



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes end three-game slide by beating Ducks 4-1

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes found a way to score some goals Friday.

They also found a way to win, beating the Anaheim Ducks 4-1 to end a three-game losing streak in the final game of their West Coast trip.

Clark Bishop's first NHL goal was a big one for the Canes, tying the score 1-1 in the second period. It came on a play that ended with Bishop, the puck, Ducks defenseman Hampus Lindholm and goalie John Gibson all in the net, which was knocked off its pegs.

Brett Pesce's third-period score gave the Canes a 2-1 lead, captain Justin Williams followed a minute later with another goal -- Bishop with an assist -- and Sebastian Aho sealed it with a late empty-netter. With goalie Petr Mrazek making 18 saves, it all added up to a solid team victory at the Honda Center in Anaheim.

"It was a great effort all the way up and down the lineup," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We've got a lot of guys banged up, a lot of guys that were just muscling it out. We deserved that win."

The Canes (13-11-4) did it without center Jordan Staal, who suffered a concussion Wednesday in a 4-1 loss to the San Jose Sharks.

With Staal out, Brind'Amour shifted Aho back to center and Aho's game was one of his best overall this season. He had five shots and won 11 of 18 draws, and he was on the ice in the third as a penalty killer when the Ducks had a 5-on-3 advantage but could not score.

"He looked pretty good out there but a lot of guys rose to the occasion tonight," Brind'Amour said.

Canes recall goalie Alex Nedeljkovic from Checkers

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes on Friday recalled goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

In another personnel move, the Canes placed forward Micheal Ferland on injured reserve retroactive to Nov. 27. Ferland has missed the past three games as he recovers from a concussion.

Bishop, named the game's first star, scored at 1:55 of the second when he crashed the net with the puck. It was initially ruled no-goal, but after a lengthy review it was ruled the puck crossed the goal line before the cage was knocked loose and that Lindholm caused Bishop to hit Gibson.

Ducks coach Randy Carlyle then challenged the call, claiming goaltender interference by Bishop, but the goal stood.

"Unfortunate goal for them, lucky one for us, but you've got to give 'Bish' credit for taking it to the net the way he did," Brind'Amour said of the unassisted goal from the fourth-line center, the Canes' first at even strength since the 2-1 win at Montreal on Nov. 27.

No such drama on Pesce's goal, his third. The defenseman jumped into the rush, took a pass from Teuvo Teravainen and beat Gibson on a shot.

Williams scored his fifth in tight, banging away at the rebound of a Bishop shot.

"We've been snake-bitten on getting some bounces so it was nice tonight to see us get a few," Brind'Amour said.

Teravainen, who had gone five games without a point, also assisted on Aho's empty-netter -- Aho's eighth goal of the season.

Jakob Silfverberg scored shorthanded at 11:47 of the first for the Ducks (15-11-5), who had won five straight, but the Canes bounced back this night.

Canes forward Saku Maenalanen, recalled from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL, made his NHL debut and played 6:49. Goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, also recalled, served as Mrazek's backup with Curtis McElhinney out with a lower-body injury.

The Canes play six of the next seven games at PNC Arena, facing the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday.

Nedeljkovic, who leads the AHL in wins this season with 12, was needed after goalie Curtis McElhinney left practice early Thursday. McElhinney's status is not known.

Nedeljkovic, 22, has a 12-4-1 record with a 2.94 goals-against average and .890 save percentage this season.

Goaltender Scott Darling has been reassigned to the Checkers but the Canes called up Nedeljkovic to back up Petr Mrazek in the final game of a three-game road trip.



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THE ATHLETIC

Mirtle: Where will the next generation of NHL players come from? Follow the Stanley Cup

By James Mirtle

It's a trend that has been happening slow and steady, over the last 10 years and largely unnoticed.

The NHL is getting more American.

Not in terms of the number of teams – although the additions of Las Vegas and (soon) Seattle help there, too – but the players on the ice. Whereas for decades the number of U.S.-born skaters hovered around 100 in a league of some 700 players, that figure has quickly ballooned to nearly double that in short order.

And – for reasons we'll dive into – this isn't a trend that's likely to slow down.

Historically, based on games played, the NHL has been approximately 14 percent American, well behind Canada (69 percent) but a solid second ahead of Sweden, Russia and other European nations. This season, roughly 27 percent of skaters who have appeared in a game have been Americans, the culmination of years of recent gains.

There are a variety of reasons for that, including the United States' large population, USA Hockey's shift in their development model and the advancements made by their national team development program. But I would argue the biggest driver of growth at the minor hockey level in recent years has been the NHL.

And specifically in the U.S. cities where their NHL teams have won.

I'll say up front that this will not be a comprehensive look at every minor hockey market in the United States because that would be enough to fill a book. What I wanted to do here, as part of our Future of Hockey series, was highlight how many kids are now playing hockey in a lot of U.S. markets where that wasn't previously happening.

Throughout NHL history, most American players have tended to come from the three Ms – Minnesota, Michigan and Massachusetts – or New York state. Even today, those four states make up a huge portion of U.S.-born players in the league. But as hockey has become more entrenched in different areas, and as NHL teams there have had increasing success, that has begun to rapidly change.

Not coincidentally, the regions that have had the biggest gains in youth hockey enrollment in recent years are all areas where teams have won the Stanley Cup in the last 10 years: Southern California, Washington, Chicago and Pittsburgh.

The chart below contains a list of the fastest growing minor hockey regions in the U.S., among the 14 USA Hockey zones with a minimum of 10,000 players aged 18 and under. Those four major metropolitan areas mentioned above lead the way, with growth rates between 38 and 71 percent in just the last 10 years.

District	State	2007-08	2017-18	Growth
Pacific	California	8,730	14,886	71%
Southeastern	DMV	8,585	13,307	55%
Mid-American	W. Pennsylvania	7,397	11,427	54%
Central	Illinois	16,893	23,346	38%
Atlantic	New Jersey	12,538	14,295	14%
Massachusetts	Massachusetts	40,017	43,674	9%
Rocky Mountain	Colorado	9,424	10,221	8%
Minnesota	Minnesota	45,168	48,920	8%
Mid-American	Ohio	9,470	10,224	8%
New England	Connecticut	10,526	11,244	7%
New York	New York	34,807	36,340	4%
Central	Wisconsin	15,049	15,440	3%
Atlantic	E. Pennsylvania	11,192	11,084	-1%
Michigan	Michigan	34,614	25,707	-26%

(Note: DMV refers to the combined D.C., Maryland and Virginia figures. These numbers are based on USA Hockey enrollment only and do not include unaffiliated leagues, which contributed to a sizable decrease in Michigan's numbers in recent years. But that's a story for another day.)

What follows below is a full picture of U.S. youth hockey enrollment growth across the country, based on the past 10 years. Full credit to chart master Dom Luszczyszyn for the heat map.

Keep in mind that some states included here have very small membership bases. (Oklahoma and Nevada, for example, show up as high growth states but still have fewer than 700 registered youth players.)

To hear those on the ground tell it, there are a number of key factors involved in driving this newfound participation in hockey at the youth level. But it is not a coincidence that most of the biggest gainers have been home to superstar-filled NHL teams that have won 10 of the last 12 Stanley Cups.

"The growth really started to take off when the Kings won their Cups (in 2012 and 2014) or when Anaheim won their Cup (in 2007)," explained Craig Johnson, a former NHLer who has coached in the Southern California minor hockey system the last 13 years. "You can see it. You see so many kids and parents that get their kids involved in the game then."

"This (growth in Washington) is because of Alex Ovechkin," said Alan May, who played five years for the Capitals in the early '90s and is now on their broadcast team. "All of a sudden, kids wanted to play hockey because he identifies the Caps as the most positive story in D.C. sports-wise every year. Because of that – and he's such a magnanimous person – people wanted to play the game."

The stories are very similar in Pittsburgh and Chicago.

Led by president David Morehouse, the Penguins used Sidney Crosby's star power to spearhead an aggressive grow the game plan going back 10 years, something reinforced by their Stanley Cup wins in 2009, 2016 and 2017.



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The Blackhawks, meanwhile, experienced a renaissance on the ice and off over the same period, beginning when Rocky Wirtz took over as owner in 2007 and reinvigorated the franchise. One of the first areas he invested in was minor hockey.

Part of what has changed of late, however, is the resources available for this push.

One of the underrated additions the NHL and NHLPA made to the collective bargaining agreement after the 2012-13 lockout was the Industry Growth Fund, which was designed to put millions of dollars directly into grassroots initiatives. Teams like the Blackhawks say the money they have received has been instrumental in transforming their youth programs, including getting new rinks built in area parks and being able to hire more staff dedicated to minor hockey.

They have since introduced programs that provide free head-to-toe equipment to first-time players who sign up for their learn to play programs.

The Industry Growth Fund is so new that its full impact likely won't be felt in the USA Hockey enrollment numbers for years to come. Already, however, there have been huge gains made in places like Chicago.

"We wouldn't have been able to program all this and get into the schools and see these 60,000-plus kids a year and teach them (about hockey)," said Annie Camins, the Blackhawks senior director of fan development and youth hockey. "It's really taken off. It's allowed us to find a way to bring hockey to life for these kids. From the beginning stage, where they just have a stick in their hands in the gym."

"This is about the only thing that the NHL and NHLPA agree on," May said. "Growing the game at the grassroots level. They use NHL alumni. They're doing it everywhere in the states. Because of that, a lot of the arenas are at max capacity. The other day I did a clinic (in the D.C. area) and there were 55 kids on the ice, 12 coaches and about 20 youth hockey players from the travel team helping out all the learn to play players. They had an organized game plan that was created by the Caps alumni. That goes on at all the arenas in the area around here. And the Caps facilitate that."

USA Hockey provided the following list of former NHL players who have become youth hockey ambassadors in some of their fastest growing youth hockey markets. It's a list that doesn't include all of the NHL alumni who are coaching in markets where they used to play:

Anaheim: Bryan Allen and Sean Pronger
Carolina: Shane Willis and Bates Battaglia
Chicago: Jamal Mayers
Florida: Bill Lindsay
Los Angeles: Derek Armstrong
Nashville: Cody Hodgson
New Jersey: Bruce Driver and Grant Marshall
Pittsburgh: Rocky Saggiuk
St. Louis: Jamie Rivers
Tampa: Mathieu Garon
Washington: Paul Mulvey

Others making significant contributions on the national level include Bryan Smolinski with the NHL and Mathieu Schneider and Rob Zepp through the NHLPA.

"We always worked with the NHL, but it got ramped up about 10 years ago," explained Kevin Erlenbach, USA Hockey's assistant executive director of membership. "We made a higher partnership. They fund our American Development Model programs. They fund grow-the-game initiatives.

"Ten years ago, you might have an NHL club that had a dedicated youth hockey person. Not everybody's got at least one. Some have five or six."

The NHL has been incredibly fortunate that many of its best teams in recent years have been based in large metropolitan areas where this rapid growth was possible. Since the introduction of the salary cap in 2005, Pittsburgh, Chicago, San Jose and Anaheim have won the most playoff games. Boston, Washington, New York (Rangers) and Los Angeles rank sixth, seventh, eighth and 11th.

That, combined with USA Hockey revamping what it was teaching kids, and the league working to get more kids into that new system, appears as though it will have ramifications for the makeup of the NHL in the very near future.

"You're seeing different areas of the country where kids no longer have to leave to go to a boarding school in New England or Minnesota to play at a high level," said Peter Robinson, the Capitals director of community relations who handles their youth hockey programs. "They can stay at home... We'd love to be able to see that homegrown talent (play for the Capitals eventually). We're seeing the level of skill rise (in youth hockey in D.C.) across the board, so I think it's coming."

Some former NHL players who grew up in hockey hotbeds in Western Canada or the northern U.S. said they've been blown away by how good the hockey has become where they are.

Johnson – whose son Ryan starred with the Anaheim Jr. Ducks program and is expected to go in the first two rounds of the draft next June – believes the only barriers to hockey growing faster in the U.S. are a lack of facilities and the costs to play. The more the NHL can help remove those obstacles, the more American kids will continue to flood into junior, college and professional programs.

"The impact the NHL has had has been great," Johnson said. "The more people you can get to try hockey for free, people get addicted to it. They try it for the first time and they want to do it again and again. So the NHL is doing it right."

"It's absolutely amazing how much teaching is going on now at the youth level and how much people care about creating a great environment," May added. "And an environment kids can improve in.

"It's an incredible program. And it's hard for me to say, but it's surpassed what they're doing in Canada. The key to the program is we're finding ways to make it fun, be creative and have retention so these kids go from this ADM program where they're not playing games to where they want to continue to play hockey.

"It's an expensive sport. So the NHL teams doing this thing, providing this money to give kids free equipment, I think it's unbelievable. They're going to keep these kids. They're going to be involved in hockey. They're going to be hockey fans their whole life."



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And, in some cases, more than just fans.

In the interest of providing a complete picture of enrollment growth, here is the full chart of all USA Hockey regions. Those with 20 percent or better increases are highlighted in yellow.

District	State	2007-08	2017-18	Growth
Minnesota	Minnesota	45,168	48,920	8%
Massachusetts	Massachusetts	40,017	43,674	9%
New York	New York	34,807	36,340	4%
Michigan	Michigan	34,614	25,707	-26%
Central	Illinois	16,893	23,346	38%
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Pacific	California	8,730	14,886	71%
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Mid-American	W. Pennsylvania	7,397	11,427	54%
New England	Connecticut	10,526	11,244	7%
Atlantic	E. Pennsylvania	11,192	11,084	-1%
Mid-American	Ohio	9,470	10,224	8%
Rocky Mountain	Colorado	9,424	10,221	8%
Southeastern	Florida	5,239	6,439	23%
Northern Plains	North Dakota	4,084	6,382	56%
Central	Missouri	5,187	6,255	21%
Rocky Mountain	Texas	6,044	6,069	0%
New England	New Hampshire	5,904	5,219	-12%
New England	Maine	5,433	5,148	-5%
Pacific	Washington	3,522	4,570	30%
Pacific	Alaska	4,419	4,547	3%
Rocky Mountain	Arizona	2,577	4,519	75%
Southeastern	North Carolina	2,768	3,861	39%
Mid-American	Indiana	3,490	3,845	10%
New England	Vermont	3,852	3,459	-10%
New England	Rhode Island	4,304	3,438	-20%
Southeastern	Tennessee	1,750	2,918	67%
Central	Iowa	2,130	2,670	25%
Northern Plains	South Dakota	1,944	2,504	29%
Rocky Mountain	Utah	2,295	2,113	-8%
Northern Plains	Montana	1,729	2,080	20%
Rocky Mountain	Idaho	1,637	1,783	9%
Southeastern	Georgia	1,841	1,725	-6%
Northern Plains	Wyoming	1,359	1,676	23%
Central	Nebraska	1,367	1,606	17%
Southeastern	Alabama	743	1,263	70%
Pacific	Oregon	688	1,066	55%
Southeastern	South Carolina	861	986	15%
Mid-American	Kentucky	913	985	8%
Mid-American	W. Virginia	744	862	16%
Rocky Mountain	New Mexico	859	815	-5%
Central	Kansas	773	779	1%
Atlantic	Delaware	655	723	10%
Rocky Mountain	Oklahoma	474	678	43%
Pacific	Nevada	407	637	57%
Southeastern	Louisiana	243	292	20%
Southeastern	Arkansas	156	245	57%
Southeastern	Mississippi	215	170	-21%
Pacific	Hawaii	19	72	279%

Godspeed to those 72 kids in Hawaii.



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Canes grind out 4-1 win over Ducks

By Adam Gold

In searching for a much-needed victory, the Hurricanes just may have found their number one center. Without Jordan Staal, Sebastian Aho moved back to the middle and performed. No, he didn't dazzle us offensively, but he played the game that was desperately needed especially with the absence of Staal.

"That whole line was good", head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game regarding Aho's running mates, Tuevo Teravainen and Jordan Martinook. "They had to be, especially with as many tough match ups as they had. We used Sebastian to kill the 5-on-3, and he's never done that before."

I'm sure it wasn't lost on those paying attention that the Canes killed off a 2-man disadvantage just two games after squandering one of their own in the loss in L-A.

There aren't any must win games in early December. But, after dropping their last three games the Carolina Hurricanes needed something to make them feel good. Friday night's 4-1 win over the Ducks in Anaheim will certainly make the in-flight meal taste a lot better.

A week ago, Carolina left a lot of meat on the bone as they generated a ton of scoring chances at home against Anaheim only to have it all unravel when the Ducks' Pontus Aberg batted a loose puck out of the air over the shoulder of Curtis McElhinney late in the 3rd period of a game that Anaheim. When Ryan Getzlaf scored a little more than a minute into overtime, the Canes headed west with a bitter taste.

Then came the 2-0 loss in Los Angeles in which a defensive breakdown led to the first goal late in the 3rd period. That was followed by the one-sided loss to the Sharks in San Jose. Worse than just the loss was the fact that they lost Staal to a concussion late in the 3rd period and that ultimately left them without a rudder in a game against a big, physical team down the middle.

Aho grabbed the paddle and played his best game of the season. He had five shots on goal, won 11 of 18 face offs and he made the defensive play in his own end that started the sequence that culminated with Brett Pesce's goal. Oh, and yes, he did score into an empty net, his first goal in seven games.

It was a very Jordan Staal performance for the 21-year old. On top of the face offs won and the defensive plays made, Aho also played 21:07, took the first shift on Carolina's first penalty kill and even delivered a couple of hits. The goals are going to come, we should all be convinced of that, but it was everything else Friday night that spoke the loudest about how Aho stepped into a very large void and helped lead the Hurricanes to a win they needed in the worst way.

* Clark Bishop scored his first NHL goal in the 2nd period. And it came in a way that the Hurricanes needed to see. It was all

speed, effort and determination. Bishop surprised Ducks' defenseman Hampus Lindholm with a speed move down the right wing, powered to the net, drew a penalty and skated the puck into the crease. The play created a goal mouth pile up, knocking the net off its pegs, and it ended with the puck sliding past John Gibson and into the goal. It was first reviewed (the net was not off before it crossed the goal line) then challenged (for goaltender interference, but the officials ruled it a good goal).

* Bishop got better as the game wore on. His 11:03 was the most ice time he's gotten since the Canes win in Chicago, but his 4:55 TOI in the 3rd period was more than twice as much as Victor Rask. In fact, Rask and Bishop switched lines midway through the game as Bishop bumped up to center Brock McGinn and Phil DiGiuseppe.

* There aren't a lot of stats to back up how good Andrei Svechnikov was tonight. Svechnikov fired four shots on goal, delivered three hits and assisted on Justin Williams' 3rd period goal that stretched the Canes lead to 3-1. He was considerably better than any box score would tell you. Some players just feel close to a break out. It's going to come soon for the 18-year old rookie.

* Jordan Martinook skated with Aho and Teravainen and while I've already gushed about the 200-foot game of the Hurricanes' star, Martinook played with an energy and a persistence that might have been the catalyst for the entire team. He was part of a forecheck that helped keep the play in the Ducks' zone for most of the evening.

* Justin Williams 3rd period goal snapped a 4-game point drought.

* Pesce's goal, which proved to be the game winner, was his first since October 13th vs Minnesota.

* Jaccob Slavin led the team with 24:04 TOI and was really superb all game long. He could easily have scored twice, hitting the post on two occasions during the same shift.

* Justin Faulk dropped the gloves for the first time in more than three years in the win. Late in the game, after Aho's empty net goal made it 4-1, Faulk and Ryan Getzlaf squared off. Notice, I didn't say "fight", because I'm not sure you could call what Faulk did fighting. Faulk got down to the ice as quickly as possible and the linesmen stepped in to separate the players, who each received five minutes for fighting even though it was nothing more than a short square dance.

* Petr Mrazek stopped 18 of 19 shots. The only goal the result of a Jakob Silfverberg short handed goal in the 1st period. Mrazek has stopped 51 of 53 shots since returning from his groin injury and figures to play again on Tuesday night when the Maple Leafs are at PNC Arena.

* Alex Nedeljkovic was recalled from Charlotte to be Mrazek's back up after Curtis McElhinney left Thursday's practice with



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a lower body injury. Nedeljkovic should be with the team until McElhinney's return, which could take a week to 10 days.

