring areas to capitalize on the chances they did generate.

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TSN.CA / Matthews still working to reclaim form

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Maple Leafs and the Arizona Coyotes skated at the Air Canada Centre on Monday.

After a four-game injury absence, Auston Matthews scored twice in his return to the Leafs lineup on Saturday in Montreal, but he wasn't thrilled with his overall effort.

"I don't know if I really feel like I'm back," he admitted. "It really wasn't my best game, for sure. I got a little lucky there, scored a couple goals. It will take a few (games) I think ... it's a little bit of everything, touch, feel, kind of your agility and everything. You want to work to get that back."

On this, he and head coach Mike Babcock agree.

"The two goals last game, you think he's back," Babcock said, "but he wasn't at all. So, we need to get him back and going and skating and playing with and without the puck like he can and being the dominating force he can (be)."

Babcock reverts to old line formations

Babcock juggled the forward lines midway through Saturday's game against the Canadiens, sparking a six-goal explosion. Matthews tallied both his goals while skating alongside Matt Martin and good friend Mitch Marner. But the lines were back to normal at Monday's skate and Babcock bristled when asked why he didn't keep that trio together.

"The beauty of this is when you get to coach the team, you'll get to do what you want," Babcock said. "When I coach the team, I do what I want. This is what I think – I like to win every night. That's what I try to do. So, I try to put the right people together for that."

As for the success of that line on Saturday?

"I think it's good entertainment for us, the score was 6-0 and the shifts, a lot of it didn't matter. I just want to win every night so I try to set up the lineup for it to be successful. They're not together tonight."

Babcock bristles when asked why he isn't keeping Matthews, Marner together

When asked why he won't be keeping Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner on the same line tonight, Mike Babcock, said he 'wants to win every night' and he tries to set the lineup for it to be successful.

So, Matthews will be back with regular running mates Zach Hyman and William Nylander to start Monday's game against the Coyotes as Toronto aims for its seventh straight win.

It will be the 100th regular-season game of Matthews' burgeoning career. Has it felt like that long?

"No, not really," the 20-year-old said with a chuckle. "It's flown by. You know, I guess that's what everybody says, 'It flies by when you're in this league,' and it sure has. It will be a pretty special night."

Adding to the special feel is the fact Matthews, a native of Scottsdale, Ariz., will be facing the Coyotes for the third time. Matthews hit the scoresheet in both games against Arizona last season, scoring a goal in a shootout loss at the Air Canada Centre and picking up an assist in a win in the desert.

"That's my hometown team so, you know, when they're not playing the Leafs you want to root for them and just a lot of good friends on that team," Matthews said. "And, obviously, the organization and the kind of slot they've been in with the arena and everything, you want to see them succeed, because you want to see hockey stay in Arizona."

Matthews will also be playing against two of his closest friends and former national program teammates tonight in Clayton Keller and Christian Fischer. TSN's Kristen Shilton has more on that.

Arizona hasn't lost in regulation in Toronto since 2002 thanks to a 6-0-1 run at the ACC. Toronto, meanwhile, hasn't won seven straight since 2003.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

Auston Matthews will be playing in his 100th career NHL game tonight, and it'll be against his hometown Coyotes team as well as good friends Clayton Keller and Christian Fischer.

Marner gloats about Argos win

The mood was light at Toronto's morning skate as the team returned to the office after a day off Sunday. Marner, a big Argonauts fan, attended the CFL East final at BMO Field alongside Matthews, Morgan Rielly and Frederik Andersen.

Marner's linemate, Regina native Tyler Bozak, was cheering for Saskatchewan as was Babcock, who grew up in Saskatoon and attended the game in a Roughriders jersey.

"Luckily enough, when I walked in today Babs and Tyler were together at the breakfast table and I walked in wearing my Argos hat, hands up celebrating," Marner said with a smile. "When you get time to rub it in it's always nice to do that."

Matthews, Rielly and Andersen actually left the game after the third quarter missing the frantic conclusion, which saw the Argos squander and then reclaim the lead.

CFL East Final: Roughriders 21, Argonauts 25

The Riders trailed for most of the game before they rattled off 18 points in the fourth quarter to take a three-point lead. Ricky Ray had other ideas however, as he led the Argos down the field in the final minutes for the game-winning touchdown. Ray finished with just 266 yards and a TD, but it was enough to propel Toronto to the Grey Cup.