* Saku Maenalanen made his NHL debut, played 6:49 and delivered a couple of hits. While he didn't get much ice time in the 3rd period, he didn't look out of place at all during the game and made a few solid defensive plays.

* The Charlotte Checkers beat the Hartford Wolfpack, 7-4, Friday night. Martin Necas had four assists, Nic Roy a goal and three assists, and Janne Kuokkanen had his 10th and

11th goals and added a helper. Scott Darling made 20 saves in a wild win.

* Kuokkanen has 26 points in 25 games for the Checkers. Necas has 17 points in his last 17 games. It's only a matter of when, not if those two players return to the Hurricanes.

* Carolina is off until Tuesday night when the Maple Leafs come to PNC Arena.



Recap: Canes Cap Road Trip with Win in Anaheim

Bishop scores first NHL goal in 4-1 win

by Michael Smith

ANAHEIM - Jump-started by Clark Bishop's first career NHL tally, the Carolina Hurricanes scored four unanswered goals en route to a 4-1 victory over the Anaheim Ducks.

Brett Pesce (game-winner), Justin Williams and Sebastian Aho (empty-netter) added goals in the third period to help the Canes to their first win of this three-game road trip.

Here are five takeaways from the Canes' road trip finale.

One

After a tough pair of games to start this road trip, the Hurricanes needed this one. And they earned it, too. Going up against a club that got the better of them in overtime a week prior, a club that had one five straight games, a depleted Hurricanes squad put an early deficit from a shorthanded goal behind them to win the last two periods and leave Anaheim with two points.

"Everyone's head is in the same area here. We're a hard-working team. No one wants to give up. We come to the rink every day with the same attitude," Bishop said. "Whether we're down a goal or up two goals, no one really lets off the gas."

"It was a great effort, all the way up and down the lineup," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We had a lot of guys banged up, a lot of guys who just muscled it out. We deserved that win."

Two

One day, Clark Bishop is going to be asked how he scored his first goal in the National Hockey League, and the story he'll have to tell will be rather unique.

"It was definitely kind of a weird goal," Bishop smiled. "Not something I ever pictured on scoring my first NHL goal like that, but they all count. Luckily that one did."

"It was a little weird, but that's how you get the goals. Crash the net," Aho said. "It was a great goal, a huge goal for us. I'm happy for him."

See, here's what happened. Bishop drove the net with speed and was upended by Ducks defenseman Hampus Lindholm. As the two fell to the ice, the puck lodged itself under Bishop's left skate. Bishop continued to slide along the ice, and the net came off its pegs - but not before the puck crossed the goal line. The original call on the ice was no goal.

"When I was down on the ice, the ref kind of said if the net didn't come off then that's a good goal. I got a little bit excited then," Bishop said.

A review did indeed overturn the original call, and rightfully so. Then, Anaheim challenged for goaltender interference, but the call was upheld. Good goal (again).

"My heart was racing pretty high," Bishop said. "It's good that I scored, but it's good that we got a win on this road trip, too."

Even though Dougie Hamilton, trailing the play, threw his hands in the air at the sight of what he correctly deduced was a goal, Bishop couldn't properly celebrate due to the call on the ice. But, when the review ruled in his favor, he was mobbed by his teammates at the bench. Warren Foegele squirted him with water and grabbed his head. Fist bumps and smiles abound. Brock McGinn retrieved the puck and tossed it to Canes equipment manager Bob Gorman for safe keeping.

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"We had a lot of guys rise to the occasion. Bish's first goal got us started. Everyone stepped up," Brind'Amour said. "It's kind of a lucky one for us, but you have to give Bish credit for taking it to the net like he did. He really had the puck the whole way, drawing the penalty and everything. He was impactful, and that's what we need."

Three



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Tied 1-1 heading into the final frame, the Hurricanes simply needed to win the period to take home two points, and they did just that.

Just about two minutes deep in the third, Pesce joined the rush and dished off to Teuvo Teravainen on the far wing. Teravainen backhanded a pass back, and Pesce smacked a quick shot past John Gibson to put the Canes up 2-1 with his third goal of the season.

Just 61 seconds later, Williams located a loose puck in the crease off a Bishop shot and whacked it in to stretch the Canes' lead to two goals.

"He was having a bit of a tough game. He took a couple of penalties. He knew that. That's the thing about him. He knows he had to get it back. He just keeps playing," Brind'Amour said. "It's good to see that goal go in. We've been snake bitten on getting some bounces, so tonight it was nice to see us get a few."

Four

The Canes' penalty kill was a perfect 5-for-5 on the night, and it came up big in the third period to preserve the team's two-goal lead. The Canes held the Ducks without a shot on goal during 1:16 of a two-man disadvantage and then killed off the remainder of Calvin de Haan's minor penalty.

With Jordan Staal sidelined with a concussion, Aho was called upon on the penalty kill and was tossed over the boards on the two-man disadvantage.

Projected Lineup: Hurricanes at Ducks

Maenalanen to make NHL debut

by Michael Smith

ANAHEIM - A three-game trek through California wraps up for the Carolina Hurricanes when they take on the Anaheim Ducks for the second time in a week on Friday night.

Saku Maenalanen will make his NHL debut, and Petr Mrazek will get the start in net.

Here is the projected lineup for the Hurricanes.

Forwards

Martinook-Aho-Teravainen
McGinn-Rask-Di Giuseppe

"I've been in the meetings, so I know what I'm supposed to do. I've played now and then some shifts lately," Aho said. "That was the first game I actually played the whole game on the PK."

"On the 5-on-3, we had to use him," Brind'Amour said. "He's never done that before, and he looked pretty good out there."

Aho logged 2:30 of shorthanded ice time, a portion of his forward-leading 21:07. Aho totaled a goal, five shots on goal, two hits, a blocked shot and a 61 percent faceoff win rate in what he felt was his most complete game of the season.

"He played well. That line was good for us," Brind'Amour said. "They had some tough match-ups. It was the effort."

Five

Saku Maenalanen became the fourth player to make his NHL debut with the Hurricanes this season. He only logged 6:49 of ice time, but he was noticeable on his first shift, when he was flying around the ice, banging bodies.

"I thought he was fine. I didn't use him that much, but you can tell he's got speed," Brind'Amour said. "When you're a big guy who can skate, you have a chance in this league."

Up Next

Time to go home. The Canes will host the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday.

Svechnikov-Wallmark-Williams
Foegele-Bishop-Maenalanen

Defense

Slavin-Hamilton
de Haan-Faulk
van Riemsdyk-Pesce

Goalies

Mrazek
Nedeljkovic

Scratches: Fleury (healthy), Ferland (concussion; injured reserve), McElhinney (lower body), Staal (concussion)

Note: Lineup subject to change prior to opening faceoff.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Bishop scores first NHL goal, Hurricanes defeat Ducks

Forward also has assist for Carolina, which had lost three straight

by Dan Greenspan

ANAHEIM -- Clark Bishop scored his first NHL goal and had an assist for the Carolina Hurricanes in a 4-1 win against the Anaheim Ducks at Honda Center on Friday.

Brett Pesce, Justin Williams and Sebastian Aho scored in the third period, and Teuvo Teravainen had two assists for Carolina (13-11-4), which had lost three straight. Petr Mrazek made 18 saves.

"It was a great effort all the way up and down the lineup," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We had a lot of guys banged up, a lot of guys that were just muscling it out, and I think we deserved that win. It was nice to begin the long trip home here and at least have that in our bank."

Jakob Silfverberg scored, and John Gibson made 32 saves for Anaheim (15-11-5), which had won five in a row and had not allowed a third-period goal during the winning streak.

Pesce gave Carolina a 2-1 lead at 1:56 of the third period, scoring blocker side off a bouncing puck in the slot.

Williams scored 61 seconds later to extend the lead to 3-1 on a rebound at the top of the crease off Bishop's initial shot.

"It was one of those games where nothing we seemed to try to do had any effect on it, any positive effect," Ducks coach Randy Carlyle said. "It was all frustration and lack of ability to execute. They were faster, quicker, and executed to a higher rate than we did."

Aho scored into an empty net at 18:46 to make it 4-1. It was his first goal in seven games, but he was more pleased with his all-around performance, which included playing center and being out on the ice for a 5-on-3 penalty kill in the third period with Jordan Staal out because of a concussion.

"We weren't really sure how that was going to work out, but, again, it was the effort," Brind'Amour said. "Even in the 5-on-3, we had to use him. He had never done that before and he looked pretty good out there, so a lot of guys rose to the occasion tonight."

Silfverberg gave the Ducks a 1-0 lead while shorthanded at 11:47 of the first period. After hitting the post on a breakaway,

Silfverberg skated in front of the crease and redirected a point shot from Jake Dotchin inside the right post.

The goal was his 100th in the NHL. He is the second Ducks player to reach the milestone this season (Rickard Rakell on Nov. 23).

"It's tough on a night like this to look on the positive side, but it's an accomplishment. I'm proud of it," Silfverberg said.

Bishop tied it 1-1 at 1:53 of the second period, taking the puck to the net before running into Gibson. Initially ruled no goal, the Situation Room initiated a video review and determined the puck completely crossed the goal line prior to the net becoming displaced.

Carlyle then challenged for goaltender interference, but the call was upheld after it was determined that the actions of Ducks defenseman Hampus Lindholm caused Bishop to contact Gibson before the puck crossed the goal line.

"Not something that I ever pictured scoring my first NHL goal like that, but they all count, and luckily that one did," Bishop said.

They said it

"That was really weird, but that's how you get the goals. Go crash the net. That was a great goal, a huge goal for us, and I'm happy for him." -- Hurricanes forward Sebastian Aho on Clark Bishop's first NHL goal

"We didn't have it. I don't know how I can explain it to you any different. We just didn't have anything going." -- Ducks coach Randy Carlyle

Need to know

Teravainen had gone five games without a point. ... Dotchin's assist was his first of the season and first with Anaheim. ... Hurricanes forward Saku Maenalanen had two hits in 6:49 of ice time in his NHL debut. ... Alex Nedeljkovic backed up Mrazek after Curtis McElhinney sustained a lower-body injury in practice Thursday.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; FS-CR, TSN4, NHL.TV)

Ducks: Host the New Jersey Devils on Sunday (8 p.m. ET; PRIME, MSG+, NHL.TV)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Hurricanes snap Ducks' 5-game win streak with 4-1 victory

By Greg Beacham

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Clark Bishop scored his first NHL goal by crashing into the Anaheim net along with the puck. Two lengthy video reviews later, the rookie finally got to celebrate.

That ramshackle goal was a fairly appropriate symbol for a night of gritty work by the Carolina Hurricanes, who don't have enough time or healthy players to worry about style points.

Brett Pesce scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period, and the Hurricanes ended their three-game skid and the Ducks' five-game winning streak with a 4-1 victory over Anaheim on Friday.

Justin Williams also scored in the third period and Petr Mrazek made 18 saves in his first victory since Oct. 26 as the Canes won in Anaheim for just the second time in nine years.

Sebastian Aho added an empty-netter as Carolina salvaged one win from its three-game California trip despite the injury absences of top goal-scorer Micheal Ferland, veteran forward Jordan Staal and starting goalie Curtis McElhinney.

"We're not going to score a lot of pretty goals," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We've pretty much established that. We've got to find some other ways to get them."

Bishop tied it for the Canes with his messy goal in the second period. The 22-year-old former fifth-round pick slid into John Gibson while the puck trickled underneath the goalie, but the goal survived two reviews that concluded the puck had crossed the line and refuted Anaheim's claim of goalie interference.

"It was definitely kind of a weird goal," Bishop said. "Not something that I ever pictured scoring my first NHL goal like that, but they all count, and luckily that one did."

Jakob Silfverberg scored his 100th career goal for the Ducks, who had won seven of eight and earned points in nine of 10 before an uncharacteristic third-period flop.

"We didn't play anywhere near to the blue collar-type of game that was required," Ducks coach Randy Carlyle said. "Nothing we seemed to try to do had any positive effect. It was all frustration and a lack of ability to execute. ... It was one of those games where nothing we did was effective. Hopefully

we learned from it, because we lacked any type of resemblance to the team we've been."

Anaheim didn't allow a goal after the second period during its winning streak. Carolina scored twice in 61 seconds in the third, starting when Pesce connected perfectly with an aggressive swing at a pass from Teuvo Teravainen for the defenseman's third goal.

Gibson stopped 32 shots for Anaheim, but took just his second regulation loss in nine appearances after mishandling a high shot that turned into Williams' fifth goal.

Mrazek made just his second appearance since Nov. 2 for the Hurricanes after McElhinney was scratched with a lower-body injury that apparently occurred during practice Thursday.

Saku Maenalanen made his NHL debut for Carolina after Staal was sidelined for the first time this season due to a concussion.

Silfverberg put the Ducks ahead in the first period with a short-handed goal when Jake Dotchin's shot deflected off his body. Silfverberg started the sequence that led to his milestone goal in his 445th game with a breakaway shot off the iron.

"It's tough on a night like this to look on the positive side, but it's an accomplishment," Silfverberg said. "We still felt we had another gear we had to put in if we wanted to come out with two points. Our last 40 (minutes were) definitely not the way we wanted to play. We were playing slow and sloppy with the puck. We weren't connecting on passes."

NOTES: Bishop scored in his 11th career game. ... Ducks F Rickard Rakell missed his first game of the season with an ankle injury. The Swede is off to a slow start with just five goals after scoring 34 last year. ... Maenalanen, a 24-year-old Finn, is a former Nashville draft pick who began his first North American season in the AHL this fall. ... Staal is out indefinitely after getting hurt in the third period at San Jose on Wednesday. ... Ferland missed his fourth straight game with a concussion. ... McElhinney will be re-evaluated when the Canes return to Raleigh. The former Ducks backup is 7-3-1.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host Maple Leafs on Tuesday night.

Ducks: Host Devils on Sunday night.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap: Canes Solve Gibson, End Losing Streak in Anaheim

A big third period and a solid blue-line presence helped the Hurricanes wrap up the California trip with a pair of points.

By Jake Crouse

After some tough breaks and head-shaking offense during their trip through California, the Carolina Hurricanes closed out the road stand with a pair of points, using a big third period and a first NHL goal to push past the Ducks, 4-1.

The start, however, was a bit concerning. Coming in, it felt like the Canes needed to rev it up in the first period after all the recent scoring woes. Instead, they came to a sputter yet again.

For the opening half of the initial period, it was all Ducks. They controlled the Canes' zone, though they were unable to solve the Carolina defense to create dangerous chances. But that proved to be of little worry for the home team as Jake Dotchin tipped a puck past Petr Mrazek for a shorthanded goal on the Canes' first power play of the game.

Carolina was close to finding answers with a flurry of dangerous shots around the crease as the period went on, but John Gibson was brilliant once again, making 13 saves to open his night. The shot chart was honestly pretty beautiful, but the outcome may have just built more confidence for Gibson.

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Or maybe not.

Early in the second period, Gibson's defense would hurt him, allowing (or rather forcing) Clark Bishop to score his first NHL goal. As he attacked the net, Bishop was taken down by Hampus Lindholm, and in the process, Bishop's skate dragged the puck past the goal line before the net was dislodged. After an official review and a goalie interference challenge, he was awarded the goal because, according to the NHL, Lindholm "caused Bishop to contact Gibson before the puck crossed the goal line."

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Carolina seemed to build momentum in the short run from the goal, but it stalled in the latter part of the second due to

penalties, giveaways and offsidies calls. Brock McGinn was tripped with less than 2:00 to play in the period, and Teuvo Teravainen nearly gave the Canes the edge on the ensuing power play with a sharp shot from the circle, but he whistled it off the outside post on a hard one-timer.

No matter, thankfully. Two minutes into the final period, Teravainen fed Brett Pesce on a cross-ice rush, and when Pesce gave it a good whack while pressured, the puck whizzed by Gibson for the eventual game-winner.

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Another minute later, and Justin Williams finally found his scoring touch in the goalie's blue paint. He created the successful zone entry, deftly avoiding a hip check along the boards, then off Bishop's blast from just outside the circle, he corralled the puck that rolled off Gibson's shoulder and flicked it in.

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Back-to-back penalties on Teravainen (slashing) and Calvin de Haan (tripping) led to a minute and change of 5-on-3 action with plenty of time left in the period, but Carolina came up with a humongous kill, not allowing a shot on goal. The Canes killed off the rest of the 5-on-4 easily, using big blocks to keep the pressure off Mrazek.

From there on, all was fairly quiet. In fact, it was mostly advantage Canes. The defense frustrated the Ducks, allowing virtually no shots attempts, then Sebastian Aho put the icing on the cake with an empty-netter that ... somehow, Adam Henrique took exception to?

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Justin Faulk traded some jabs with Ryan Getzlaf, all was good, Aho headed to the locker room with the grin of a Finn and his teammates took it from there to end the game.

Mrazek went 18-for-19 in the net in his second start back from injury. (He also got two minutes for tripping on a wild call.) The Canes finished the Golden State trek 1-2-1 and return home to try to down the Maple Leafs once again at home on Tuesday.

Carolina Hurricanes at Anaheim Ducks: Lineups and Game Discussion

The Canes attempt to end the road trip on a high note in Anaheim.

By Andy House

The Carolina Hurricanes will attempt to salvage at least one victory on their California road trip as they wrap up their season series with the Ducks in Anaheim tonight. With Jordan

Staal ruled out with a concussion, and Micheal Ferland now placed on Injured Reserve also due to a concussion, the Canes will enter play shorthanded up front. Additionally, Curtis McElhinney tweaked something yesterday and left practice early, leading the Canes to use the roster spot created by placing Ferland on IR to bring Alex Nedeljkovic up to serve as the backup to Petr Mrazek tonight and the recall of Saku Maenalanen from Charlotte. The Canes will be



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hoping to find the net, as they have not scored in five-on-five action during the first two games of the trip. The lines are likely to change, but as of now here is our best guess for how the lines will roll. The team did not skate this morning. Rod Brind'Amour will speak with the media at 8:00 pm ET and we'll provide an update after his interview is made available.

Updated Lines:

Jordan Martinook - Sebastian Aho - Teuvo Teravainen
Brock McGinn - Victor Rask - Phil Di Giuseppe
Andrei Svechnikov - Lucas Wallmark - Justin Williams
Warren Foegele - Clark Bishop - Saku Maenalanen

Jacob Slavin - Dougie Hamilton
Calvin de Haan - Justin Faulk
Trevor van Riemsdyk - Brett Pesce

Petr Mrazek
Alex Nedeljkovic

Injuries and Scratches: Haydn Fleury (healthy), Micheal Ferland (concussion; injured reserve), Curtis McElhinney (lower body), Jordan Staal (concussion)

The Anaheim Ducks are riding high as they hope to continue their five-game winning streak that began on their eastern road trip that included an overtime win in Raleigh last Friday. One noted absence for tonight will be the loss of Rickard Rakell, who will miss tonight with an ankle injury.

John Gibson will return to the net as he looks to continue his solid season that has elevated the Ducks to second place in the Pacific Division. Below are the lines that Head Coach Randy Carlyle is expected to deploy on home ice:

Daniel Sprong - Ryan Getzlaf - Pontus Aberg
Nick Ritchie - Adam Henrique - Ondrej Kase
Andrew Cogliano - Ryan Kesler - Jakob Silfverberg
Kiefer Sherwood - Carter Rowney - Brian Gibbons

Jacob Larsson - Josh Manson
Brandon Montour - Hampus Lindholm
Josh Mahura - Jake Dotchin

John Gibson
Ryan Miller

Metropolitan Division Weekly Roundup: Hits, Trades, and New Hires

The Metropolitan Division has been active with players moving teams and a General Manager getting hired.

By Zeke Lukow

1. Washington Capitals: 35 Points (16-9-3)

Tom Wilson is back in the news for a hit again. However, this time he was on the receiving end of a Ryan Reaves hit that sent him out of Tuesday's game against Vegas. Wilson missed Thursday's game against the Arizona Coyotes with a concussion that came from the hit. Reaves was ejected from the game for the blind-side hit that looked similar to Wilson's hit on the Devils' Brett Seney earlier in the season. While the hit was shoulder to shoulder, the issue came when the player hits the ice head first. The NHL is trying to get these types of hits out of the game. Both were late and could have been avoided.