"I was pretty tired so I went home," said Matthews. "Morgan and Freddie and I, we all went home and then the game turned into an absolute barnburner ... probably should have stayed around for that last quarter. I think Mitch and Bozie made a bet. I don't know if he made a bet with Babs. I wouldn't make a bet with Babs. I still haven't gotten my bottle of wine from last year's World Juniors. You're out of luck if you're betting with him. I don't think he pays up."

Matthews and Babcock placed a wager on the gold medal game at last year's World Juniors, which Team USA won in a shootout.

Babcock, meanwhile, couldn't help but notice his players watched the game in a suite instead of braving the outdoors.

"It was cold," the coach noted. "I took a different route with the fans instead of in that secure suite there watching on TV (smiles). It was enjoyable. It was a great experience. Obviously, I grew up in Saskatchewan and so I'm a Roughriders fan. I'm really happy for Toronto and [coach Marc Trestman] and the team, obviously they did a good job. And for Larry [Tanenbaum] as ownership, it's a great opportunity for them. Any time you have a chance to win a championship I think it's real special."

Marner riding high after Argos' win; Matthews regrets leaving after 3rd quarter

Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and Mike Babcock all attended the East Final on Sunday. Marner had no doubt the Argos were going to come out on top while Matthews enjoyed his first ever CFL game.

Hjalmarsson's return a big boost for Coyotes

The last-place Coyotes have won two straight and will be getting a boost on Monday as defenceman Niklas Hjalmarsson returns from injury.

"It's big," said head coach Rick Tocchet. "He's a 25-minute guy. He gets the puck out in pressure situations. He's a shot-blocker, great guy in the room. We've really missed him. He'll add a lot of intangibles to our team."

Hjalmarsson has missed the last 10 games after sustaining an upper-body injury on Oct. 30 in Philadelphia. His return should take some strain off of Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who leads the team in ice time this season (25:18 per game).

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Tocchet said he sensed some extra energy at the morning skate, especially among the group of Coyotes who are playing in their home province. Among that group is Max Domi, who broke into a big smile when asked about returning to the site of his World Junior triumph.

"Me and (Anthony Duclair) were talking about it earlier," he said. "A lot of good memories. Winning a gold medal here is probably at the top of my list for overall memories in the sport of hockey, so great rink, great atmosphere and I'm excited to play here tonight."

TSN.CA LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084411 Websites

TSN.CA / Do the Canucks need to rethink their overtime strategy?

By Jeff Paterson

PHILADELPHIA, PA – Overtime has not been kind to the Vancouver Canucks early in this 2017-18 National Hockey League season. Three times the team has been forced to settle the score beyond regulation time and on all three occasions the Canucks have failed to secure the bonus point up for grabs. The latest setback came Saturday night against the St. Louis Blues when Brayden Schenn plunged the dagger into the Canucks 2:41 into the extra period.

The results certainly aren't what the Canucks are looking for as they try to keep pace with the teams around them in the Pacific Division and Western Conference. All points are big points in the NHL standings and the Canucks aren't in any kind of position to be leaving points on the table or -- in the case of their most-recent overtime losses -- surrendering a point to a conference rival.

Now, three games is a small sample and this is hardly a crisis for the Canucks. It may not even qualify as a pressing concern. But more than the results, the hockey club should likely to review its approach to three-on-three overtime if it hopes to win its share of games that require additional time.

On Saturday against the conference-leading Blues, the Canucks didn't register a shot on goal in overtime. Not one single shot. Puck-possession is important, certainly, but unless the Canucks find a way to possess the puck into the opponent's net at some point somebody has to shoot it. The past two times the Canucks have been to overtime -- against St. Louis and before that Dallas -- the team managed just a single shot on goal. Two games, one shot at one end -- and two goals at the other end of the ice. Including an October 10th shootout loss to Ottawa, the Canucks have been outshot 8-3 in three overtime periods this season.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

"There is a lot that happens in overtime," Canucks coach Travis Green told TSN 1040 after the team's practice in Philadelphia Monday. "We had one game (vs Dallas) where it seemed like we were in their zone the whole time. We missed the net, we didn't get shots on net, Bo hit a post. Those games can go either way and they can go either way fast."

That night Alex Radulov pulled the trigger to end the game 2:32 into the extra session.