But when Wilson does get away with these plays, you will see teams bring in enforcers or match a physical player against him. Ryan Reaves isn't a player that should be out against the Caps top line. He doesn't have the skill, but he does match up against Wilson and can protect his teammates. This hit jumps out as a reaction to Wilson's play and the fact he wasn't suspended for his hit. If the NHL continues to be soft on borderline hits, I could see more of these types of plays happening.

2. Columbus Blue Jackets: 34 Points (16-10-2)

The Blue Jackets have had a bad week. They lost to the Flames and let up nine goals on Tuesday. On Thursday they lost to the Wild 4-2, both times with Sergei Bobrovsky in net. Bobrovsky let up eight goals on 26 shots midway through the third period on Tuesday. This lowers his save percentage to .901 which is his worst season total since 2011-2012 when he had a .899 save percentage. His 3.04 goals against average is the worst of his entire career.

It's an odd move for a goalie that is in a contract year to leave him in through seven goals before pulling him after the eighth. Goalies are infamously headcases, so to let he guy get shelled and to demolish his self confidence in this game. Not only could this affect him in future games, but you can look at incidents like Patrick Roy in Montreal which forced a trade after a similar event. Not only are they going to have issues with his in-season happiness, they are also courting him in the long-term for a new contract.

3. New York Islanders: 29 Points (13-11-3)

Which brings us to the Islanders, where an interesting thing to keep an eye on is Lou Lamoriello's aggressive player acquisition. With Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky on expiring contracts, how hard will Lamoriello go after them in the off season? Bobrovsky has been rumored to be interested, and Panarin wants to go to a larger market team. While the Isles normally play second fiddle to the Rangers in New York, would Lamoriello be able to work his magic to make the Islanders more appealing than the Rangers for Panarin? One thing he will be able to use is a brand new facility.

On the stadium front, the Islanders received positive news when it comes to their new arena. The Belmont Park site passed the environmental impact study which means they are one step closer to beginning construction. The study found the only impact the stadium would bring is more traffic. The Islanders are hoping to start construction in May so they can begin play in the 2020-2021 season — of course, only if the CBA is in place for the start of the season.

4. Pittsburgh Penguins: 29 Points (12-10-5)

The Penguins made their second shake-up trade this year when they traded Daniel Sprong to the Anaheim Ducks for defenseman Marcus Pettersson. Pettersson is a 22 year old Swedish defenseman who is playing in his second NHL season. In 27 games played this year, he has recorded zero goals and six assists. While he hasn't shown to be a heavy



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scoring threat, he is 6'3" 177 lbs. At 6'3" he is likely to be able to put more weight on his frame to be a more imposing threat in the defensive zone. What he lacks in pure muscle he makes up for with a long reach which makes him annoying to play against.

The Penguins departed with Sprong who has played four seasons with the club and recorded only four goals and five assists. Though he is just 21 years old, he has struggled to contribute in a consistent basis in the lineup. With the Pens thin on defense, this trade makes sense for them, even if they move Pettersson to the AHL without needing waivers since he is in the last year of his entry level deal. He will also be an easy player to re-sign as a restricted free agent with a two-way deal allowing for added flexibility and depth on the blue line in coming seasons.

5. New York Rangers: 29 Points (13-12-3)

The Rangers have a five day break, the longest of the year outside of their bye week. The break comes at a good time for the Rangers, who have lost three straight games before getting some time off and some extra practice time. This also gives Pavel Buchnevich, Mats Zuccarello, Adam McQuaid and Vladislav Namestnikov time to come back from injuries. Buchnevich is the most likely to return Saturday, which is big for the Rangers who have struggled in his absence.

The Rangers' record was 5-5-1 without Buchnevich and they have a 9-7-2 record with him in the lineup. Though he has struggled, only scoring five goals and four assists, he's strong offensively and forces defensemen to play more responsibly. When you combine that with the loss of Namestnikov, who plays on the top line, and Zuccarello who has been their top scorer over the past few years, they need all the offense they can get.

6. Carolina Hurricanes: 28 Points (12-11-4)

The Canes are going with their red jerseys throughout the entire California road-trip. This is another fun and interesting thing that Tom Dundon wants to implement. He hates the white, away jerseys and doesn't believe that they have any appeal, which I tend to agree with. In order to make this work the Canes had to petition each team to change their jersey preferences.

The fun game will be tonight when the Canes take on the Ducks who will be wearing their black jerseys, meaning that both teams will be wearing dark colors. I believe this is the first time that both teams will be wearing colors for a regular season game. However, no jerseys look appealing to fans when the team is playing poorly. The Canes have just four goals in their last five games, the worst of any team in this timespan.

Pierre LeBrun has reported that the Canes are "desperately trying to acquire a top-six forward" since they lost out on William Nylander. The Ducks are looking for a left-hand defenseman and could be a fit with the Canes as a trading partner. The Ducks are heavy on centers with Rickard Rakell and Adam Henrique as possibilities that could be available. The experienced Jakub Silfverberg would be another possible target at right wing. These three players are all under the age of 29 and have shown an ability to score. The rest of their top six players are just too old and wouldn't fit into the Canes' young team.

7. Philadelphia Flyers: 25 Points (11-12-3)

The Flyers have named Chuck Fletcher as their new General Manager and Rick Wilson as their new Assistant Coach. Fletcher served as the Minnesota Wild GM from May 2009 to April of 2018. He has also served as the assistant GM of the Penguins and the Panthers. Fletcher was part of the Panthers organization during the expansion years and was also part of the Wild rebuild. It seems weird to hire a GM with rebuild experience to head up a team that is not happy that they are still rebuilding. The Flyers are looking to get over the hump, not to continue the rebuild.

The move to Fletcher does seem kind of strange since the problem with the team doesn't seem to be with the composition of the team. The issue has been on ice performance. If they were ready to part with their GM after a weak start, why would they give Ron Hextall an extra draft and offseason? He was able to continue with his plan to draft and signed a long-term high dollar deal with James van Riemsdyk. Why not give a new GM this time to implement the strategy?

8. New Jersey Devils: 25 Points (10-12-5)

Cory Schneider has not started a game since November 25th. In his last appearance, he came in relief for Keith Kincaid against the Tampa Bay Lightning, and still allowed a goal in just six shots faced. While most of the performance issue likely comes from off season hip surgery, this situation is very similar to the Scott Darling situation. Both goalies had rehab stints in the AHL at the beginning of the season, thus making it difficult to get into a rhythm and adjust to the speed early in the season.

Now the teams are fully relying on the other goaltenders and are only using them if they have no other choice. Schneider is signed through the 2021-2022 season at \$6 million. That's a ton of salary to potentially bury in the AHL, not to mention the risk of losing him for nothing on waivers. The issue for the Devils is that Schneider has a much higher ceiling than Darling, so they cannot be 100% confident that he would be able to clear waivers to get playing time at the AHL level.



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Checkers win wild 7-4 game over Wolf Pack

By Nicholas Niedzielski

Less than a week after dropping their first visit to Hartford, the Checkers avenged themselves with a 7-4 beatdown of the Wolf Pack.

The final minutes of the period proved to be fruitful for the Checkers throughout the contest. After falling behind 3-1 in the opening frame, Nicolas Roy and Martin Necas – both of whom would be on their way to four-point efforts – combined to set up Janne Kuokkanen for a pair of quick-strike tallies in the last 26 seconds of play, evening the score before the first buzzer sounded.

That tie would carry over until the final five minutes of the second, when Nick Schilkey jammed home a loose puck out front to give Charlotte the lead and Trevor Carrick unleashed a cannon from the blue line with 13 seconds left to extend that advantage through 40. Even the third period continued the trend, with Andrew Poturalski and Roy each cashing in empty netters in the waning moments to ice the contest and give Charlotte its second straight road victory.

In the end Charlotte's offense stole the show, with six different skaters logging multi-point games, but the defense locked up after that whirlwind of a first. The Checkers

allowed just 12 total shots over the course of the final two periods and Scott Darling, who finished with 20 saves to notch his third win of the season, turned aside 11 of them.

NOTES

Tonight matched Charlotte's most goals scored in a game and most combined goals between both teams this season ... Nicolas Roy and Martin Necas both set career highs with four points on the night and became the second and third Checkers this season to record a four-point game ... Necas' four assists are the most in a single game by a Checkers player this season ... Tonight was the third time this season that the Checkers have scored three goals in a first period and the third time they've allowed three goals in a first period ... The Checkers are a perfect 12-0-0 when leading after two periods this season ... Kuokkanen is now tied for sixth in the AHL in scoring ... Necas is now tied for ninth among AHL rookies in scoring

UP NEXT

The Checkers wrap up their current road trip with a visit to Springfield tomorrow for a 7:05 p.m. matchup against former assistant coach Geordie Kinnear's Thunderbirds squad.

TODAY'S LINKS

- <https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/article222842595.html>
- <https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/article222784175.html>
- <https://theathletic.com/699120/2018/12/07/mirtle-where-will-the-next-generation-of-nhl-players-come-from-follow-the-stanley-cup/>
- <https://www.wralsportsfan.com/canes-grind-out-4-1-win-over-ducks/18048432/>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/recap-canes-cap-road-trip-with-win-in-anaheim/c-302718028>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/projected-lineup-carolina-hurricanes-anaheim-ducks/c-302707724>
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/carolina-hurricanes-anaheim-ducks-game-recap/c-302710824>
- <https://www.apnews.com/7f1c22bee5ac4b29892884c0c8fd4ed6>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2018/12/8/18131609/recap-carolina-hurricanes-solve-john-gibson-end-losing-streak-in-anaheim-clark-bishop>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2018/12/7/18131342/carolina-hurricanes-at-anaheim-ducks-lineups-and-game-discussion>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2018/12/7/18130513/metropolitan-division-weekly-roundup-12-7-18>
- <http://gocheckers.com/game-recaps/checkers-win-wild-7-4-game-over-wolf-pack>



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SportScan

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

1119852 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes recall goalie Alex Nedeljkovic from Checkers

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

The Carolina Hurricanes on Friday recalled goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

In another personnel move, the Canes placed forward Micheal Ferland on injured reserve retroactive to Nov. 27. Ferland has missed the past three games as he recovers from a concussion.

Nedeljkovic, who leads the AHL in wins this season with 12, was needed after goalie Curtis McElhinney left practice early Thursday. McElhinney's status is not known.

Nedeljkovic, 22, has a 12-4-1 record with a 2.94 goals-against average and .890 save percentage this season.

Goaltender Scott Darling has been reassigned to the Checkers but the Canes called up Nedeljkovic to back up Petr Mrazek in the final game of a three-game road trip.

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1119853 Carolina Hurricanes

The Most Important Hurricanes of All Time

BY CARTER FRICANO DECEMBER 6TH, 2018

Twenty one years ago, the Hartford Whalers franchise packed their bags and shipped out to an unproven hockey market in Raleigh, North Carolina to become the Hurricanes. Since then, the Hurricanes and the city of Raleigh have proven that hockey can not only work in the Old North State, but it can thrive under the right circumstances.

Many NHL greats have donned the Hurricanes' red and black over the years, as well as many players that have been instrumental to creating a culture of success and an identity of hard work and devotion. In discussing who were/are the most important players to the Hurricanes franchise, it is not only the top scorers or most skilled players that will be considered, but also the most influential to team culture and identity.

Arturs Irbe

A personal favorite of mine, Arturs Irbe was a fan favorite everywhere he went during his NHL career. From his quirky goalie mask, to his ability to give his team a chance to win most nights, it's easy to see why Irbe was a popular figure in professional hockey. The Latvian-native joined the Hurricanes in 1998 following their first season in Raleigh, and it was with the 'Canes that Irbe had the best years of his career.

Arturs Irbe Hurricanes

While his stellar performance with the 1994 San Jose Sharks that helped them upset the powerhouse Detroit Red Wings was a notable moment in his career, he stole the show when he came onto the Raleigh scene in 1998. First he took the starting job from a 25-year old Trevor Kidd, and then helped the Hurricanes reach the Stanley Cup Final in 2002, only five years after they moved to Raleigh.

Irbe never saw prolonged NHL success, but he helped put the Hurricanes on the map of relevancy very soon after their move from Hartford, and for that, the city is forever grateful for the man known as "The Wall."

Erik Cole

An original Hurricanes draft pick in 1998, Erik Cole was both tremendously skilled and dedicated to winning. Even though he had a top-end quality shot and incredible skating ability, he was never afraid to get into the corners and battle or stand in front or near the net to bang away and cause havoc for opposing netminders.

Cole spent his best years with the 'Canes, playing nine of his first 10 seasons in the NHL in Raleigh and enjoying the most success there in the process. As a rookie in 2001-02, Cole played all 82 games and helped Carolina reach the Stanley Cup Finals. Four years later, Cole had a great regular season campaign that helped the 'Canes win the Southeast Division, and ultimately capturing the Stanley Cup, despite Cole missing most of the playoffs due to injury.

Erik Cole, Carolina Hurricanes

Erik Cole (BridgetDS/Flickr)

After spending the back nine of his career with three other NHL clubs, Cole signed a one-day contract with the Hurricanes last September to retire as a 'Cane. Cole now serves as a club ambassador.

Ron Francis

Wherever Ron Francis went, winning followed him, as he played playoff hockey in 17 of his 22 NHL seasons and was a part of three Stanley Cup Finals, winning two championships with the Pittsburgh Penguins. Francis was not only a leader on and off the ice, he was one of the most prolific hockey players to ever lace them up, putting up 1,798 points in 1,731 NHL regular season games.

While Francis didn't join the Hurricanes until he was 35-years old, he left an indelible mark on the franchise. His veteran wisdom and high level of skill were instrumental in helping the Hurricanes franchise prove their worth in North Carolina. He helped the team reach the postseason in three of his first four seasons with them, during which they reached the Finals in 2002. Even in his relatively short time with the 'Canes as a player, Francis was still essential for developing a culture of winning in Raleigh.

Ron Francis, Hurricanes GM

Upon retirement, Francis held a role with the Raleigh Youth Hockey Organization in their efforts to help develop young hockey players in the area and, more recently, he served as associate coach of the 'Canes, president of hockey operations, and as general manager. You can say what you want about the quality of his tenure as a front office executive, but Ron Francis gave his heart, soul, and body to the Hurricanes organization, and that will go down in history.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Eric Staal

As the Hurricanes' highest-ever draft pick before Andrei Svechnikov, Eric Staal had massive expectations on him before he ever even played an NHL game — and he lived up to them.

As a large man with incredible ability, Staal's ceiling of potential was seemingly limitless upon entering the NHL. He had an average rookie campaign, but following an AHL stint during the 2004-05 lockout, Staal returned as a man possessed. He led the 'Canes in scoring in 2005-06 with 100 points, following that up with 28 points in 25 playoff games en route to the Hurricanes' first Stanley Cup in franchise history.

Staal not only delivered on the playoff stage during the Cup run, he scored one of the most iconic goals in Hurricanes' history when he scored on Martin Brodeur with 32 seconds left in Game 7 of the 2009 Eastern Conference Quarterfinals, giving the Hurricanes a 4-3 lead and, ultimately, sinking the New Jersey Devils en route to an improbable run to the Eastern Conference Final. Staal was not only a leader, captaining the team for more than six years, but he was a clutch performer and the face of the franchise until his departure in 2016.

Cam Ward

An obvious choice here, Cam Ward will live on as the greatest goalie in franchise history for a long time.

A Hurricanes first round draft pick in 2002, Ward sought to solidify the team's goaltending situation when he broke into the league in 2005, but that was not initially apparent. Ward struggled in a backup role behind Martin Gerber, but issues were largely masked by a high-powered 'Canes offense.

Cam Ward

Hurricanes goaltender Cam Ward looks on. (Hammersmith Studios- Greg Thompson)

During the playoffs, though, when they fell into a 0-2 hole against the Montreal Canadiens in the opening series, head coach Peter Laviolette turned to Ward, and the rest is history. Carolina captured the Stanley Cup, and Cam Ward earned the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP, quelling any doubts that he was the right man for the job.

Ward was the Hurricanes' goaltender for more than a decade, and while the team only made the playoffs one other time during that stretch, Ward often gave his team a chance to win no matter the circumstances. He was an all star in 2011 when the All Star Game made its way to Raleigh and he played a total of 668 NHL games in a Hurricanes sweater. This summer, upon his departure via free agency, he officially passes the torch to the next generation of 'Canes goaltenders.

Rod Brind'Amour

As if there was any doubt.

Brind'Amour wasn't a Hurricanes draft pick, but he made the Hurricanes organization his tribe. Acquired from the Philadelphia Flyers in 2000, Brind'Amour quickly became a fan favorite and franchise legend with his stellar on-ice performance, as well as his unparalleled leadership. This was a man who could not only dominate the scoresheet, but could also rally his troops and dive headfirst into battle ahead of those he led.

Every championship team needs a Rod Brind'Amour. He was a player that is the perfect center of a franchise and the perfect captain to lead a great team. Brind'Amour was vital to the Hurricanes' appearances in the Stanley Cup Finals, their championship in 2006, and he helped usher in the new era of Hurricanes hockey, playing until age 39. He even recovered from an ACL tear as a 37 year-old in 2008, and came back to play 80 games the following season. He was simply as tough as nails.

Only about a year after his retirement, Brind'Amour was brought on as an assistant coach for Carolina, where he remained at that position until he took the head coach position in May of 2018. Even after he finished his playing years, Brind'Amour continued to be involved in the development

and identity of the Hurricanes organization, and he looks to make an even bigger impact as head coach in the upcoming 2018-19 season. Brind'Amour will bring that same work ethic and drive into the locker room on a nightly basis this season, and hopefully for 'Canes fans it will pay dividends on the ice.

The Hockey Writers LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119958 Toronto Maple Leafs

Toronto Maple Leafs get lucky when it comes to bumps in the road

DAVID SHOALTS

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 7, 2018

UPDATED DECEMBER 7, 2018

Collisions were the big topic around the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday, both on and off the ice.

The one off the ice involved Kasperii Kapanen and William Nylander, who were in a car together and involved in a minor accident as they left the MasterCard Centre in the west end of Toronto after Friday's practice. Neither player was injured, according to a team official, and both will play in Saturday's game in Boston against the Bruins. It was not known which player was driving.

The other collision came in the second period of Thursday night's 5-4 overtime loss to the Detroit Red Wings and involved the Leafs' big star, Auston Matthews. Wings defenceman Niklas Kronwall sent Matthews into the boards and it looked as though his shoulder took most of the impact. But once again the Leafs were fortunate and Matthews, who recently missed 14 games with an injury to his other shoulder, was not injured.

Presumably, the other driver in the Nylander-Kapanen fender-bender either exchanged information with the Leaf wingers or gave their side of the bump to the police and went on their way. In Kronwall's case though, that was not the end of it, according to at least some of the Toronto media.

TSN radio in particular was baying on Friday morning. A couple of hosts of one show spent a good deal of time wondering why none of Matthews's teammates rendered Kronwall senseless for the effrontery of throwing a bodycheck in an NHL game. What's next? Screening goaltenders?

It wasn't just Kronwall's check, of course, which was not a dirty one. It was from the side, was more of a glancing blow and just happened near the boards, where Matthews can take part of the blame for leaving himself in a vulnerable position. No, it was who Kronwall hit.

For decades, frontier justice in the NHL decreed that anyone who levelled a star player such as Matthews with a dirty hit could expect a return shot in similar fashion. The job of revenge went to someone on the offended party's team who was not exactly a fancy skater, of which there were plenty in those days.

Then, 25 years ago or so, the rough justice was expanded to include avenging any hard check on a star player. Stars who staggered back to the bench after a bone-rattling, but clean, hit were no longer greeted with chuckles and admonishments to "keep your head up." Now, a one-man lynch mob would go over the boards looking for the perp and any team that failed to do this heard many loud questions about its "character."

This is where Friday's media howls for revenge came from. There were wistful musings about how nice it would be to have someone such as Edmonton Oilers linebacker Milan Lucic on the Leafs roster to roll over



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Kronwall. Left unasked was exactly how the ponderous Lucic would keep up with the young and speedy Leafs on every other shift in the game.