"We've talked about certain concepts that we have – you don't want to be tired, you don't want to shoot and miss the net – but at the end of the day, it comes down to a lot of guys that can just put it in the net," Green explained. "I don't like to over-analyze 3-on-3. You have to be careful because you need guys to just play and let their offensive instincts take over."

It seems the coach may be leaning in the right direction with his player deployment in overtime. In the game against Ottawa, Markus Granlund led all Canucks forwards with 2:08 of ice time followed by Henrik Sedin at 1:47. In the Dallas game, Sven Baertschi topped all Canucks forwards at 1:22. Against St. Louis on Saturday, Bo Horvat at 1:17 and Brock Boeser with 1:06 led the way. So it appears the Canucks are starting to shift towards their best-offensive players handling the most minutes in overtime – the way it should be.

Radulov and Schenn are both gifted offensive players who needed just one chance to end things – and they did. The lone Canucks shot in their past two trips to overtime belongs to Chris Tanev. So no Canuck forward has put a puck on goal in the last two overtime sessions. That needs to change.

It's great to control the puck and the Canucks have spent time in the attacking zone, but at some point they need their best players to pull the trigger.

"Puck possession is obviously huge," Bo Horvat says. "We have to be smarter with the puck. We have to defend well, but change at the right time. There are a lot of key components that go into being successful in overtime and we have to get better at it."

Three points have been flushed so far, the Canucks simply can't afford to squander many more. And putting pucks on net in overtime would certainly be a good place to start. At the very least, it's worth a shot.

TSN.CA LOADED: 11.21.2017

1084412 Websites

TSN.CA / Matthews set to celebrate 100th game with old friends

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – So much of Auston Matthews' young career has already unfolded as if from some Hollywood script.

There was the four-goal NHL debut. The Centennial Classic overtime winner. The homecoming against his childhood team in Arizona that also marked the 1,500th NHL game of his idol Shane Doan. Even the goal Doan scored against Matthews' line that night, marking the 400th of his career, is a highlight. Werdum

Given the storybook start to his first 99 NHL games, it's no surprise the stars have aligned once again for his 100th. Matthews missed four games with an upper-body injury earlier this month, pushing the milestone game back to Monday night — which just so happens to be when the Coyotes make their annual trip to Toronto.

"It's flown by. I guess that's what everybody says, [time] flies by when you're in this league and it sure has," said Matthews. "It'll be a pretty special night, obviously, playing the hometown team so it should be fun. I have a lot of good friends on the other side there so it'll be a good one for sure."

Two individuals eager to meet Matthews on the ice Monday night are Coyotes' forwards Clayton Keller and Christian Fischer. They were teammates of Matthews' at the U.S. National Team Development Program (Fischer from 2013-15, Keller in 2014-15) and were all part of the team that won under-18 World Junior Championship gold in 2015 (Matthews also won under-18 gold in 2014).

The Scottsdale native still holds especially fond memories of the international tournament experience and the months of preparation it took for the group to reach their goal.

"Your whole two years is kind of based off winning that tournament, it's what you work for," he said. "It's a really big deal. It was something I'll never forget, for sure; how you're over there representing your country, playing with the same group of guys for two years straight for one goal. When you meet that, it's pretty special."

Now the three friends will share the same ice as professionals for the first time, a day they could only dream of after bonding quickly in Ann Arbor, Mich. Once Keller, who's a year younger than Matthews, was called up to the under-18 team, he began driving Matthews home from practice and to school, car rides they'd spend trash-talking each other's Xbox skills.

Fischer, meanwhile, spent two seasons as Matthews' roommate.

"I think I kind of ran the show in the room a bit," Fischer recalled with a smile. "I controlled the TV and the temperature but he's a good roommate, a good guy. He's still one of my best friends. Playing against him tonight is something I'll remember."

Fischer said Matthews was a gracious host when the Coyotes got into town Sunday night, treating him and Keller to dinner at an upscale steakhouse. While Fischer denies Matthews will get the same swanky treatment when the Leafs play in Arizona come December ("I told him we're not going anywhere nice like that"), he can attest to the fact Matthews hasn't let superstar status in Toronto change who he is.

"You can see what he can do with the puck and the type of person he is. He's really humble," said Fischer. "He's one of a kind, a generational talent. I think we played together for our whole first year [at the NTDP] and he's such an easy player to play with."

"It was good to get close to him. He's just a great guy, really humble," added Keller. "[His success] doesn't surprise me. As soon as I practised with him and saw how hard he works, nothing ever surprises me with him."

The friends took decidedly different paths after the U.S. NTDP to their initial NHL tilt – Matthews through the ZSC Lions in Switzerland, Keller by way of Boston University and Fischer via the OHL and AHL – and they'll surely pause to enjoy the moment in warm-ups Monday. But once the puck drops, all bets are off.

"It was nice just to see [Auston], catch up. Tonight it's a little different," said Fischer. "We're enemies on the ice. If I have a chance to hit him, I'm going to hit him."

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1084413 Websites

TSN.CA / Matthews still working to reclaim form



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Maple Leafs and the Arizona Coyotes skated at the Air Canada Centre on Monday.

After a four-game injury absence, Auston Matthews scored twice in his return to the Leafs lineup on Saturday in Montreal, but he wasn't thrilled with his overall effort.

"I don't know if I really feel like I'm back," he admitted. "It really wasn't my best game, for sure. I got a little lucky there, scored a couple goals. It will take a few (games) I think ... it's a little bit of everything, touch, feel, kind of your agility and everything. You want to work to get that back."

On this, he and head coach Mike Babcock agree.

"The two goals last game, you think he's back," Babcock said, "but he wasn't at all. So, we need to get him back and going and skating and playing with and without the puck like he can and being the dominating force he can (be)."

Babcock reverts to old line formations

Babcock juggled the forward lines midway through Saturday's game against the Canadiens, sparking a six-goal explosion. Matthews tallied both his goals while skating alongside Matt Martin and good friend Mitch Marner. But the lines were back to normal at Monday's skate and Babcock bristled when asked why he didn't keep that trio together.

"The beauty of this is when you get to coach the team, you'll get to do what you want," Babcock said. "When I coach the team, I do what I want. This is what I think – I like to win every night. That's what I try to do. So, I try to put the right people together for that."

As for the success of that line on Saturday?

"I think it's good entertainment for us, the score was 6-0 and the shifts, a lot of it didn't matter. I just want to win every night so I try to set up the lineup for it to be successful. They're not together tonight."

Babcock bristles when asked why he isn't keeping Matthews, Marner together

When asked why he won't be keeping Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner on the same line tonight, Mike Babcock, said he 'wants to win every night' and he tries to set the lineup for it to be successful.

So, Matthews will be back with regular running mates Zach Hyman and William Nylander to start Monday's game against the Coyotes as Toronto aims for its seventh straight win.

It will be the 100th regular-season game of Matthews' burgeoning career. Has it felt like that long?

"No, not really," the 20-year-old said with a chuckle. "It's flown by. You know, I guess that's what everybody says, 'It flies by when you're in this league,' and it sure has. It will be a pretty special night."

Adding to the special feel is the fact Matthews, a native of Scottsdale, Ariz., will be facing the Coyotes for the third time. Matthews hit the scoresheet in both games against Arizona last season, scoring a goal in a shootout loss at the Air Canada Centre and picking up an assist in a win in the desert.

"That's my hometown team so, you know, when they're not playing the Leafs you want to root for them and just a lot of good friends on that team," Matthews said. "And, obviously, the organization and the kind of slot they've been in with the arena and everything, you want to see them succeed, because you want to see hockey stay in Arizona."

Matthews will also be playing against two of his closest friends and former national program teammates tonight in Clayton Keller and Christian Fischer. TSN's Kristen Shilton has more on that.

Arizona hasn't lost in regulation in Toronto since 2002 thanks to a 6-0-1 run at the ACC. Toronto, meanwhile, hasn't won seven straight since 2003.

Auston Matthews will be playing in his 100th career NHL game tonight, and it'll be against his hometown Coyotes team as well as good friends Clayton Keller and Christian Fischer.

Marner gloats about Argos win

The mood was light at Toronto's morning skate as the team returned to the office after a day off Sunday. Marner, a big Argonauts fan, attended the CFL East final at BMO Field alongside Matthews, Morgan Rielly and Frederik Andersen.

Marner's linemate, Regina native Tyler Bozak, was cheering for Saskatchewan as was Babcock, who grew up in Saskatoon and attended the game in a Roughriders jersey.