But those days are almost gone, too. Thanks to the increasing emphasis on youth, speed and skill, it takes an egregious blind-side hit to spark any retaliation.

Kronwall's hit did not measure up in that regard. This from no less an authority than Matthews himself, who said the only damage he suffered was having the wind knocked out of him.

"I haven't seen a replay of it, really," Matthews said. "I don't know. Stuff like that is going to happen when you're battling. Sometimes you think a play's dirty and maybe it's not or maybe a play doesn't seem so dirty, you watch it on replay and it is. I haven't seen it."

Given the culture change both in the NHL and with the Leafs, there is also the question of just who on the current roster would deliver any retribution. Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren, the twin torpedoes from the Brian Burke-Dave Nonis era, are long gone. Matt Martin and Leo Komarov, hard-nosed checkers rather than fighters, but the last remnants of tough guys on the team, were shipped out last summer.

Now, as Leafs head coach Mike Babcock pointed out by bringing up the boarding penalty Kronwall received, there is a different kind of toughness on the Leafs.

"I just think you look at our personnel and you look at what we've got. We are what we are," Babcock said. "Our toughness is our power play. Take all the penalties you want."

Well, as Matthews ruefully observed, sometimes that doesn't work despite the high-octane Leafs unit.

"We got a power play from it and our power play wasn't any good last night anyway," he said.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119959 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs' William Nylander and Kasperii Kapanen involved in a minor car accident

THE CANADIAN PRESS

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 7, 2018

UPDATED DECEMBER 7, 2018

Toronto Maple Leafs players William Nylander and Kasperii Kapanen were involved in a minor car accident Friday afternoon.

A team official confirmed in an e-mail to The Canadian Press that the collision occurred near the Leafs' practice facility in the city's west end.

It's unclear which player was behind the wheel at the time of the incident.

The 22-year-old wingers were both on the ice for the team's 12 p.m. practice at MasterCard Centre. Toronto was scheduled to fly to Boston later in the day ahead of Saturday's game against the Bruins.

Nylander returned to the Leafs following a prolonged contract impasse that ended last weekend with the restricted free agent signing a six-year, US\$45-million deal.

The Swede had just taken part in his first full practice of the season with Toronto after making his debut in the Leafs' 5-4 overtime loss to the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday night.

Kapanen already has a career-high 11 goals and 10 assists in 29 games this season. Nylander was held off the scoresheet against Detroit, but is coming off consecutive 61-point campaigns.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119960 Toronto Maple Leafs

Saturday NHL preview: Toronto Maple Leafs at Boston Bruins | The Star

By Kevin McGran

Boston's David Pastrnak has outdone good buddy William Nylander of the Leafs in terms of production, including head to head. Pastrnak has 10 goals and six assists in 13 career games against Toronto, while Nylander has four goals and three assists in nine meetings with Pastrnak's Bruins. Nylander, though, has the richer contract of the 22-year-olds — \$6.96 million per year to Pastrnak's \$6.66 million (all dollars U.S.).

NEED TO KNOW

With Patrice Bergeron still sidelined by a rib injury, Colby Cave is expected to centre the top line with Pastrnak and Brad Marchand. The 23-year-old Cave went undrafted out of the Swift Current Broncos and spent most of the last three-plus seasons in the minors ... The Bruins' power play ranked fourth through Thursday's games, but has struggled of late and has been the focus in practice. Their penalty killing, though, ranked 24th ... Without Bergeron, the Bruins have been winning less than half of their faceoffs ... At 2.57 goals per game, Boston's offence ranked in the bottom five.

UP NEXT

Tuesday at Carolina, 7 p.m.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119961 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs redefining toughness in modern NHL | The Star

By Dave Feschuk

A certain kind of hockey traditionalist might suggest the Maple Leafs are woefully short of muscle. Exhibit A came Thursday night. When Detroit defenceman Nik Kronwall tossed Auston Matthews into the boards, inducing an awkward fall that appeared to see Matthews land on or around his recently injured shoulder. Kronwall was penalized for boarding and Matthews, though winded, was otherwise unhurt.

And there was no further accounting for the incident. In other words, Kronwall threatened the well-being of Toronto's best player with an undeniably dirty play and nobody in a blue and white sweater so much as feigned retaliation.

Leafs coach Mike Babcock, asked about this after Friday's practice in Etobicoke, didn't seem particularly disturbed by the lack of vengeance.

"You look at our personnel, you look at what we've got — we are what we are," Babcock said.

What they are is a skill-first team that, in general manager Kyle Dubas's rookie season, has been stripped of nearly all vestigial nods to hockey's



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vigilante heritage. Even last season the Leafs employed a small cadre of players whose arsenal included physical intimidation, among them Matt Martin, Leo Komarov and Roman Polak, all of whom have since departed. It wasn't long ago that Babcock lauded the likes of Martin for "keeping the flies off" Toronto's young core.

But by the end of last season, Martin couldn't find a place in the lineup. And this season the Maple Leafs don't have anything resembling such a policeman, let alone a glorified mall cop.

So Saturday's game in Boston will be both a contest between division rivals and a contrast in on-ice demeanours. The Leafs are the least-penalized team in the league. The Bruins are the second-most penalized. The player who led the Bruins in scoring the previous two seasons, Brad Marchand, leads the league in penalty minutes with 72. The top penalty getters on the Leafs, Nazem Kadri and Zach Hyman, have accrued a modest 16 penalty minutes apiece — tied for 136th in the NHL.

The Leafs have one fighting major this season, credited to the since-departed Josh Leivo, the second-fewest behind Arizona, which had yet to be penalized for fighting. Boston's eight fighting majors are the second-most behind the New York Rangers, who've been tagged with nine.

"Our toughness is our power play," Babcock said.

Toronto's power play is undeniably formidable, running at 33-per-cent efficiency with Auston Matthews in the lineup and 27 per cent overall, sixth-best. With that in mind, the coach offered a message to opponents who'd presume to push the Leafs around: "Take all the penalties you want."

That's not to say Babcock hasn't repeatedly urged his team to play a "heavier" style on offence, relying less on the rush and more on the cycle.

"I would like our team to be physical on offence. What that means to me is, when you get the puck, you hang on to it. You get your ass out. You spend time heavy in the offensive zone," said the coach. "To me, that's physical for our group."

Not that the Leafs are wholly averse to body contact. On Friday, forwards William Nylander and Kasperii Kapanen were involved in what was described as a minor car accident near the team's practice facility. Neither was injured. Still, the fender bender ensured that Nylander's first practice day of the season went about as well as his first game. The 22-year-old got about 12 minutes of ice time in Thursday's 5-4 overtime loss to the Red Wings, his first NHL action since signing a six-year contract on Saturday. Though he began that game on a line with Matthews and Patrick Marleau, Friday saw Nylander practising alongside Marleau and centreman Kadri.

"Would I do it any different if I had the chance to do it today? No, I'd do it exactly the same way," Babcock said, speaking of Nylander's prompt return to game action. "Did I expect him to be any different than he was? Not really. Do I think this is going to take some time? For sure. But I don't think Willie's too wound up about it. I'm not too wound up about it.

"There's eight exhibition games for a reason, and training camp for a reason. Then the league starts slow, whoops, and goes faster and faster. It's hard to arrive late."

The Bruins are expected to arrive at TD Garden on Saturday without the services of some key pieces. Top-line centreman Patrice Bergeron remains out with a rib injury. Workhorse defenceman Zdeno Chara is out with a left knee injury. Perhaps it's no surprise the Bruins, who've lost four of their past five games, went into Friday clinging to the final wild-card playoff spot in the East. The Leafs, of course, weren't making the mistake of underestimating the team that ousted them from the post-season's first round in seven games last spring.

"They've always played us tough every time we've played 'em," Babcock said of the Bruins.

As much as the Leafs wear it as a point of pride not to take penalties — "The last thing you want to do is be revengeful," said Kadri, explaining the lack of response to the Kronwall hit — they've also had a tough time

drawing them. They're dead last in power-play opportunities. Is there an anti-Toronto conspiracy among NHL referees?

"I'd like to say there is," said Morgan Rielly, the Leafs' alternate captain, "but I can't do that to (the officials)."

It was only back in 2015-16 that Kadri led the league by drawing 64 penalties in 76 games. But this season he's drawn a modest seven penalties in 29 games, tied for the team lead with Mitch Marner and John Tavares. Asked a while back what's changed in Kadri's approach, Rielly smiled.

"Less diving," Rielly said.

It was suggested Kadri needs to dig out the old Speedo and return to his roots.

"Maybe. I'll talk to Naz about being a rat again," he said.

But Kadri, laughing at the suggestion, said the Leafs have made a point of avoiding the attention-drawing antics once considered game-night staples. The Leafs don't hit much. They rarely fight. They've been whistled for a league-low three roughing minors, a little more than a week's work for the Bruins, who lead the NHL with 22. A certain kind of traditionalist would suggest Toronto's gentility could prove a liability come the playoffs. Then again, the NHL's least-penalized team came into Friday as its second-best team as measured by points percentage.

As Kadri said Friday, in today's NHL being bereft of tough guys doesn't mean you're not tough.

"We've shown in the past that regardless of how teams want to play, we're not going to be pushed around," Kadri said. "We don't have the most physical guys in terms of running you through the end boards. But if we get hit, we're going to get back up. It's that relentless mentality, to mentally and physically not be fazed, and just carry on."

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119962 Toronto Maple Leafs

Honesty about mental health key to Leafs coach Mike Babcock's playbook | The Star

By Dave Feschuk

Mike Babcock, the Maple Leafs coach, wanted to talk about a problem in his family.

Not a problem in what he calls his hockey family. Things are going awfully well around Toronto's NHL team this season. And not a problem in his immediate family, either; this wasn't about his wife and three adult children. Babcock's point of contention, brought up unprompted in an exclusive interview with the Star this past week, was aimed at members of his extended family, who could probably stand in as members of almost anyone's. To Babcock's eye, they're seeing loved ones struggle with mental health issues and refusing to confront the issue.

Last month, teams in the Greater Toronto Hockey League raised funds by selling Movember Babsocks, a special-edition printing of the popular hosiery that bears the coach's jaw-prominent caricature.

Last month, teams in the Greater Toronto Hockey League raised funds by selling Movember Babsocks, a special-edition printing of the popular hosiery that bears the coach's jaw-prominent caricature. (Handout)

In an exclusive interview, Leafs coach Mike Babcock opens up about the impact of mental health issues and ways to make things better: "The conversation, in my opinion, is still the greatest thing we can be doing."



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"I don't know if I'm allowed to, but I'm going to talk about it anyway: The people in my family whose kids are struggling (with mental health challenges) ... The parents won't admit to it," Babcock said. "They won't admit to it. What they want to do is to make sure they're showing everybody that everything's perfect — you've got a perfect house, a perfect car, go to school. What a crock."

Babcock paused a moment, as if incredulous, and continued.

"If you won't admit it, how are you going to help your child?" he said. "That, to me, is the biggest thing I've seen over the past couple of years."

Talking about mental health issues isn't always easy for some of us. It's still seen, in unenlightened eyes, as a shameful weakness to be hidden, not a treatable illness better brought into the light. And Babcock wanted to make the point that he knows this to be true first-hand. Even though he's the famed coach of hockey's richest franchise — even though he's been a high-profile advocate for mental health initiatives in the few years since he saw two family friends lost to the ravages of the disease in one grim summer — his extended circle is not immune to the unhelpful cone of silence. Even among his own relatives, there are those who still choose blind eyes and zipped lips over openness.

Still, statistics say one in five Canadians will suffer from mental illness, which means everybody knows somebody affected, which is why continuing the public discourse remains vital. And so Babcock keeps talking.

"The conversation, in my opinion, is still the greatest thing we can be doing," Babcock said.

The societal fixation with keeping up appearances in the age of social media is a sore point with the coach. If he's risen to become the game's highest-paid coach while styling himself as an obsessively competitive perfectionist, off the clock he sees the obsession with curated personal utopias as an unhealthy pursuit.

"That's what today's world is all about. Instagram — I'm not on it, but I just see from my kids. The projection out there is that everything's perfect. What a crock," Babcock said. "What mental-health talk, to me, is about is ... life's messy, period. And there's tough times for everybody. And just because I can put a suit on at night and it looks like everything's going good, that doesn't mean it's going good necessarily. And the same for our athletes."

Still, anyone who's watched Babcock work knows he's a demanding boss who's been known to test the limits of his players' self-confidence and expects his athletes, as he says, "to bring it every night." I asked him how he reconciles what he knows about mental health with his penchant for fostering cutthroat internal competition that keeps players on edge.

"I disagree with that, 100 per cent. We're not trying to put anyone on edge. We're trying to be demanding and supportive," Babcock said. "We believe that people play better when they know you care about them,

when they know you've got their back, when they know the parameters. But we expect you to do it right."

Babcock insists his public persona as the uncompromising, hard-driving coach doesn't jibe with a private reality that's geared toward the well-being of every single player.

"The image that's out there of who I am and the amount of time we spend dealing with each individual and being concerned about them is totally different," Babcock said. "What's wrong with doing it right? I think somewhere along the way, we think that being demanding is harsh. No, it isn't. It's real. Why do you want slippage in your life? Just do it right. I don't think you're holding anyone to a standard they don't want. These athletes want to be the best they can be, so we're demanding on them. That doesn't mean we're not loving and caring and appreciative and supportive."

Babcock was speaking in support of the Movember Foundation, which raises funds for various causes including mental health. Last month, teams in the Greater Toronto Hockey League sold Movember Babsocks, a special-edition printing of the popular hosiery that bears the coach's jaw-prominent caricature. Five dollars from each \$20 pair went to Movember's young men in sports program, another \$5 went to the minor-hockey team. The team that sold the most socks wins a practice at the Maple Leafs' Etobicoke training facility to be presided over by Babcock and his staff. Perhaps the lucky winners bend the coach's ear on what he sees as his high-flying team's lingering weaknesses.

"We have to get heavier," Babcock said. "That doesn't mean acquiring more players. That means learn to play heavier. We need to be more battle proven, and we've got to play better defensively. That doesn't mean eliminate our offence. That means be better defensively — give up less."

Babcock also cited the career arcs of historically great NHL captains Alex Ovechkin and Steve Yzerman, who both had to wait until age 32 to first hoist the Stanley Cup. He said his 20-something stars might yet endure more "playoff miseries."

"Rome wasn't built in a day. We'd like instant gratification. That's the world we live in. That's not reality," he said. "Often you need battle scars, disappointments. That's the springboard for opportunity in life. No different than mental health. Everybody has momentary setbacks. Can you continue to push through it?"

So what does Babcock do when he sees a member of his extended family suffering a setback while those around them apparently feign obliviousness? Life's messy. Babcock said that no matter how much he talks, "it doesn't necessarily mean anyone's going to listen." The thought has occurred to him that maybe he's crossed a line, that maybe it's none of his business. He's not sure there's an easy answer. But silence certainly doesn't seem like one.

"The biggest thing is, you've got to be willing to have the conversation," Babcock said. "To me, you've got to be willing to speak your mind a little bit. Once you know — and you know through your personal skills — that you're crossing the line, then you've got to back off. In saying all that, I think it's still important to try to help. I really believe that. We all need help in our life ... I just think that as we continue to have this talk."

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119963 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs' Nylander and Kapanen unhurt in minor car accident | The Star

By Kevin McGran



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2018

Toronto Maple Leafs forwards William Nylander and Kasper Kapanen were involved in a minor car accident near the club's training facility in Etobicoke on Friday.

"Confirming that William and Kasper were involved in a minor collision near our practice facility this afternoon. There were no injuries," the team's director of media relations, Steve Keogh, said in an email.

It's unclear which player was behind the wheel at the time of the incident.

The 22-year-old wingers were both on the ice for the team's afternoon practice at the MasterCard Centre on Kipling Ave. before departing for Boston for a game Saturday night against the Bruins.

Nylander returned to the Leafs following a prolonged contract impasse that ended last weekend with the restricted free agent signing a six-year, \$45-million US deal.

The Swede had just taken part in his first full practice of the season with Toronto after making his debut in the Leafs' 5-4 overtime loss to the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday night.

Kapanen already has a career-high 11 goals and 10 assists in 29 games this season. Nylander was held off the scoresheet against Detroit, but is coming off consecutive 61-point campaigns.

— with files from The Canadian Press

Kevin McGran is a sports reporter based in Toronto. Follow him on Twitter: @kevin_mcgran

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119964 Toronto Maple Leafs

McAvoy's return energizes Bruins with Maple Leafs coming to town | The Star

By Kevin McGran

BOSTON—The Boston Bruins, who have managed to stick around the playoff race despite a rash of injuries, are starting to get healthy again.

Defenceman Charlie McAvoy made a surprise return to the lineup on Thursday against the Lightning, having recovered from a concussion that had kept him out since Oct. 18.

"I thought Charlie was good," head coach Bruce Cassidy told reporters in Tampa. "I thought he was rusty handling the puck at times and I fully expect that, perfectly normal.

"I was just happy to see that he had conviction in his game, wanted to be a difference-maker. How's he going to react after being out? There's going to be obvious rust, but how is his assertiveness? And I thought it was very good."

McAvoy — a dynamic blue-liner at age 20 with 38 points in 71 career games — was credited with three giveaways, finished minus-1 and took a penalty after he turned the puck over late in the first period, but seemed happy about his first game back.

"I thought in the second and third I kind of let my brain and my skills work, let it all take over, and I was able to play what I thought was good hockey," McAvoy told the Boston Herald. "And I'll continue to grow on that, but it was just a win in itself to be back out there with these guys."

The Leafs and Bruins, who cancelled Friday's practice, have split the first two games of their season series. The Bruins have had the Leafs' number in the playoffs, though — this past spring and in 2013.

"Last time we lost there," Leafs winger Andreas Johnsson said before the trip to Boston. "We have to play a tight game and try to get a win."

While the Leafs are on a 5-0-1 run, the Bruins have lost four of their last five. Their vaunted power play has struggled with just three goals in its last 15 chances. So, getting McAvoy back might mean more to Boston than William Nylander's return does to the Leafs.

"Charlie back in the lineup helps (the power play)," said Cassidy. "Moving it along the blue line a little more, it opens up some seams. You want to attack the net, but if they're jamming it up you've got to go to the open player, and that's usually the defenceman."

Despite their slump, the Bruins have managed to tread water and hang around the Atlantic Division playoff race. Expected to be among the top three with Toronto and Tampa, injuries have taken a toll. The Bruins have lost 105 man games to injury and still have four players on long-term injured reserve, including captain Zdeno Chara and centre Patrice Bergeron. They've made frequent use of their farm team and the waiver wire.

The Leafs, by comparison, have lost just 17 man games and boast a roster so healthy that they traded Josh Leivo to Vancouver for a minor leaguer to make room for Nylander.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119965 Toronto Maple Leafs

Nylander now in catch-up mode for Leafs, and Matthews can relate

Terry Koshan

Auston Matthews doesn't have to imagine what kind of transition William Nylander is experiencing right now.

Matthews, recently back in the Maple Leafs lineup from a shoulder injury that caused him to miss 14 games, remains in a similar state of adjustment.

Matthews has eight points (five goals and three assists) in four games "It's still a process," Matthews said. "I feel like it really takes about a month to almost get back, and game by game you want to feel more like yourself.

"These last couple of games, the first period has been really tough for me to get myself going. In the second and third I started feeling much better, but I want to feel good the whole game."

Where Matthews differs from Nylander, of course, is that he is not being asked to hit the ground running. Matthews was excellent for the Leafs before he was hurt on Oct. 27, scoring 10 goals in 11 games.

Nylander has played in one game and on Friday practised with his Leafs teammates for the first time after missing the first two months because of his contract dispute.

"I don't know how I would feel if I was just literally jumping into a game from summer skates for the last couple of months," Matthews said. "I think timing is up there as one of the most important (facets) in trying to get back.

"Willie is a guy who can slow things down and when you have not played a hockey game and jump into Game 29 (as Nylander did against Detroit on Thursday), it's pretty tough.

"I don't think you can expect the guy from six, seven months since his last game to jump in and be the guy that he is in Game 40. Nobody in here is worried about him. I'm sure the next couple of weeks he will work



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extremely hard to getting back to feeling how he does (normally) and go from there.”

Against the Red Wings, Nylander played a total of 12 minutes 29 seconds, with no shifts in the final 11 minutes of regulation or in overtime.

“It’s just nice to get the first (game done), otherwise it could have been like this coming into Boston, so now I have a game and a practice in me, and it feels a little better,” Nylander said. “(It’s) probably more the timing. I have been skating a lot back home, so I think it’s just the timing of things and battles around the boards and stuff, which is a little different.

“It’s going to take a couple of games until you get there.”

As elite as Matthews and Nylander are, coach Mike Babcock doesn’t expect anything less than an arduous re-acclimation.

“There are eight exhibition games for a reason and training camp for a reason,” Babcock said, “and then the league starts slow and goes faster and faster and it’s hard to arrive late.

“They are really good players so they are going to be able to do things in the meantime. For them to feel as good as they want to feel and know they have rhythm and it’s going their best, it’s going to take them some time.”

LESS TROUBLE BRUIN?

On Saturday night, the Boston Bruins will be without two crucial players, centre Patrice Bergeron and defenceman Zdeno Chara, as both are injured.

Bergeron and Chara have helped make life hell for the Leafs in the past.

“Those guys are hard to replace, and they are irreplaceable, but they have good team dynamics and they usually follow a structure pretty well and that’s what has brought them a lot of success in the past,” Nazem Kadri said. “They have some depth players. They are going to be ready to play.”

The Leafs have not yet had to face Boston defenceman Charlie McAvoy, who was injured and out of the lineup when the teams met twice earlier this season. McAvoy recently returned after recovering from a concussion.

“Their defence is better than last time we played them,” Babcock said. “They have always played us tough. They got good players, we understand that, it’s going to be a good game.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119966 Toronto Maple Leafs

Bruins-Maple Leafs Game Day

Lance Hornby

7 P.M. TD GARDEN

TV: HNIC, RADIO: Sportsnet

THE BIG MATCHUP

RW David Pastrnak vs. RW William Nylander

Similar positionally and almost contractually, the two off-ice friends will be compared for many years to come after Nylander signed his six-year deal. The latter was over-taxed in Thursday’s return, but Pastrnak and the Bruins will give him just as rough a ride as in last year’s playoffs, where David delivered and Nylander was nullified.

KEYS TO THE GAME

1. BOSTON BEAN BETTER

It would be a good night for Bruin scorers to start clicking, even though they’ve been missing key players such as Patrice Bergeron. The 3-2 loss in Tampa Bay on Thursday represented the ninth time in the past 10 they’ve scored two or fewer goals and much of that has come at the expense of vital matches against teams currently in playoff position.

2. GIVE FREDDY A BREAK

Toronto’s 4-2 win over Boston almost two weeks ago, was the start of four straight games facing 40 or more shots for Toronto’s No. 1 goalie. He had a rest on Thursday to prepare for an opponent whose forwards are always active around his porch. Only two other goalies in franchise history, Allan Bester and Felix Potvin, have been subjected to so many consecutive 40-shot games.

3. RASK AT HAND

After Jaroslav Halak split the first two games of the season series, this would be a good time for Tuukka Rask to reclaim his mastery of the Leafs. With a record of 16-7-2, a .925 save percentage and two playoff series wins over his draft team, any thought of getting Boston out of their heads by the Leafs starts with exorcising Rask.

4. MARNER MANIA

With a six-game assist streak, including three in the last meeting against the Bs, the slippery winger shows why the Leafs aren’t messing with his line now that Nylander’s back. Centre John Tavares is a lethal trigger man, too.

5. DOT ... DOT ... DOT

The absence of Bergeron truly showed in the last game when Toronto won 33 of 58 faceoffs, 20 of those by Tavares and Par Lindholm. Six Leafs won at least two draws for a 57% overall advantage that night.

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1119967 Toronto Maple Leafs

Matthews fine after taking hit from Kronwall, coach Babcock would like Maple Leafs to be ‘physical on offence’

Terry Koshan

Auston Matthews’ National Hockey League career didn’t flash before his eyes on Thursday night.

In fact, there wasn’t even a brief moment of panic for the Maple Leafs superstar at Scotiabank Arena after he was crushed into the corner boards by Detroit Red Wings defenceman Niklas Kronwall.

“I was fine,” Matthews said on Friday after the Leafs practised. “I just kind of lost my wind for a second. But, no, I didn’t really feel anything there. Just one of those things.”

Matthews was back on the ice at the MasterCard Centre, centring a line with Andreas Johnsson and Kasperii Kapanen as the Leafs prepared to face the Boston Bruins on Saturday night, Toronto’s first of five consecutive road games.

Patrick Marleau was given the day to rest, and coach Mike Babcock said the 39-year-old would be in the lineup against Boston.



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Considering Matthews' history of shoulder injuries, Leafs Nation rightfully held its collective breath until Matthews, wincing in pain, got up. The 21-year-old centre didn't miss a shift, as it turned out.

Kronwall received a boarding minor on the play, but the Leafs didn't score with the man advantage.

Detroit won the game 5-4 in overtime after the Leafs erased a 4-1 Wings lead in the third period.

There has been hand-wringing among some observers that the Leafs didn't seek retribution on Kronwall.

Morgan Rielly made an effort to get at the Wing but was held up by Gustav Nyquist. Other Leafs on the ice at the time included Kasperii Kapanen, Andreas Johansson and Ron Hainsey.

Does coach Mike Babcock expect a reaction from other Leafs when a player of Matthews' ilk takes such a hit?

"I just think you look at our personnel and you look (at) what we got," Babcock said. "We are what we are. Our toughness is our power play. Take all the penalties you want."

Difficult to argue with the coach on that point. The Leafs' power play, though 0-for-4 against Detroit, is clipping along at 26.7%, good for sixth-best in the NHL prior to games on Friday.

Matthews said he had not seen a replay of the check.

"Stuff like that is going to happen," Matthews said. "You're battling, sometimes you think a play is dirty and maybe it's not, or maybe a play doesn't seem so dirty and you watch it on replay and it is. I have not seen it, but we got a power play from it."

Quite frankly, those who think Babcock and general manager Kyle Dubas should be teaming up to find a policeman-type player for the Leafs haven't been paying attention. The emphasis in Toronto is on quick, talented forwards who have the ability to score at a moment's notice.

The Leafs had a player who could administer justice if needed, and that was winger Matt Martin, who last season played in three games after Jan. 22 before he was traded to the New York Islanders in July for minor-league goalie Eamon McAdam.

Babcock would like his team to be more physical, a factor he touched on after the Leafs won in Minnesota last Saturday. There's a big difference between being physical and acquiring a player whose job is to mete out punishment, something that would not keep a man employed on a full-time basis in today's NHL.

During training camp, Babcock said his team would have to be physical "by committee" with the off-season departures of players such as Martin, Leo Komarov and Roman Polak.

"I think we're getting better and better in that area," Babcock said when asked about it on Friday. "I would like our team to be physical on offence. What that means to me, is when you get the puck, you hang on to it."

"You get your ass out, you protect the thing, you spend time heavy in the offensive zone. That's physical for our group. I would like to finish checks when the check is there. When the guy is twice as big as you, I like you to cut off his arms."

As for Kronwall, the Leafs and the Wings have two more meetings in 2018-19: On Dec. 23 in Toronto and on Feb. 1 in Detroit.

The Leafs weren't thrilled with the hit on Matthews, but were not vowing bloody revenge either.

"(Kronwall) is a good honest player and at the same time, I have seen him line up a few guys," Nazem Kadri said. "He likes to play physical and that's just a play that is tough to call, a player five, six feet from the boards."

"Even if you give him a little tap on the back, it's still a dangerous play, no matter how hard you hit him, just because of the circumstances. Thankfully, (Matthews) is OK and you just move on."

'IT'S OUR TURN TO PUSH BACK'

The Maple Leafs want to take some stuffing out of the Boston Bruins before the holiday season.

Rivalries in pro sports are best when both teams are elite, or when they're even, and the Leafs know they have some catching up to do against Boston.

"They have come out on top in recent years, so it's our turn to push back," Nazem Kadri said on Friday. "That being said, it's not going to be easy."

"It's two historic franchises with great players and great success in the past, so I think there is always going to be (a rivalry) there."

The Leafs lost on Nov. 10 in Boston, falling 5-1 after dominating the first period. On Nov. 26 in Toronto, the Leafs lost 4-2.

The final regular-season meeting between the clubs this season comes on Jan. 12 in Toronto.

Of course, there could be another collision in the playoffs next spring. The Leafs and Bruins have met 15 times in the post-season, with Toronto winning eight of those series.

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1119968 Toronto Maple Leafs

The Ultimate Leafs Fan goes Wild in Minnesota

Mike Wilson

ST. PAUL, Minn. — I felt like that infamous football player (no name required) as I was running through Minneapolis airport towards the Lyft pickup after my Air Canada flight arrived an hour and a half later than scheduled.

I was supposed to be at the Tria Rink in downtown St. Paul, attending the Wild practice, followed by a chat with its head coach, ex-Leaf Bruce Boudreau.

Fellow SIHR member (Society for International Hockey Research) Roger Godin, who is the Wild's team curator, had arranged a busy schedule for my two days in the Twin Cities, escorting me to the small media room next to the rink just as practice ended. While Boudreau was chatting with Hockey Night in Canada's Jim Hughson, it gave me a chance to put my travel bags down and catch my breath.

Boudreau, a Blue and White lifer and who began in minor hockey with the Marlboros, starred with the Markham Waxers junior Bs, then won two Memorial Cups with the Marlies before being drafted by Toronto in 1975.

"The Leafs are it, man; what every young player strives to become," he said. "Regardless of how many opportunities to go somewhere else came along, for me, no matter how many times I was up and down, I never wanted to leave."

During Boudreau's frequent shuffling to and from the farm, he wore six different sweater numbers.

"Once you become a Leafs fan, you are one forever," he said. "Loved or hated by everyone else, you remain a Leafs fan. I religiously watch every game they play, so I guess I have a good scouting report."



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Boudreau could've also dropped by next door to watch the Leafs play outdoors in the Gardiner Classic.

Organized by Jake's father, John, last year during the Leafs' seasonal visit to the Gardiner family's home state, it's a three-on-three mini-tournament on a small civic rink across from the Xcel Energy Center. From two blocks away, I detected the unmistakable sound of pucks hitting the boards; skates cutting into the ice and groans of a good or bad play.

A smattering of curious onlookers gathered to experience this group of highly skilled professionals acting like kids on a wintry play day. When the 'championship' game was done, the Leafs switched skates for running shoes, stopped for a hot dog at the snack bar and boarded the team bus in full gear. Though this was Minnesota, it couldn't have been a more Canadian scene.

I had dinner that evening at Tom Reid's bar a few blocks from Xcel, a well-known hangout for hockey people. Tom once played for the Minnesota North Stars during an 11-year NHL career and continues as the Wild's radio colour commentator.

"Growing up, my dad was a huge Leafs fan, but my favourite was Jean Beliveau," said Reid. "So we used to argue constantly who was the better team and who'd win the Cup. It was great.

"I never saw a game at the Gardens until I was 19, Bruins and Leafs. When I played there, walking around the halls, looking at the history, it was just great to be a part of."

Xcel's hallways pay tribute to the 'State of Hockey' and its past. Godin proudly showed me the different levels — grassroots, high school, college, Olympic and pro. Herb Brooks is immortalized with a statue in the short walk between Xcel and the Wild head office, once home to a private men's club that also has a restaurant named after the famed coach.

The Minnesota area is rich in covered rinks, many of them dating back to the 1930s and still in use. The White Bear Hippodrome was built in 1926 as part of the Ramsey County Fair complex and is the oldest in operation in the Twin Cities area.

Yet, during the pre-game warmup, the lower bowl around the Leafs end was a dozen rows deep in Toronto colours. George Gushulak and his nephew, Blair Pacheco, drove down from Winnipeg and always try to get to a few NHL games a year. Vancouver is their next destination in early 2019.

At his bachelor party 25 years ago, Don McCall's best friend gave him a Leafs sweater with his name on the back, along with his age at the time. On the sleeves is the date of his wedding and McCall still wears that to every Toronto game he attends with wife Michelle. On this night, they included eight-year old grandson Mason for the six-hour drive from Thunder Bay. It was Mason's first live game, showing off his Mitch Marnier sweater and Leafs toque.

But it's the Thunder Bay contingent out-numbering those who'd made the closer drive from Winnipeg. One fan from there was in head-to-toe Leafs garb. I approached four other guys who looked as though they'd been sampling local craft beers rather than the popular mini-donuts hawked around the rink. They'd just arrived from the Ontario side of the border that morning.

I always explain who I am and what my 82-game Leafs project is all about before asking for interviews, getting names and taking pictures, but at that point, the leader of the quartet suddenly backed out saying: "No way, man, no way."

He wouldn't even face me, while the others had no reservations telling me all their great Leafs moments. Curious what had set him off, I later approached him — without my camera.

"Hey, are you violating your parole restrictions or something and can't be seen?" I joked.

He assured me it was nothing personal.

"Listen, if my wife finds out I snuck away and am here with these guys, I may as well be on parole," he explained. "She'll kill me."

When we all stopped laughing, he gave me a hug and a big 'Go Leafs, Go' and we watched a 5-3 Toronto win.

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1119969 Toronto Maple Leafs

'He looks like a 12-year-old': Semyon Der-Arguchintsev is one of hockey's most peculiar players and people

By Scott Wheeler Dec 7, 2018

Peterborough, Ont. — It's 9:11 a.m. in late November and the last player to take to the Peterborough Memorial Centre's ice for his team's 9 a.m. morning skate has just begun the first drill by flipping the puck into the wrong corner.

"Good job Sammy!" a teammate yells sarcastically from the bench.

"You guys are right," Petes head coach Rob Wilson answers with a smile on his face, the thumb of his glove pointed at the scrawny, baby-faced culprit to his left, "he's fucking stupid." The jab in jest elicits laughter from the Petes' players.

The kid, a smile on his face and dimples in his cheeks, shrugs his shoulders and flips the puck back into the correct corner.

He's Semyon Der-Arguchintsev and that's not the first time he has spent the beginning of a practice, or a game, with his head in the clouds.

He never seems to be in a rush. He's often a bit loopy. Those who know him describe him as childish and innocent — in both look and spirit.

But everyone is charmed by him.

And they're fascinated by his skill. He doesn't look like a hockey player, but there's a mystique to him that makes him a special one. Half an hour after practice is done, he's still on the ice with teammates Nick Robertson and Declan Chisholm, practising deflections in front of the net. He gets a piece of every shot.

An hour later, after finishing his post-practices stretches, Der-Arguchintsev emerges from the Petes' locker room in sweats and a toque, his jacket hanging past bony shoulder blades, long after all of his teammates have left. He is juggling two mugs of tea and a spoon when he grabs a seat on the bench.

He's honest, in part because he's incapable of helping himself. The year isn't going well. Less than six months after the Leafs drafted him in the third round and two months after they handed him an entry-level contract following a standout summer and fall of camps, the youngest player in the 2018 draft class has looked like it, he says.

At one of those camps, he stayed with a familiar face: Nikita Zaitsev.

Zaitsev has known Der-Arguchintsev since he was born. He played with his older brother, Alexander, from age five to 16 and the two families are so close they might as well be one. After a recent practice, Zaitsev joked about Der-Arguchintsev saying he is "honestly crazy."

"He doesn't care about anything. He just walks in and starts talking with everybody, even with Babs and all the Leafs guys. I told him a couple of simple things not to do, but he doesn't care, he doesn't listen," Zaitsev said.



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"He doesn't need advice. He loves hockey as much as anybody I know. He's a really good guy, unbelievable skill and hockey sense. He needs to get heavy and he still has lots of stuff to do – he's a kid – but he's unbelievable. Like everybody loves him here in the room. It's ridiculous. He's asking me for tickets to watch the game all the time when he's got a day off, so he's just a big fan."

Der-Arguchintsev doesn't get it — why he was so quickly adopted by Leafs players, staff and fans.

"I usually talk in the dressing room and everything but sometimes I can be quiet. It's not like I'm always yelling. I'm just always smiling and friendly to everyone. And then I see sometimes on the Internet people love me," Der-Arguchintsev says, laughing. "It's so nice that people and Toronto fans love me. It's helping me a lot. I like that support from them."

He credits Zaitsev for guiding him throughout training camp, introducing him to teammates and the Leafs for believing in him.

"I was so comfortable. Everyone treated you equally. They were being nice to me!" Der Arguchintsev said. "Training camp was awesome for me. I just like being around NHL. I'm trying to work really hard to make them proud."

But 13 points in 21 games is 13 points in 21 games, and Der-Arguchintsev expected more of himself to start the season.

"It was a little slow start for me and I would say I wasn't on the top of my production, right? Like my production will come, I'm just kind of more focused right now on maybe scoring more goals because I have only one goal right now. It's something that I have to do because I'm an offensive player," he said.

Wilson has met with Der-Arguchintsev a lot this season to help him take what he has (the raw talent) and fix the rest (the minus-17 rating he began the year with).

"He's a good kid, Sem. He's pretty quiet, he's a pretty lowkey guy, but you can have a laugh with him and he likes to joke. He's got a personality to him. He's just a young man with some serious talent and it's funny because he's very strong on his skates and I think he's very confident, so he's strong off the ice too. I think he has that little aura of confidence that you need," Wilson said.

Just because it hasn't happened yet — the offensive explosion the Petes anticipate as around the corner — doesn't mean it's not going to happen. Der-Arguchintsev isn't like any kid his age.

"He will take it to the next level. Toronto knows what they're doing and they saw something in him that not just us but a lot of people see in him. He is working extremely hard. His accountability off the puck, it's very important to him and he's all in," Wilson said. "He's not far off the pace he was on last year and you've got to remember he's a young 18, right? Maybe that doesn't matter so much when we're all 25 and 35 and all that but when you're a kid it makes a difference."

Between skates, practices, and games, Der-Arguchintsev has begun working more diligently at nearby Hybrid Fitness Health Performance (HFHP), the Petes' training centre.

And there's more to him, below the skin-and-bones surface.

"He's going in there to beef up and get stronger but I tell you what, he's highly competitive, he's very strong on his skates and he doesn't get intimidated. His size, I don't believe, as he gets older will be a factor because he's not worried if you're 6-foot-3 taking runs at him," Wilson said. "It doesn't bother him. Nothing does."

These days, Der-Arguchintsev carries a shade over 160 pounds on his 5-foot-10 frame. But sometimes it — the beefing up — just doesn't happen.

"We can't really reach inside and make the muscles grow but we can set him up for success as he develops from being a young boy to a professional athlete. His body frame is childlike. Everyone grows at a different pace and I think for Sammy and his development in terms of

strength and conditioning, it's going to be about recognizing how to move his body and proper mechanics to allow him to drive more power through his smaller frame for when his true growth happens," Josh Gillman, HFHP's head trainer and owner, said between sessions.

"Before he was put into our strength and conditioning program here he was never really challenged in that department. So I think just him actually educating himself is where his challenge lies in terms of how important strength and conditioning is."

Heading into the NHL draft, the Petes weren't even sure Der-Arguchintsev would get selected due to his size, a stigma he knows he will have to shed.

"I have to work to get there. I'm not the biggest guy. It's hard for me to build muscle but I'm still trying. I'm good at trying," Semyon said.

The Petes are hopeful that growth will come (Alexander is 6-foot-2). And even if it doesn't, they think he's talented enough that it may not matter.

General manager Mike Oke attributes Der-Arguchintsev's slow start to being a third-year player and facing the toughest matchups on the team for the first time in his career.

"We fully anticipate that he is going to take a step. He has a long way to go, there's no doubt about it. But he does have I think a real good foundation in some of those areas that he needs to work on and that should help him. I think he's got tremendous vision and playmaking ability. He has the ability to shake off defenders. He has an ability to escape from oncoming checkers. And he has a vision of where other guys are on the ice," Oke said.