"Luckily enough, when I walked in today Babs and Tyler were together at the breakfast table and I walked in wearing my Argos hat, hands up celebrating," Marner said with a smile. "When you get time to rub it in it's always nice to do that."

Matthews, Rielly and Andersen actually left the game after the third quarter missing the frantic conclusion, which saw the Argos squander and then reclaim the lead.

CFL East Final: Roughriders 21, Argonauts 25

The Riders trailed for most of the game before they rattled off 18 points in the fourth quarter to take a three-point lead. Ricky Ray had other ideas however, as he led the Argos down the field in the final minutes for the game-winning touchdown. Ray finished with just 266 yards and a TD, but it was enough to propel Toronto to the Grey Cup.

"I was pretty tired so I went home," said Matthews. "Morgan and Freddie and I, we all went home and then the game turned into an absolute barnburner ... probably should have stayed around for that last quarter. I think Mitch and Bozie made a bet. I don't know if he made a bet with Babs. I wouldn't make a bet with Babs. I still haven't gotten my bottle of wine from last year's World Juniors. You're out of luck if you're betting with him. I don't think he pays up."

Matthews and Babcock placed a wager on the gold medal game at last year's World Juniors, which Team USA won in a shootout.

Babcock, meanwhile, couldn't help but notice his players watched the game in a suite instead of braving the outdoors.

"It was cold," the coach noted. "I took a different route with the fans instead of in that secure suite there watching on TV (smiles). It was enjoyable. It was a great experience. Obviously, I grew up in Saskatchewan and so I'm a Roughrider fan. I'm really happy for Toronto and [coach Marc Trestman] and the team, obviously they did a good job. And for Larry [Tanenbaum] as ownership, it's a great opportunity for them. Any time you have a chance to win a championship I think it's real special."

Marner riding high after Argos' win; Matthews regrets leaving after 3rd quarter

Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and Mike Babcock all attended the East Final on Sunday. Marner had no doubt the Argos were going to come out on top while Matthews enjoyed his first ever CFL game.

Hjalmarsson's return a big boost for Coyotes

The last-place Coyotes have won two straight and will be getting a boost on Monday as defenceman Niklas Hjalmarsson returns from injury.

"It's big," said head coach Rick Tocchet. "He's a 25-minute guy. He gets the puck out in pressure situations. He's a shot-blocker, great guy in the room. We've really missed him. He'll add a lot of intangibles to our team."



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

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Positive vibes for Domi in return to ACC

Tocchet said he sensed some extra energy at the morning skate, especially among the group of Coyotes who are playing in their home province. Among that group is Max Domi, who broke into a big smile when asked about returning to the site of his World Junior triumph.

"Me and (Anthony Duclair) were talking about it earlier," he said. "A lot of good memories. Winning a gold medal here is probably at the top of my list for overall memories in the sport of hockey, so great rink, great atmosphere and I'm excited to play here tonight."

Domi scored in his only previous NHL game in Toronto back on Dec. 22, 2015.

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1084414 Websites

TSN.CA / On Ekman-Larsson and the Maple Leafs

By Bob McKenzie

Columnist image

It's not so much the elephant in the room as it is the OEL in the ACC.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson and the Arizona Coyotes played the Maple Leafs in Toronto on Monday, which meant there was a pretty good chance someone suggested the 26-year-old defenceman should or could walk down the hall at the Air Canada Centre before game time and switch teams.

It wouldn't be the first time the idea has been publicly broached by pundits and fans alike; it likely won't be the last time either.

The funny thing is, outside of some creative thinking by those who believe OEL to the Leafs makes a lot of common sense for both teams, there doesn't appear, at this moment anyway, to be any real basis in fact to it.

Yet here we are talking about Ekman-Larsson to Toronto. What gives?

I was asked about it on TSN 1050 last Wednesday. It was a fair question too, given the Coyotes were 2-15-3 at the time — this was before they beat Montreal and Ottawa and then the Maple Leafs to cobble together a three-game winning streak.

McKenzie: No reason to think Leafs, Coyotes are talking OEL deal

TSN Hockey insider Bob McKenzie joins Landsberg in the Morning with guest hosts Matt Cauz and Steve Simmons to discuss the Maple Leafs vs Devils, winning three in a row without Auston Matthews, if the Maple Leafs and Coyotes are talking about an Oliver Ekman Larsson trade and more.

But I was mostly dismissive of it for the same reasons I have been in the past.

That is:

- Ekman-Larsson is the centrepiece of the Coyote team and even though he is scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of next season — thereby eligible to be extended this summer — he has been mostly positive about the prospect of re-upping in Arizona.

- In spite of the Leafs' seeming "need" for a top-pairing blueliner, there has been little evidence to suggest the Leafs have been burning up the phone lines with an eye towards giving up one of their young offensive stars to get one.

I never gave it much thought beyond that - until late Saturday night/early Sunday morning, when someone merely cautioned me that there could be something to it, that I shouldn't be so quick to so be dismissive, that an OEL-to-Toronto-for-William-Nylander balloon was out there floating in the rumoursphere.

Huh. Interesting.

That's when you start to let your imagination run wild a bit.

You start to wonder about a lot of things:

- There's been considerable talk in the early going that new Coyotes' head coach Rick Tocchet and team leader Ekman-Larsson haven't exactly hit it off, although having to wait 21 games to get the team's first regulation win might strain any coach-player relationship.

- Ekman-Larsson, like a lot of Coyote players this season, has not played well at all.

- As seemingly committed as Ekman-Larsson has been in his public comments about staying in Arizona for the long haul, he did tell my TSN colleague Pierre LeBrun, in an interview for The Athletic this past week, that the uncertainty over the arena situation in Arizona is a factor of sorts and he'll need some clarity on that before making any long-term commitment.

- If the Coyotes are going to be as bad this season as their 4-15-3 start would suggest, can a 26-year-old top-pairing defenceman really be as committed and happy as he says he is on a last-place team that was supposed to take a big step forward this season?

- Is it possible there's been a seismic philosophical shift within the Leaf hierarchy as it relates to building a contender on the backs of their three young offensive stars - Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and William Nylander? Because, make no mistake, that has been the guiding principle of the (Brendan) Shanaplan.

- Look at that on Saturday night in Montreal: Isn't that Mitch Marner playing alongside Auston Matthews, which almost never happens? What about Josh Leivo's curious one-year contract extension last week? Is that noteworthy beyond the obvious?

Even for those of us who do this for a living, it's tempting/way too easy to get a little swept up in dreaming in technicolour sometimes. Alas, the job is to try to drill down on what's real and what's imagined.

So here we go:

- As of Sunday night, my best information is that the Leafs and Coyotes haven't had a single conversation regarding Ekman-Larsson. (By the way, I hate reporting what's not happening with such great certainty because, well, what if they were to have a conversation today?).



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017

- If, and this is a rather large IF, Arizona were to trade OEL to Toronto for, as rumoured, William Nylander, I don't believe Arizona, and many other teams, probably including even the Leafs themselves, view Nylander as an NHL centre. And if you're the Coyotes, you don't contemplate moving a top-pairing D man for a winger. They would want and need a centre in return.

- I don't believe the Leafs have, at this point in time anyway, altered their core principle that they can build a Cup contender, both from a hockey and a salary cap perspective, with the three kids (Matthews, Marner and Nylander) up front.

This latter point may irritate many Leaf fans who envision giving up one of them for a stud defenceman, but (certainly for now anyway), the Leafs believe more in the concept of perhaps not having a true No. 1 D but trying to have five Top 4 D, if that makes any sense. Maybe that's simply a forced choice, because trading for a true No. 1 defenceman is near impossible.

In any case, this long-and-winding exercise to contemplate a scenario, and then refute it, more or less got me back to where I started from last Wednesday, though I wouldn't necessarily call the process fruitless.

It did reinforce to me two things: 1. I don't believe the Coyotes are at all interested in trading Oliver Ekman-Larsson; 2. I don't believe the Leafs are at all interested in trading any of their Big 3 kids up front.

Perhaps at some point in time, down the road, one or both these things could or maybe even will be subject change.

But I'm betting it won't be prior to puck drop tonight.

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1084415 Websites

USA TODAY / NHL awards at the quarter mark: Lightning duo sizzling atop MVP race

Kevin Allen and Jimmy Hascup, USA TODAY Published 11:22 a.m. ET Nov. 20, 2017 | Updated 4:38 p.m. ET Nov. 20, 2017

The NHL season is only 47 days old, but history shows that teams not in a playoff position on Thanksgiving will have a difficult time getting there by the end of the season.

With 309 games already played, we will be at the quarter pole of the season this week.