"The other thing too, I have to admit, is despite his lack of size and stature he does have a unique ability to go into the pile and somehow have the ability to come out with the puck. He's a young man that has a real jovial spirit about him, somebody that just generally has a smile on his face."

If Der-Arguchintsev makes it, it won't be the first time he's overcome a supposedly-insurmountable obstacle.

Rockland, Ont. — More than 300 kilometres east of Peterborough, the Canadian International Hockey Academy (CIHA) sits on the banks of the Ottawa River dividing Ontario from Quebec.

Its three buildings — a residence, a cafeteria and a two-pad arena — sit between a storage facility just off of Highway 17 on the outskirts of Rockland, a town of 11,000 people.

It's here, after prompting from a friend who doesn't play hockey anymore, where Der-Arguchintsev first made the 10-hour trip from Moscow to Canada to pursue his dream.

It was just before his 14th birthday when he decided to take the plunge. At the time, CIHA was in its infancy and had little-to-no track record for developing talent. Today, its program is a cross between a Canadian private school (an international boarding student pays \$44,900 in tuition) and an AAA program. CIHA plays out of Eastern Ontario's top Bantam and Midget minor hockey league rather than in a traditional prep school circuit. After eliminating its girl's program a few years ago, the school now welcomes between 75 and 100 student-athletes per year.

"There's families on each floor that live here with young kids running around — it gives it that family atmosphere. It's nice because some of the guys get homesick and they can go to them," head recruiter Joey Clare says, pointing out the central room marked 'House Parents'.

There are signs of Der-Arguchintsev everywhere, from the pamphlet that touts the school's success stories (including Los Angeles Kings first-round pick Gabe Vilardi), to the mural they made of him in the arena, or the Russian flag hanging above the team's main rink, next to the flags representing the other international players who've played for CIHA.



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In a lot of ways, Der-Arguchintsev was their guinea pig. When he worked out, agents from Sergei Losev to Randy Robitaille began sending some of their top young players to the school.

"He's just a sweet kid," CIHA director Andre Savage said. "To see the success that he has had since he left here, he's an individual that you are so happy for just because he's just a generally good person."

Der-Arguchintsev still makes an effort to come back and meet the new students.

"It would be easy to stay away and say I've made it," Clare says. "It speaks to his character."

Der-Arguchintsev appears to be the same kid today that he was then.

"He still looks like he's that young kid so you could just imagine back when he was 14-years-old," Savage said.

"He'd be that one player that you'd walk by somewhere around the hockey rink and he'd be working on his game, working on his stickhandling, and you just saw the drive that he had within him. And as much as he looks like a young kid and he wasn't the biggest player, to be honest when he was on the ice he was probably one of the hardest players to get the puck off from. And that just speaks to what he is outside of hockey. As innocent as he looks, he just had a quiet drive to him."

In his first year at CIHA, Der-Arguchintsev didn't look like a star — though they knew he was one. His 36 points in 30 games wasn't all that uncommon at the Bantam level. He finished second on the team in scoring to Brandon Stone, who has 13 points in 21 games in the Maritime Jr. A Hockey League this season.

It was the next season, in 2015-2016, when Der-Arguchintsev talked childhood friend Pavel Gogolev into joining him at the school, that he really broke out. As the youngest player in the league while playing up an age class on the Midget team on a line with Gogolev, Der-Arguchintsev led the league in points (70 in 46 games) and assists (49) to win its rookie of the year award.

"He was a special player. To be honest, when he first arrived here I saw him and I saw his size and I was like 'OK.' It's always an adjustment for players, especially the ones who are coming from outside this region. They're good players where they're from but when they come to Ottawa the hockey is pretty competitive and physical and fast and it always takes a bit of time for them to adjust. But with Sem he fit in quite nicely from the start," Savage said.

"I've never seen a kid with that talent to stickhandle the way he does, and the way he sees the ice and passes and can turn on a dime. He may not have had the strength but the way he was protecting and shifting and rolling off players, it was quite incredible to see."

Because of that, Savage refuses to take credit for any of Der-Arguchintsev's success. Der-Arguchintsev did it on his own.

"It was actually pretty hard the first months because I didn't know any English when I got there so it was hard to communicate," Der-Arguchintsev said.

"It's really nice when I go back home, I always want to be there, but at the end of the day I know that I'm here to play hockey so it's kind of not distracting me thinking about my home. I thought it was the best decision for me in development of hockey to move to Canada."

For a while, it looked like Der-Arguchintsev couldn't get drafted into the OHL though. In order to be selected, his family needed a residence in the province. To make it happen, his dad briefly got a place — even though he was still living back home.

Before Der-Arguchintsev became eligible, which was late in the process, Oke and Petes head scout Chris McNamara made an effort to see him play regardless, including several more trips to the school and a sit-down chat with him late in the year.

"Every time you went to watch he was a player that we noticed his obvious skill and ability. He really impressed us with his desire to be a good player and to better understand the game," Oke said. "He and his family made the decision to come to North America and specifically CIHA to help with his hockey career and that's a bold move for somebody who is 14-years-old."

That decision, which included leaving the Soviet Wings, one of the top hockey programs in Russia, was bold enough to work.

The Petes took him 27th overall.

Peterborough, Ont. — On the concourse inside the Peterborough Memorial Centre, Kristen Cheng, Der-Arguchintsev's billet mom, can't find Semyon's father, Andrei.

Wearing Semyon's maroon No. 19 jersey, Cheng hasn't seen Andrei since they arrived from dinner at the rink together.

Cheng, 28 (she was 26 when she began billeting Semyon), is a French teacher at a nearby elementary school. Billeting is a family tradition. Her parents did it in London and she developed close relationships with her billet brothers.

"They haven't all gone onto the NHL but they've all done amazing things and you get to keep the contacts and support whatever they do. It's really fulfilling that way," Cheng said.

"I'm pretty young to be doing this. Because of hockey they always grow up super quick so I treat him like an adult but also as a little brother."

While she missed his draft to receive a leadership award in Tuscon, Arizona, Cheng was there, in Toronto, when Der-Arguchintsev made his preseason debut and signed his first contract.

"It's so satisfying. He has worked very hard for it. This has been his goal since I had him at my house at 16 and he has worked everything just to get drafted and now it's to make it," she said.

Cheng has grown close to Andrei too. Whenever he comes to visit (which is for a few weeks once a year), he stays in her extra bedroom, rather than at a hotel — something she's OK with because it relieves her and Semyon's teammates of chauffeur duties (Der-Arguchintsev has no interest in getting a driver's license) and he likes to help out with cleaning duties.

"They help me so much (the Chengs). I've been really close with both of them. I don't care if it's a small town or not though. It's nice here and I like it here and I'm happy here," Semyon said of the transition from the big-city feel of Moscow to Peterborough.

Not by coincidence, Gogolev was also drafted by the Petes.

Semyon and Gogolev are the self-proclaimed Petes ping pong champions after years of playing together at CIHA. Gogolev keeps Semyon in check, too.

"We joke around with him about the way he looks. He looks like a 12-year-old. We're pretty funny with him about that and when you play against other teams they would joke about it too and everyone laughs at him," Gogolev said. "The academy was great. It was just so much fun for one straight year to be around the guys and the facilities and dorms. That was the best time of my life to be there."

The Petes placed Semyon with Cheng because they knew he needed someone who could give him one-on-one attention. Oke doesn't shy away from admitting that Semyon needs a particular kind of guidance.

"They've developed a real strong relationship and I know that Sem has developed a strong relationship with the extended family so there's no doubt about it: Whether you're from Mississauga or whether you're from Minsk, it's key and the billets definitely play an important role to help the players feel at home and feel comfortable," Oke said.

Andrei, his hair parted in the middle and hanging over his forehead like his son's does, is wandering the concourse above Cheng, on the second



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floor, when a reporter taps him on the shoulder to ask if he's Semyon's dad.

"Yes," he answers, reaching into his pocket to pull out his phone. He fumbles to open an app with a Russian flag on it.

"Translates English. Talk," he says, handing the phone to the reporter and pointing at a big red button.

Andrei is short, like his son, but broad-shouldered. His English is better than he thinks it is, and eventually, he gives up on his app.

The residence that got Semyon into the OHL? The thousands of dollars in two years of tuition fees? They aren't a product of Andrei's wealth. Back home, he helps run a small construction business.

"It's not big. Not big," he insists. "We don't have money."

Andrei is nearing the end of his three-week stay at Cheng's because he must go home and get back to work.

For now, though, he gets to watch his son live out his dream.

Down below, the Petes are playing the Kingston Frontenacs and Semyon spends the game taking a lot of risks and turning the puck over while centring Robertson and Adam Timleck. It's the second intermission and he has already drawn a penalty and picked up two assists. On the first, he sent a shot on net for an intentional rebound on the backdoor. On the second, he went inside-out to burn a defender one-on-one off the rush before sending a tap-in pass across the crease. By the time the game is done, he'll pick up a third assist and his 16 points in 22 games suddenly won't look that bad.

"Five years ago, Sem told me 'I want to go.' Many years in hockey, his older brother playing hockey in Russia and I think this better for Sem if he study hockey in Canada. You understand?" Andrei says.

"Sam looks small but when he's going he's this one," he continues, hunching over further as if to hold a hockey stick and illustrate his son's low skating technique. "He looks small but when he stands good he's 5-11. But now is new hockey, it doesn't matter as much. But maybe he grows up extra. He's very young. His face is very young. We hope he grows up maybe 3-4 centimetres."

Andrei turns to the reporter.

"We were very happy the Leafs chose Sam. You watch first game?"

"Mhm," the reporter answers.

"He's not bad," Andrei says. "For first time, it's not bad. But now he has I think little problem by scoring goals. I don't know why."

And he's not alone. There's a lot people don't quite know about Semyon.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119911 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens' fourth-liners play key roles in closing out Senators

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

CHICAGO — Why is Nicolas Deslauriers on the Canadiens' roster?

This is a popular question on Twitter, but the answer was there for all to see Thursday as Deslauriers played his part in the Canadiens' 5-2 win over the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre.

Deslauriers was a healthy scratch Tuesday, when the Canadiens won the first half of their home-and-away series against the Senators. A

second-period outburst propelled Montreal to a 5-2 win. They won most of the battles and outthit the Senators 33-20.

There was some frustration on the part of the Senators during the third period and head coach Claude Julien was concerned that Ottawa might take some liberties with Montreal's star players when the Sens returned home for the rematch.

That's why Thursday's game started with Deslauriers on a line with the team's two leading scorers, Jonathan Drouin and Max Domi.

Was Julien trying to send a message?

"The message was that if you want to go after our star players (you have to deal with Deslauriers)," said Julien. "I never told him to (fight), but I wanted (the Senators) to know that he was there for protection. When things like that happen, you deal with it and we dealt with it."

As it was, Deslauriers's services as an enforcer weren't needed. Ottawa did play a more physical game on Thursday — the hits were 37-36 in favour of the Canadiens — but there were only four penalties in the game and Deslauriers had more shots on goal (three) than hits (one).

"We knew they might try to play a chippy little game, they tried it the last 10 minutes at the Bell Centre," said Deslauriers. "I was happy to play. We have a lot of depth on our team and, as a line, we didn't play well against San Jose (a 3-1 loss last Sunday) so somebody had to sit down and think it over and that was me. I wasn't mad. We had a great game, the team played well. When you get back in the lineup, you just want to have chemistry with the other two guys on your line and that's what we did tonight."

"I felt good tonight and this is the kind of game I want to play," said Deslauriers. "I knew they would try to go after our star players (and) I want them to do that because it gives me a focus."

A hockey team has a variety of skills. You want your fourth line to play enough minutes to take the pressure off the other lines and, if things go well, nothing bad happens when they're on the ice.

Each of the players on the fourth line Thursday had something to contribute.

Kenny Agostino, who was called up from Laval on Nov. 6, has an offensive skill set that has earned him time on the second power-play unit.

Michael Chaput, who was called up from Laval two weeks later, earns extra minutes as a penalty-killer and he's someone you want in the faceoff circle for a key draw. Among Canadiens who regularly take draws, Chaput leads the team in faceoff percentage with a success rate of 60 per cent.

Deslauriers had a career-high 10 goals last season, but his biggest asset is his muscle, even when it's simply a threat.

The Canadiens had a chance to get a good night's sleep after the win in Ottawa. It was the first game in a three-game road trip and normally the team would board a charter flight after the match. But their next game is Sunday in Chicago (6 p.m., SN, SN1, RDS, TSN 690 Radio) and the Canadiens took a flight from Ottawa on Friday.

Defenceman Xavier Ouellet headed back to Montreal. He was placed on waivers Friday to make room on the roster for Noah Juulsen, who is returning from a facial fracture. Juulsen could return in Chicago or Tuesday in Minnesota. If Ouellet clears waivers Saturday, he'll report to Laval.

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1119912 Montreal Canadiens

What the Puck: Staying in the black is bottom line for bleu-blanc-rouge



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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In recent years, value of the Canadiens has increased exponentially while the team withers on the ice.

BRENDAN KELLY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

One of the great talking points among Habs fans during the past 10 or 15 years is trying to figure out the 21st century Canadiens conundrum — why has one of the National Hockey League's greatest franchises sunk so low since that last Stanley Cup win in 1993?

I know, I know, Les Boys just swept the mighty Ottawa Senators — sarcasm alert! — but let's forget this week and at least admit that the Habs in this century are but a pale shadow of the Flying Frenchmen that captivated the province for the last five decades of the 20th century.

The Forbes magazine's annual ranking of the value of NHL teams came out this week and those numbers had me thinking that maybe the real problem here is that the team makes too much money. It sounds counterintuitive, but the reality is that as the Canadiens' value increased during the past two decades, its on-ice performance sagged. Yet the team's woes don't seem to have any impact on the bottom line.

Au contraire, the cash just keeps rolling in for the Habs Inc. no matter how sucky the team is. They are doing far better this season than any of us expected, but I'm wondering if it's all that good for the CH's income statements. Forbes ranked Montreal the third-most valuable team in the league, behind only the New York Rangers and the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Forbes valued the team at \$1.3 billion (all figures U.S.), up four per cent from a year earlier. This for a team that Geoff Molson and his partners bought for \$575 million in 2009 and that George Gillett bought an 80 per cent stake in eight years earlier for just \$185 million.

Gillett bought the team from Molson Brewery and at the time Molson CEO Dan O'Neill told anyone who would listen that the Canadiens were nothing but a drag on the Molson's business. Famously when Gillett bought the iconic franchise, there wasn't a single Canadian company willing to step up to the plate to try to acquire the Habs because the team was seen as a financial liability.

Seventeen years later, the bleu-blanc-rouge is a cash cow, with annual profits of \$102 million, according to Forbes. This for a team that hasn't made the Stanley Cup final since it beat the Los Angeles Kings in five games in June 1993 and has only made the conference finals twice in the 25 years since that unexpected championship win. (And let's admit that one of those conference finals, the one in 2010, was a fluke or entirely due to the heroics of goaltender Jaroslav Halak, depending on how you look at it.)

In other words, they haven't been a very good team for the vast majority of that post-'93 period yet their value has increased exponentially. Of course Molson and his partners would love to win the Cup, but they don't even need to make the playoffs to keep rolling in cash.

You don't have to have a PhD in management from Harvard to understand that booming profits takes the edge off the urgency of improving your product.

There has been much speculation in the past two years about the fact that Montreal, though it's been struggling, hasn't spent to the limit of the salary cap. They didn't last season and this season, the team has just under \$9 million in available cap space.

After two wins against Ottawa this week, Montreal is holding down the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, although it's fair to say it's an open question as to whether the Habs will make the playoffs. But what the Forbes numbers underline is that they don't actually need to make it to the post-season to generate fantastic profits, especially if general manager Marc Bergevin is helping out his boss by keeping \$7 million to \$9 million in the CH bank account each year.

The core of the Canadiens' profitability is the blind support of its fan base and that's a pretty sweet thing for a brand to have. Is all that money the sole cause of the mediocrity of the 21st century Habs? Of course not. There are loads of other factors, starting with the CH obsession with always looking nostalgically at past glories rather than present-day challenges. All I'm saying is that when you can't close the company safe because there are hundred-dollar bills flying in every direction, there is no urgency to be the best in the league.

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1119913 Montreal Canadiens

Melnick's GBU: Claude Julien's hot streak continued in his hometown

By Mitch Melnick Dec 7, 2018

Claude Julien reached into his bag of anti-cliché messages and pulled out, "If it ain't broke, fix it." And now even the coach is on a bit of a roll.

There were a lot of good signs in Montreal's second straight 5-2 win over Ottawa. Carey Price, in his sixth consecutive start, was sharp again early on when he needed to be while too many of his teammates were still in snooze mode.

While the focus on the blue line has centered on the return of Shea Weber and his newest partner Brett Kulak, it's the pairing of Jeff Petry and David Schlemko that continues to impress. Weber's presence has, without question, stabilized the area in front of Price. It's no coincidence that since his return the Habs have allowed as many as 30 shots on goal just once. But the game showed that Weber does not have to be their best defenceman to win. Truth is, he finally looked a little tired Thursday in Ottawa.

Up front, Paul Byron found the back of the net for the first time since late October. It took him four games after returning from his lower body injury that knocked him out of the lineup for November. And even though the Max Domi-Andrew Shaw-Jonathan Drouin trio was largely neutralized, Drouin and Shaw still managed to hit the score sheet as they combined, in style, to produce what proved to be the winning goal.

So yeah, good signs all around as the Habs jumped on a defensively deficient Senators team that was forced to play two men short over the final 20 minutes following injuries to Bobby Ryan and Matt Duchene.

But more than anything it was another coaching decision (or three) by Julien that sparked them. After flip flopping Shaw and Byron to great effect Tuesday in Montreal, Julien put them back with their regular linemates during practice on Wednesday. Sensing a more physical night ahead in Ottawa, Julien also put Nicolas Deslauriers back in the lineup in place of Matthew Peca, who had played well in Montreal.

And look what happened.

Shaw and Byron scored goals. And the fourth line was relentless, enjoying their best game of the season. True, the Ottawa defence corps doesn't have Brent Burns or Erik Karlsson or Marc-Édouard Vlasic, but that was awfully impressive, getting the Habs going when they absolutely needed it.

As a veteran hockey lifer might put it, "It's called coaching."

THE GOOD

· Michael Chaput-Kenny Agostino-Nicolas Deslauriers: It took just 20 seconds for the Canadiens to tie up the game after Mark Stone (again) whipped a high wrist shot over Price right off a faceoff win. Price had made a series of big saves through the first eight minutes of the period but now Montreal needed to get going. So Julien threw his fourth line



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back on the ice. They dominated down low, as they did all night, before Agostino got the puck to Petry whose harmless looking wristed floated past Craig Anderson to tie the game. Chaput also earned an assist on the play, his first point as a member of the Canadiens. Later in the game, as Domi continued to hit the ice with frequency as an obvious target, Julien put Deslauriers on his wing for a shift. Which was kind of the point of dressing him in the first place. As Julien said after the game, "The only message was, if you want to go after our star players... I think it was just a natural move. I never told him to go (fight) but I just wanted them to know that he was there for protection. You have to deal with those things, when teams decide to do that, and I thought we dealt with it."

· Brendan Gallagher: He was at his very best, as he always seems to be against Ottawa. It figures that on a night when he kept firing pucks at Anderson, who robbed him at least twice, it was Gallagher's impressive deflection skills and a lucky bounce that got him his 13th goal of the season. Gallagher ended up with a game high nine shots on goal. It just seemed like a matter of time before one of them went in. It was a Tomas Tatar shot from the middle of the ice inside the blue line that Gallagher got his stick on to send the puck past Anderson and into pinball mode, moving from the goalpost to the back of Anderson's pad to slowly sliding over the goal line. Like watching in slow motion in real time.

· Jeff Petry and David Schlemko: I don't know if Schlemko can keep it up, but for the first time in his stint with the Habs, you can see why Marc Bergevin wanted him. His comfort level is clearly aided by playing alongside Petry, who even outside of his game-tying goal, was the best defenceman on the ice.