USA TODAY Sports NHL columnist Kevin Allen and NHL editor Jimmy Hascup weigh in with their award front-runners.

Hart Trophy (MVP)

Allen: Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay Lightning: It's truthfully a toss-up between Stamkos and linemate Nikita Kucherov, but Stamkos might be playing the best hockey of his career. Runner-up: Kucherov.

Hascup: Kucherov, Lightning: He's the league's leading goal scorer on the NHL's top team. Kucherov also ranks second with 33 points and leads the league in points per 60 minutes (3.78) at even strength among players with at least 200 minutes. Runner-up: Jaden Schwartz (Blues)

Calder Trophy (Rookie)

Allen: Clayton Keller, Arizona Coyotes: The 11 goals are impressive, but his most telling statistics are his 71 shots on goal. That ranks 12th in the NHL. Runner-up: Will Butcher (Devils)

Hascup: Matthew Barzal (New York Islanders): Barzal's emergence as a legitimate top-six center has been vital. He leads rookies in points (19); he has a 54% Corsi (5% better than his team without him on the ice) and is 18th in the NHL in primary points (first assist or goal) per 60 minutes. Runner-up: Keller

Vezina Trophy (Goalie)

Allen: Sergei Bobrovsky, Columbus Blue Jackets: In 16 starts, Bobrovsky owns a .933 save percentage and has given up one or no goals in eight of those appearances. Runner-up: Corey Crawford (Blackhawks)

Hascup: Bobrovsky: Among starters, Bobrovsky is first in overall SV% (.933), first in five-on-five save percentage (.944) and tied for third in wins (11). Runner-up: Crawford

Norris Trophy (Defenseman)

Allen: Alex Pietrangolo, St. Louis Blues: He has played a major role in the Blues' 15-5-1 start. Pietrangolo is playing 26:12 per game, and he's tied for second among defensemen in shots on goal (69). Only 16 defensemen are playing 25 or more minutes, and he leads them all in plus-minus (+9). Runner-up: Victor Hedman (Lightning)

Hascup: Pietrangolo: He's tied for first among defensemen in points (19); he's a positive possession player and has a 64% goals-for percentage (16 goals for, nine against at even strength). Runner-up: Erik Karlsson (Ottawa Senators)

Jack Adams Award (Coach)

Allen: Mike Yeo, Blues: His team has been the NHL's best since he took over the Blues last February. Runner-up: John Hynes (Devils)

Hascup: John Stevens, Los Angeles Kings: Their puck possession is worse than previous seasons, but the Kings have scored more and look rejuvenated.

Biggest Disappointment

Allen: Edmonton Oilers: They were a fashionable pick to reach the Stanley Cup Final and this morning they rank 29th out of 31 NHL teams. Runner-up: Canadiens

Hascup: Oilers: This was supposed to be the start of more glory years. Runner-up: Canadiens

Most Improved Team

Allen: New Jersey Devils: How many pundits projected the Devils leading the Metropolitan Division this close to Thanksgiving? Zero would be a good guess. Runner-up: Lightning

Hascup: Devils: They are better, especially on offense. Even though they've gone from 28th to seventh in the overall standings, there are questions about sustainability. Runner-up: Kings

Biggest Surprise

Allen: Brayden Schenn, Blues: Schenn is among the scoring leaders. He's on a 100-point pace after never having more than 59 in his career. Runner-up: Sean Couturier (Flyers)

Hascup: Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets: Winnipeg signed Steve Mason after Hellebuyck's disappointing 2016-17 season. Now, Hellebuyck (.931 SV% in 15 games) is the reason the Jets have gotten off to a strong start. Runner-up: Couturier

Biggest Mystery

Allen: Pittsburgh Penguins: The two-time defending champions rank 26th in goals-against average and are strangely inconsistent. Sidney Crosby and Kris Letang are both minus-12. Phil Kessel (+2) is the only big-name Penguins player who isn't minus. Their 5-on-5 scoring average is one of the NHL's worst. Runner-up: Wild



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • Nov. 21, 2017**

Hascup: Carey Price, Montreal Canadiens: He hasn't played since Nov. 2 because of a lower-body injury and his return date is unclear. Even when he played, he sported a 3.77 goals-against average and .877 SV%.  
Runner-up: New York Rangers

USA TODAY LOADED: 11.21.2017