· Andrew Shaw: Career goal number 100 was a beauty. Both Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Drouin made eye-opening passes to get the puck to Shaw. The scrappy winger is just two goals and four points shy of his season totals of a year ago. In the last month, since Julien moved him up to play with Drouin and Domi, Shaw has seven goals and 14 points in 14 games. For his part, over the same span, Drouin has 16 points. Taking it a step further, Drouin's 26 points in 29 games has him among the top 50 scorers in the NHL, tied with Steven Stamkos and Tyler Seguin. In fact, in his last 43 games as a Hab, Drouin has 39 points. Care to revisit your angry side?

THE BAD

· Special Teams: Ottawa scored on it's only power play after an unnecessary holding penalty by Brett Kulak. (Kulak has looked mostly good, but he's taken a lot of big hits when he has the puck. I don't know if it's tunnel vision or what but by the time Bobby Ryan had him lined up in the neutral zone late in the first period, Kulak was ready as he raised his left shoulder to protect himself. Ryan's face bounced off Kulak's shoulder while his stick went flying in the other direction. The Ottawa winger never returned to the game.) When Montreal had the man advantage...

THE UGLY

· Power Play: Not even two games against the worst penalty killing team in the NHL could help solve the Habs' power play issues. Their first two power plays were just dreadful. Late in the third, with a chance to bury Ottawa, Drouin came close a couple of times as he confidently fired shots from inside the blue line, hitting the post on one of them. Ultimately it was an empty netter by Byron that clinched the win. The power play has dropped to 29th in the NHL at just 14.1 percent.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119914 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens need Max Domi to strike that delicate emotional balance, like he did against Ottawa

By Sean Gordon Dec 6, 2018

OTTAWA — By definition, proper kayfabe requires a heel, and the Canadiens' Max Domi is more than willing to take on the job's hockey equivalent — particularly when it comes to the Ottawa Senators.

You might say he's taken over the family business, given expert-level trolling like this:

DOMI MOUTHING "WAIVERS" TO ZACK SMITH ON TUESDAY.

SMITH CLEARED WAIVERS EARLIER THIS SEASON #HABS
PIC.TWITTER.COM/IMFLJ3TUA1

— SHAYNE PASQUINO (@SHAYNEPASQUINO) DECEMBER 7, 2018

Unlike his dad Tie, who was paid to antagonize and did so with relish in the old Battle of Ontario days, the younger Domi is counted upon for more than villainy.

He leads the team in scoring, with 30 points in 29 games. The transition to full-time centre this fall has been unfolded more than adequately. But he's still his father's son, and occasionally passion escalates into folly, as it did in a recent game against Buffalo.

In that tilt, he carried on a running verbal and physical battle with Sabres forward Johan Larsson. Late in the game, it boiled over, with Domi becoming highly agitated after a hit from Larsson near the Canadiens bench and screaming obscenities at the Buffalo bench after he returned to his own.

In overtime he took a crucial penalty that was in no way related to the earlier shenanigans, but it was clear to anyone watching that the Canadiens' most successful, if not most important, forward had successfully been knocked off his game.

"He's been successful this year because he's played with a lot of emotion, so you don't want to take that away from him. The only thing you don't want to do is cross that line of emotion where the positive side becomes a negative. That's basically what he's doing and he's been much better at it," said coach Claude Julien.

Better's not the same thing as perfect; the Senators presented another opportunity — or pitfall — which Domi handled with more aplomb this time around.

As one might expect, Domi was pitted against Smith on his first shift and singled out for special attention by basically every Senator on the ice. In mid-period, the two met for a faceoff in the Montreal end; Smith decided to conduct a test to make sure Domi's jockstrap and cup were properly attached and in full working order — by pitchforking him in the swingers.

It was a sign of things to come. Domi absorbed it all and palpably enjoyed himself doing it. This is a player who needs to play with sharp edges, but it only works as long as he can hold them in balance with his offensive role. He understands this.

"Typically, as long as you can keep your emotions in check to the point where you're staying disciplined, everything else is just kind of a spark, right? It kind of gets you going. The first few shifts we were a little slow and they kind of poked us and woke us up," Domi said after the game.

In his case, emerging from slumber meant dishing hits and generally finding a way to get to the middle of whatever aggro developed after whistles when he was on the ice. If the Senators were going to push, and they clearly were going to push, Domi would shove back.

With a Canadiens' victory seemingly assured at 4-2 late in the third, Domi indulged himself with a couple of healthy runs at Ottawa's Cody Ceci, and a big hit in the corner boards on Smith, coming away with the latter's stick in the process.

On a late power play he could be seen grinning as he yanked the collar of Smith's jersey back and forth in a net-front scrum.



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The gap between knowing the right thing and doing it varies in size according to circumstance. Overall, on this Thursday night in Ottawa it was so small as to be nonexistent. The challenge is to keep it that way. It's not easy.

For all the good things he did, Domi wasn't exactly working at peak efficiency in the offensive zone. He ended the game pointless and wasn't especially crisp with the puck; at one point in the first period he bungled a simple pass that would have sprung Paul Byron for a partial breakaway. It was a bit of a theme. On a power play in the third he expertly settled a bouncing puck, warded off a defender, looked up and, having done the hard part, sent a pass to the point that missed teammate Jonathan Drouin by at least a stick length.

Domi also had a tough night in the faceoff circle, too, winning just four of the 13 draws he took. He got caved in possession-wise at even strength with the Canadiens controlling 37 per cent of shot attempts and 36 per cent of scoring chances when he was on the ice per Natural Stat Trick. On the plus side, Montreal topped 40 shots for the fifth-straight game since Shea Weber's return. And Domi was credited with four hits, same as the likes of Weber and fourth-liner Kenny Agostino. Regardless of how much or how little stock you put in how hits are counted, for Domi to co-lead his team in that category will count as a win for the opposing team most nights.

That said Domi was engaged defensively and on the backcheck (he wasn't on the ice for any Ottawa goals) and his linemates, Drouin and Andrew Shaw, had strong games, combining on what would hold up as the winning goal. The marker was Shaw's 100th in the NHL.

"After the first little bit you could tell they were just trying to get our line off its game, but it didn't work," Drouin said.

The evidence supports the claim. Domi didn't lose his cool. He didn't cost his team by taking ill-advised penalties, and his feistiness and willingness to match the Senators chirp for chirp and hit for hit can't be discounted in a game that was chippy from the opening faceoff.

"Those are the types of games that get you into the playoffs," Domi said afterwards.

He's not wrong.

Julien has lately been preaching about the importance of learning how to win. That includes figuring out how to navigate surly encounters like back-to-back games against a divisional and geographic rival.

"Learning to win is having discipline under those kinds of situations, they were trying to reel us into taking penalties because they do have a very good power play, for us it was about being disciplined and not retaliating," Julien said.

The corollary is keeping that discipline while also doing your day job well. That's a tougher lesson to learn for younger players than it might first appear. Ottawa's Brady Tkachuk, who has the makings of a perfect foil to Domi, had a glorious scoring chance early that was saved by Carey Price, but otherwise spent the evening trying to staple various Canadiens into the boards. That included Jesperi Kotkaniemi, who took exception late in the game to a Tkachuk hit along the boards and laid the lumber in return. Their last action in the game involved swiping at one another with their sticks.

Though Kotkaniemi notched an assist, neither of the youngsters in this game was a major factor offensively – as everyone expects they will be in future encounters.

It's a promising prospect. When Domi was asked if he sees the potential for a lasting and increasingly bitter rivalry, he said: "oh yeah, 100 per cent.

"We're just getting 'er going," he added, with a huge smile.

It should be noted at this point Domi has willing accomplices in this. Brendan Gallagher lives to infuriate his opponents, and certainly did so on Thursday (and scored to boot). Drouin is also not above throwing

shade on the Senators. After Tuesday's win over Ottawa, the first of a matching pair of 5-2 victories this week, he said: "we hate those guys like they hate each other – uh, hate us."

Surely just an unfortunate and thoroughly benign slip of the tongue.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119975 Washington Capitals

Overtime Czech: For Jakub Vrana, extra work is paying off

By Isabelle Khurshudyan December 7 at 2:46 PM

GLENDALE, Ariz. — When Jakub Vrana was just a hockey-loving boy in the Czech Republic, the NHL still a distant dream, his father would take him to national team practices for inspiration. He insisted they stay until every player was off the ice, and he made sure his son took note of those who were out there latest, working at their craft even as others had long left for the locker room.

The lesson was straightforward, and it's stayed with Vrana: "He always tell me that if you want to be better than the other players, you have to work extra."

Of the Washington Capitals, Vrana is almost always the last player off the ice, staying out so late that team equipment staffers occasionally have to plead that he wrap it up so they can finish their work for the day. Vrana changes up what he chooses to work on depending on how he feels his game is going, and while he still sees a lot that needs fine-tuning, the Capitals see an exciting young forward who has continued to get better.

With three goals in the past two games, Vrana now has nine goals with eight assists through 28 games, on pace to eclipse his 27-point total in 73 games last season. With wingers T.J. Oshie and Tom Wilson both out because of concussions, the team is counting on Vrana, suddenly the second-most-productive winger behind captain Alex Ovechkin, to help make up for some of the lost scoring. All of the extra work seems to be paying off.

"He's a guy who spends a lot of time out there and works at his game, and I think it's led to the consistency that he's put together this year, continuing to get scoring chances every night and a valuable offensive asset for us," Coach Todd Reirden said. "Always as a coach, you love someone who wants to be out there getting better."

There tends to be an order to who comes off the ice when after practices. Veterans, particularly those who log the most minutes, come off quickest, and in Washington, Ovechkin typically leaves the ice first with center Nicklas Backstrom not far behind him. Bottom-six forwards or third-pairing defensemen, along with the backup goaltender, might stay on the ice longer to log the time they might not get in a game. The less established a player, the more he might want to make a good impression by practicing a little longer.

"For some, it might be a little bit of guilt," center Lars Eller said with a chuckle. "In V's case, he's past that step now. . . . That's the willingness to be better and not being satisfied."

Entering Tuesday's game against the Golden Knights, Vrana had been unhappy with his recent performances, particularly his wall play, so he worked on that after a practice in Las Vegas. He then asked defenseman Dmitry Orlov to shoot pucks toward the net and attempted to get his blade on them because tips and deflections could help when the two are on the power play together. If Vrana misses on a chance in a game, he'll spend the next day practicing his shot from that same spot, a bucket of pucks beside him as he snaps one after another.



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"Sometimes I just wait until everybody's gone and I have the ice for myself," Vrana said. "And then I can do my thing."

[Capitals mailbag: Will the team visit the White House?]

Practices revolve around team play and system work, so Vrana gets to work on his individual skills when he stays on the ice after. He draws confidence from the routine — "It makes the game easier," he said — and he has read about how Jaromir Jagr, the second-leading scorer in NHL history and a fellow Czech, would log extra on-ice sessions when no one else was around for the same reason.

Coaches occasionally will tell players they're practicing too much and to save more energy for the game, but Reirden said the Capitals are "not there with [Vrana] right now; he's still a young guy with lots of energy." A 2014 first-round pick, Vrana is the last high-end forward the Capitals have drafted, and though he is only 22, he already has established himself in the team's top-six corps.

"He's just really maturing in front of our own eyes here and becoming a much better pro than he has been in the past," Reirden said. "His speed is a factor. His release is great. He's doing a lot of things to help us win games."

But ask Vrana, and he'll say that he should be stronger in battles or that his hands could move faster and his shots still miss the net too often. He learned long ago what it takes to be better.

"The longer you're here, you feel more comfortable, but it's also the same feeling as when you come here," Vrana said. "You've still got to go and produce. You're playing in the NHL for an NHL team, so you have to be good. It doesn't matter if it's your first year. Since my first game, I wanted to produce, and I didn't blame that it was my first year or something. I just wanted to come here and dominate my game and play good and just try to do everything I can to be that way."

Washington Post LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119976 Washington Capitals

Burakovsky's goal sends Capitals to win over Coyotes

By John Marshall - Associated Press - Thursday, December 6, 2018

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Andre Burakovsky made a mistake that led to Arizona's first goal and spent most of the night watching pucks repeatedly bounce over his stick.

When given a late opportunity, though, he halted the Coyotes' four-game winning streak.

Promoted to the top line due to Tom Wilson's injury, Burakovsky made up for his early miscues by scoring late in the third period and lifting the Washington Capitals to a 4-2 victory Thursday.

"This game is funny," Burakovsky said. "You're playing good, some nights have 1,000 chances and can't score, and some nights you're struggling hard and get one."

Coming off consecutive losses, the Capitals faced one-goal deficits in each of the opening two periods.

Jakub Vrana scored his third goal in two games in the first period and Matt Niskanen had one on his birthday in the second. Phoenix Copley turned away numerous good chances while making 27 saves, and Burakovsky scored the winner with 4:42 left on a shot that caromed off goalie Adin Hill's blocker.

Alex Ovechkin added an empty-net goal after becoming the fastest player - ninth overall - to have 5,000 career shots, reaching the mark in 1,031 career games. Marcel Dionne was the previous fastest at 1,215 games.

"We've been creating chances every game, playing good games, so it's good to see it pay off," Vrana said.

Christian Fischer scored in the first period, but the Coyotes missed on several opportunities to stretch the lead. Lawson Crouse scored in the second and Arizona again wasted some decent chances in the third before Burakovsky scored.

Hill stopped 26 shots, giving up one more goal than he had while opening his Coyotes career with four straight wins.

"They made the play, we didn't," Arizona coach Rick Tocchet. "We had our chances."

The Coyotes jumped on Washington early when Fischer, who earlier limped off after blocking a shot, one-timed a pass from Derek Stepan from the right circle.

Arizona squandered a chance early in the second period when Richard Panik missed the net on a penalty shot.

The Capitals ratcheted up the pressure from there, tying it on Vrana's wrist shot from between the circles that beat Hill to the glove side.

The momentum didn't last.

Crouse tied it 90 seconds later, gathering a loose puck between the circles, sliding to his left and beating Copley to the stick side.

Niskanen tied it late in the period on a shot that caromed off Arizona defenseman Jacob Chychrun past Hill.

The Capitals got their turn for a penalty shot next and also failed when Vrana couldn't find an opening against Hill.

Burakovsky, after struggling most of the night, scored the winner on a shot Hill saw, but couldn't stop.

"I got a piece of that shot with my blocker, but I've got to make that save," he said.

NOTES: Wilson did not play due to a concussion sustained Tuesday against Vegas. ... Arizona lost for the third time in 15 games (11-3-1) when scoring first. ... Niskanen turned 32. ... Coyotes C Vinnie Hinostroza went out in the first period with a lower-body injury and did not return.

UP NEXT

The Capitals play at Columbus on Saturday.

The Coyotes host the San Jose Sharks on Saturday.

Washington Times LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119977 Washington Capitals

Golden Knights' Ryan Reaves tells media he asked for autographed photos of an injured Wilson to be pulled by memorabilia dealer

By J.J. Regan December 07, 2018 1:01 PM

Ryan Reaves should not expect a Christmas card from Tom Wilson anytime soon.

Reaves and Wilson were engaged in a physical matchup Tuesday in a game between the Capitals and Vegas Golden Knights. Things came to



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a head in the second period when Reaves delivered a late, blind-side shoulder blow to Wilson that knocked him out of the game and earned Reaves an ejection.

Reaves showed his remorse over causing an injury to a fellow player by signing pictures of an injured Wilson from Tuesday's game and writing down his postgame comments on the hit, "He ran into a lion in the jungle."

The pictures were being sold by local memorabilia company Inscriptagraphs.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119978 Washington Capitals

Capitals forward Jakub Vrana continues breakthrough season

By Brian McNally December 07, 2018 6:00 AM

Capitals forward Jakub Vrana has come into his own.

It's hard to gather any other conclusion after three goals in Vrana's past two games. He scored twice against the Vegas Golden Knights on Tuesday and had another to tie the game in the second period of an eventual 4-2 victory against the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday.

That's a good sign for the 2014 first-round pick, who has found a home at left wing on the second line – first playing alongside center Nicklas Backstrom and now Evgeny Kuznetsov. Vrana sits at 9 goals, which is just three less than his rookie year total (13). With 17 points he is well on his way to setting a new career high after 27 last season.

That's been necessary production for Washington, which hasn't always been able to rely on 2013 first-round pick Andre Burakovsky. He did score the game-winner on Thursday. Alex Ovechkin added an empty-net tally. But Burakovsky's scoring (five goals, three assists) has been limited and injuries to Kuznetsov (concussion) and T.J. Oshie (concussion) have left a void Vrana has helped fill.

Yeah it's tough with the injuries we have a little bit more [responsibility] here," Vrana told reporters in Glendale, Arizona after the game. "We think we're handling it really good. We're creating chances every game, playing some strong games. It's good for our confidence going forward."

Vrana read the play right when a loose puck bounced to him in the slot at 5:27 of the second period. A pass from behind the net from Kuznetsov hopped over Brett Connolly's stick and Vrana was there to hammer it past goalie Adin Hill to tie the game 1-1.

Vrana could have had his second consecutive two-goal game. With the game tied 2-2, he had a breakaway just 16 seconds into the third period. Matt Niskanen – who himself had a goal – took an Arizona turnover and sent a pass up ice anticipating Vrana could use his speed to get behind the Coyotes. He was correct. But Vrana missed wide on the backhand. He did get a second chance with a penalty shot awarded for a slight hook by Coyotes defenseman Kevin Connauton, but didn't even get a shot off on Hill.

No matter. Burakovsky's goal at 15:18 put the Caps ahead for good and Alex Ovechkin added an empty-netter – his 21st of the season. And Vrana took yet another step forward in a season that looks more and more like a breakthrough at age 22. He's built on the promising signs shown in last year's Stanley Cup playoff run.

"I've really like Jakub's game the whole year just because of his consistency," Caps coach Todd Reirden. "He's just really maturing in front of our own eyes here. Much better pro than he has been in the past...He's doing a lot of things to help us win games. That line has

played well and [Kuznetsov] and him do some things well when we pair them together. Another good game for him."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119979 Washington Capitals

Where will the next generation of NHL players come from? Follow the Stanley Cup

By James Mirtle Dec 7, 2018

It's a trend that has been happening slow and steady, over the last 10 years and largely unnoticed.

The NHL is getting more American.

Not in terms of the number of teams – although the additions of Las Vegas and (soon) Seattle help there, too – but the players on the ice. Whereas for decades the number of U.S.-born skaters hovered around 100 in a league of some 700 players, that figure has quickly ballooned to nearly double that in short order.

And – for reasons we'll dive into – this isn't a trend that's likely to slow down.

Historically, based on games played, the NHL has been approximately 14 percent American, well behind Canada (69 percent) but a solid second ahead of Sweden, Russia and other European nations. This season, roughly 27 percent of skaters who have appeared in a game have been Americans, the culmination of years of recent gains.

There are a variety of reasons for that, including the United States' large population, USA Hockey's shift in their development model and the advancements made by their national team development program. But I would argue the biggest driver of growth at the minor hockey level in recent years has been the NHL.

And specifically in the U.S. cities where their NHL teams have won.

I'll say up front that this will not be a comprehensive look at every minor hockey market in the United States because that would be enough to fill a book. What I wanted to do here, as part of our Future of Hockey series, was highlight how many kids are now playing hockey in a lot of U.S. markets where that wasn't previously happening.

Throughout NHL history, most American players have tended to come from the three Ms – Minnesota, Michigan and Massachusetts – or New York state. Even today, those four states make up a huge portion of U.S.-born players in the league. But as hockey has become more entrenched in different areas, and as NHL teams there have had increasing success, that has begun to rapidly change.

Not coincidentally, the regions that have had the biggest gains in youth hockey enrollment in recent years are all areas where teams have won the Stanley Cup in the last 10 years: Southern California, Washington, Chicago and Pittsburgh.

The chart below contains a list of the fastest growing minor hockey regions in the U.S., among the 14 USA Hockey zones with a minimum of 10,000 players aged 18 and under. Those four major metropolitan areas mentioned above lead the way, with growth rates between 38 and 71 percent in just the last 10 years.

(Note: DMV refers to the combined D.C., Maryland and Virginia figures. These numbers are based on USA Hockey enrollment only and do not include unaffiliated leagues, which contributed to a sizable decrease in Michigan's numbers in recent years. But that's a story for another day.)



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What follows below is a full picture of U.S. youth hockey enrollment growth across the country, based on the past 10 years. Full credit to chart master Dom Luszczyzyn for the heat map.

Keep in mind that some states included here have very small membership bases. (Oklahoma and Nevada, for example, show up as high growth states but still have fewer than 700 registered youth players.)

To hear those on the ground tell it, there are a number of key factors involved in driving this newfound participation in hockey at the youth level. But it is not a coincidence that most of the biggest gainers have been home to superstar-filled NHL teams that have won 10 of the last 12 Stanley Cups.

"The growth really started to take off when the Kings won their Cups (in 2012 and 2014) or when Anaheim won their Cup (in 2007)," explained Craig Johnson, a former NHLer who has coached in the Southern California minor hockey system the last 13 years. "You can see it. You see so many kids and parents that get their kids involved in the game then."

"This (growth in Washington) is because of Alex Ovechkin," said Alan May, who played five years for the Capitals in the early '90s and is now on their broadcast team. "All of a sudden, kids wanted to play hockey because he identifies the Caps as the most positive story in D.C. sports-wise every year. Because of that – and he's such a magnanimous person – people wanted to play the game."

The stories are very similar in Pittsburgh and Chicago.

Led by president David Morehouse, the Penguins used Sidney Crosby's star power to spearhead an aggressive grow the game plan going back 10 years, something reinforced by their Stanley Cup wins in 2009, 2016 and 2017.

The Blackhawks, meanwhile, experienced a renaissance on the ice and off over the same period, beginning when Rocky Wirtz took over as owner in 2007 and reinvigorated the franchise. One of the first areas he invested in was minor hockey.

Part of what has changed of late, however, is the resources available for this push.

One of the underrated additions the NHL and NHLPA made to the collective bargaining agreement after the 2012-13 lockout was the Industry Growth Fund, which was designed to put millions of dollars directly into grassroots initiatives. Teams like the Blackhawks say the money they have received has been instrumental in transforming their youth programs, including getting new rinks built in area parks and being able to hire more staff dedicated to minor hockey.

They have since introduced programs that provide free head-to-toe equipment to first-time players who sign up for their learn to play programs.

The Industry Growth Fund is so new that its full impact likely won't be felt in the USA Hockey enrollment numbers for years to come. Already, however, there have been huge gains made in places like Chicago.

"We wouldn't have been able to program all this and get into the schools and see these 60,000-plus kids a year and teach them (about hockey)," said Annie Camins, the Blackhawks senior director of fan development and youth hockey. "It's really taken off. It's allowed us to find a way to bring hockey to life for these kids. From the beginning stage, where they just have a stick in their hands in the gym."

"This is about the only thing that the NHL and NHLPA agree on," May said. "Growing the game at the grassroots level. They use NHL alumni. They're doing it everywhere in the states. Because of that, a lot of the arenas are at max capacity. The other day I did a clinic (in the D.C. area) and there were 55 kids on the ice, 12 coaches and about 20 youth hockey players from the travel team helping out all the learn to play players. They had an organized game plan that was created by the Caps alumni. That goes on at all the arenas in the area around here. And the Caps facilitate that."

USA Hockey provided the following list of former NHL players who have become youth hockey ambassadors in some of their fastest growing youth hockey markets. It's a list that doesn't include all of the NHL alumni who are coaching in markets where they used to play:

Anaheim: Bryan Allen and Sean Pronger

Carolina: Shane Willis and Bates Battaglia

Chicago: Jamal Mayers

Florida: Bill Lindsay

Los Angeles: Derek Armstrong

Nashville: Cody Hodgson

New Jersey: Bruce Driver and Grant Marshall

Pittsburgh: Rocky Saganiuk

St. Louis: Jamie Rivers

Tampa: Mathieu Garon

Washington: Paul Mulvey

Others making significant contributions on the national level include Bryan Smolinski with the NHL and Mathieu Schneider and Rob Zepp through the NHLPA.

"We always worked with the NHL, but it got ramped up about 10 years ago," explained Kevin Erlenbach, USA Hockey's assistant executive director of membership. "We made a higher partnership. They fund our American Development Model programs. They fund grow-the-game initiatives.

"Ten years ago, you might have an NHL club that had a dedicated youth hockey person. Not everybody's got at least one. Some have five or six."

The NHL has been incredibly fortunate that many of its best teams in recent years have been based in large metropolitan areas where this rapid growth was possible. Since the introduction of the salary cap in 2005, Pittsburgh, Chicago, San Jose and Anaheim have won the most playoff games. Boston, Washington, New York (Rangers) and Los Angeles rank sixth, seventh, eighth and 11th.

That, combined with USA Hockey revamping what it was teaching kids, and the league working to get more kids into that new system, appears as though it will have ramifications for the makeup of the NHL in the very near future.

"You're seeing different areas of the country where kids no longer have to leave to go to a boarding school in New England or Minnesota to play at a high level," said Peter Robinson, the Capitals director of community relations who handles their youth hockey programs. "They can stay at home... We'd love to be able to see that homegrown talent (play for the Capitals eventually). We're seeing the level of skill rise (in youth hockey in D.C.) across the board, so I think it's coming."

Some former NHL players who grew up in hockey hotbeds in Western Canada or the northern U.S. said they've been blown away by how good the hockey has become where they are.

Johnson – whose son Ryan starred with the Anaheim Jr. Ducks program and is expected to go in the first two rounds of the draft next June – believes the only barriers to hockey growing faster in the U.S. are a lack of facilities and the costs to play. The more the NHL can help remove those obstacles, the more American kids will continue to flood into junior, college and professional programs.

"The impact the NHL has had has been great," Johnson said. "The more people you can get to try hockey for free, people get addicted to it. They try it for the first time and they want to do it again and again. So the NHL is doing it right."



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"It's absolutely amazing how much teaching is going on now at the youth level and how much people care about creating a great environment," May added. "And an environment kids can improve in.

"It's an incredible program. And it's hard for me to say, but it's surpassed what they're doing in Canada. The key to the program is we're finding ways to make it fun, be creative and have retention so these kids go from this ADM program where they're not playing games to where they want to continue to play hockey.

"It's an expensive sport. So the NHL teams doing this thing, providing this money to give kids free equipment, I think it's unbelievable. They're going to keep these kids. They're going to be involved in hockey. They're going to be hockey fans their whole life."

And, in some cases, more than just fans.

In the interest of providing a complete picture of enrollment growth, here is the full chart of all USA Hockey regions. Those with 20 percent or better increases are highlighted in yellow.

Godspeed to those 72 kids in Hawaii.

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1119980 Washington Capitals

How the Seattle expansion draft in 2021 might impact the Capitals (version 1.0)

By Chris Kuc Dec 7, 2018

There are some fairly major obstacles looming that make projecting the Capitals' protected list for the 2021 Seattle expansion draft difficult.

Namely, Nicklas Backstrom, Braden Holtby and Alex Ovechkin.

The veterans are the backbones of the Capitals, and all three will likely be seeking large – really large – salaries when their contracts expire following the 2019-20 season for Backstrom and Holtby, and following the 2020-21 season for Ovechkin.

What general manager Brian MacLellan does regarding those players will have a major impact on the list he will submit to the NHL come expansion time.

The rules for the draft are the same as those set in place for the Golden Knights' expansion draft:

Teams have the option of protecting seven forwards, three defensemen and one goalie; or eight skaters and one goalie.

Players with no-movement clauses have to be protected. First- and second-year pros along with unsigned draft picks are exempt from the expansion draft.

Teams must make a defenseman and two forwards available who played 40 games the previous season or 70 combined in the previous two seasons.

One goalie must be made available.

The Capitals, who went the 7-3-1 route last time, lost defenseman Nate Schmidt to the Golden Knights, at the time considered a devastating blow to the future of the blueline. The pain of that departure disappeared completely right around the time the Capitals captured the Stanley Cup.

While players who carry "No Movement" clauses must be protected, that currently does not come into play because no current Capitals have that clause in their contract.

Without further ado, here is a stab at what the Capitals might do in the summer of 2021:

Protected List

Forwards

Alex Ovechkin – The Capitals could go a couple of ways with The Great 8. They could sign the face of the franchise to an extension within the next couple of seasons or wait until his deal expires and then ink Ovechkin to a deal after the expansion draft. For this exercise, assume the captain is locked in and will be protected.

Nicklas Backstrom – The talented Swede could command a lot of money – think of an average salary around \$10 million – but the thinking here is that the Capitals will sign him (while hoping for a discount).

Evgeny Kuznetsov – The center is already one of the top players in the NHL and seems to be getting better. Kuznetsov isn't going anywhere.

Lars Eller – Eller is often overshadowed by the plethora of stars on the Capitals, but he is a vital cog who should only get better.

Jakub Vrana – Vrana is a stalwart among the top six and appears to be just touching his offensive potential.

Tom Wilson – Love him or hate him, the bruising Wilson is a part of the core, as evidenced by the six-year, \$31 million contract he signed last summer.

Andre Burakovsky – This is the most tenuous of the predicted protected players. The Swede appears to have a ton of potential but has not tapped into it since breaking into the league during the 2014-15 season. Make the leap and assume he will find his groove and stick around.

Defensemen

John Carlson – The puck-moving veteran figures to be a Norris Trophy candidate for the next few seasons. The Capitals will hang onto him.

Dmitry Orlov – The Russian is a steady presence along the blueline and is signed through the 2022-23 season at a reasonable annual cap hit of \$5.1 million.

Michal Kempny – Kempny carries a friendly cap hit of \$2.5 million through the 2021-22 season, making him a favorite to be protected.

Goaltender

Ilya Samsonov – The Capitals' top pick (22nd overall) in 2015 is the goaltender of the future.

Exemption

The Capitals' 2018 first-round pick (31st overall), talented defenseman Alexander Alexeyev, would be the most coveted, but he can't be selected.

Who does that leave for Seattle?

It's right around this time you might realize that Holtby and T.J. Oshie aren't among those listed above. Simply put, it will be very difficult financially for MacLellan and the Caps to keep Ovechkin, Backstrom and Holtby on the roster for the long term. As talented and integral as Holtby is to the Capitals, they will have Samsonov waiting in the wings and the massive spending will have to stop somewhere.

Now, on to Oshie. There isn't a player on the Capitals' roster more respected or as hard-working as Oshie. But the winger will be 35 by the time Seattle takes the ice, and Oshie, who plays a rough-and-tumble style, will likely be feeling every bump and bruise on his body. Oshie is signed through 2024-25 with an annual cap hit of \$5.75 million and that is a contract MacLellan could want to unload. Something else to consider, Oshie was raised in Everett, Wash., just north of Seattle, and would be an ideal captain for the expansion team.



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Teams only have to expose one defenseman under contract who played 40 or more games the prior season. Depending on the next deals they sign, that could leave Christian Djoos, Madison Bowey and Jonas Siegenthaler, all of whom are currently on the active roster. Lucas Johansen, the team's top pick (28th overall) in 2016, would also be attractive to an expansion team depending on his development.

Conclusion

While Oshie would make for the most headlines and create an ideal feel-good story in Seattle, the feeling here is that a young defenseman with some NHL experience might be more attractive to a first-year team. That could be a toss-up between Djoos, Bowey and Siegenthaler as the one headed to the Great Northwest.

Stay tuned.

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1119926 NHL

Hockey in Seattle will have implications elsewhere, including Tacoma

BY BILL VIRGIN

Seattle is getting a National Hockey League franchise beginning with the 2021-2022 season, the soon-to-be-former KeyArena is getting a \$800 million remake, and somewhere there's a group of Sonics fans wondering, "Wait a minute. Wasn't this supposed to be about basketball? How'd hockey get in here?"

Lots of people are doing a lot of wondering about a lot of questions, and not just what the remodeled venue at Seattle Center will be called. There's also the matter of what the team playing in the building will be called, whether that will be a more traditional name reflecting the region's heritage, or something more contemporary to capture the flavor of modern Seattle — the Insufferable Hipsters? The Self-Styled Progressives? The Amazonians?

The prospect of another big-ticket professional sports franchise in the region has loads of implications for business and consumer spending, traffic, other venues, even real estate. So let's get digging.

- We'll start with what this means for our own venue, the Tacoma Dome, coming off its own physical overhaul.

The timing couldn't be better. The T-Dome comes back online as an entertainment venue just as KeyArena shuts down for gutting and reconstruction (retaining the distinctive roof, a remnant of the building's start in life as the Washington state pavilion for the 1962 world's fair). That gives it a few years to build up a steady stream of concerts, one-off sports events and other shows.

Once the new Seattle building is open and competing with the Tacoma Dome, will it grab all of the big-name shows and events?

Not necessarily.

The Seattle arena won't have as many dates available because hockey will tie them up. Then there's the matter of access. The new Seattle venue isn't on light rail, isn't close to freeways, many of the Sonics-era parking lots are gone, and, oh by the way, they're tearing down the Alaskan Way viaduct. If traffic snarls prove too much of a discouragement for concertgoers to make the trek to Seattle from the south, that's one more argument in the T-Dome's favor (provided, of course, I-5 through Tacoma is functioning).

- The region's two pocket arenas currently hosting major-junior hockey — the Seattle Thunderbirds at the accesso ShoWare Center in Kent, the

Everett Silvertips at Angel of the Winds Arena — have a little more to worry about if having an NHL teams grabs all the attention of the region's hockey fans (some cities host both NHL and Western Hockey League teams, but that's in hockey-mad Canada).

But maybe not, for multiple reasons. One is the size of the building — Everett and Kent can survive if they find enough events that don't need or want a facility the size of Seattle's.

Another is the aforementioned matter of access.

Here's a third: the cost of a ticket. An upper-level, end-of-the-rink ticket for an upcoming home game for the Pittsburgh Penguins, a successful team in a smaller market, costs \$67, not including various fees. A Seattle Thunderbirds ticket for one end of the arena runs \$18 for adults.

As a hockey fan who has attended both NHL and WHL events (and even the old Tacoma Sabercats), your columnist can attest that you can get a pretty good show, and be a lot closer to the action, for that \$18 ducat. For many fans deciding how to allocate their discretionary income, they may root for Seattle's NHL team, but, when it comes to attending a game, what they can afford is the WHL's product.

- The interesting financial aspect of Seattle's new team will be corporate sponsorship and spending, from tickets and suites to advertising. Seattle certainly has the corporate base to support the hockey team, the Mariners, the Seahawks and the Sounders. Do those companies have the inclination to spend their dollars that way, especially in an era of tight budgets and uncertainty over the payback from marketing efforts?

- The nearly forgotten man in the latest news about KeyArena's reconstruction and the arrival of a hockey team is Chris Hansen. You remember, the guy who bought 13 acres of property in Seattle's Sodo district for a basketball arena only to be thwarted in his efforts.

If Hansen wanted to give the finger to the port, the Mariners and the city, he'd establish the world's largest rendering plant, or a gargantuan auto wrecking yard, or maybe a 24-hour pile-driving testing lab. More realistically, if Amazon or some other corporate client decides it wants more office space locally, he has a nice developable parcel just waiting.

That has real-estate implications all the way from Sodo to Tacoma. More new office space on the regional market could hinder efforts to add elsewhere. But more mixed-use encroachment on one of Seattle's remaining commercial-and-industrial districts could prompt some businesses to recognize the inevitable, costly trend and bail out for places like Tacoma and Pierce County.

News Tribune LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119992 Websites

The Athletic / Hockey's Top 40 under 40: The coaches, executives, scouts and negotiators shaping the NHL's future

By Craig Custance Dec 7, 2018

When the idea of compiling a list of the most impressive people in hockey under the age of 40 was presented to a few people in the game in an attempt to get candidates, they instead suggested something a bit less ambitious. Like, say, the top 10 under 40.

"Or maybe the top 65 under 65," joked a source.

As it turns out, if you eliminate current players from the equation, the NHL is still very much a place for those who are, let's say, very experienced.



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Take Lightning GM Julien BriseBois, for example. He's viewed as a rising young star in the GM ranks, now that he's taken the reins from Steve Yzerman. But it's taken him nearly two decades with NHL teams to get to this point. He's too old for this list. He's kind of like the band that hits No. 1 on the charts as an overnight sensation, only they've been together since 1998.

"Our sport doesn't move people up at any sort of rate," said one executive, explaining the challenging climb in hockey. "That's a factor. Hockey operations is still a small world."

For young men and women looking to break into the game, especially those who didn't play in the NHL, it's a challenge. There still aren't a ton of them around the game.

"You've got to earn your stripes," said another NHL team executive in his early 40s who fits this description.

But it's slowly changing. The growth and adoption of analytics in the game have helped the cause. Analysts who were hired in the past four or five years are rounding out their expertise inside the game and the smart bet is that a number of them work their way into management roles. Progressive teams looking to add women, like the New Jersey Devils, Arizona Coyotes and Toronto Maple Leafs, help the cause, too.

So we're not taking the shortcuts. We're not adding 45-year-olds. We're not cutting the list down to 10. With help from multiple sources around the NHL and plenty of conversations, the list below is a look at 40 people under 40 years old who have a bright future in the game.

Before we get too far, a few caveats:

1. No current players are allowed. That's cheating. Taylor Hall, if he so chooses, will one day run an NHL team. One GM suggested Marie-Philip Poulin needed to be on here as well. But we're removing players from the equation to highlight those already in the process of working up the ranks.

2. No media. Again, there are talented young men and women who are influential in the media world who will probably transition to the team side one day. That's already happened with writers who have written for The Athletic, and at some point a team will lure away Tyler Dellow. But to remove any accusations of navel gazing or promoting friends, we're going to eliminate everyone in the media from consideration. Sorry, Tyler!

3. Also, let's not sweat the order too much if that's OK. This is less a ranking and more a highlight of some young(ish) people doing cool things in hockey. If you think Wes Clark should be higher, you're probably right.

4. Lastly, if you're reading this and you feel like you or someone else should be on the list, I definitely agree. I'm not sure what happened, complete error on my part. Maybe I got your age wrong. Don't feel the need to text or call, we can both agree you deserved to be in here.

Alright, with that out of the way, let's get to it. And you'll NEVER guess who is No. 1:

1. Kyle Dubas, Maple Leafs GM – There has been a lot of digital ink spilled on the rapid ascension of the 33-year-old Dubas to one of the premier jobs in hockey. There won't be a rehashing of it here, but if you missed it, here are some highlights:

Jonas Siegel on Dubas' path to the top.

Katie Strang on what was on the line for Dubas during the William Nylander.

How those around the league viewed Dubas' work on the Nylander negotiations, from Pierre LeBrun.

And one out of network read, by Bruce Arthur: "Leafs GM Kyle Dubas turns the page on old-school hockey traditions"

Dubas and the Maple Leafs are set up to be a league power for the next decade. If it happens and he continues to successfully navigate the landmines that come with it, it's going to open doors for young executives

with a similar background. The NHL may be resistant to change, but it also loves to copy success.

Whatever you think of Dubas' success so far or how he handled the William Nylander talks, there's really one voice whose opinion matters most on this front and that's his boss. To Maple Leafs president Brendan Shanahan, the Nylander saga was valuable experience for his young GM.

"You have to go through it," Shanahan told The Athletic's Katie Strang at the NHL's board of governors meetings this week. "And now he's gone through it a couple of times. I've obviously had a lot of faith in Kyle for a long time, but that doesn't mean it's not challenging [for him] when you are going through it. ... He worked well with them [Nylander's camp] and we got our player back."

2. John Chayka, Coyotes GM – Still just 29 years old, Chayka continues to explore every avenue to make the Coyotes better in a challenging environment that looks like it will include another new owner. He's aggressive in making trades, even if 98 percent of them are with the Blackhawks, with a belief that incremental improvements add up significantly over time. When many people in the hockey world believed the Coyotes would eventually lose franchise defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Chayka got an extension done. He's also not afraid to make bold moves that reflect his convictions, like his selection of center Barret Hayton with the No. 5 overall pick in the 2018 draft.

Like Dubas, Chayka is progressive in his hiring. When the Coyotes hired Dawn Braid as their skating coach, it was the first full-time female coach hired in the NHL. In November, the Coyotes hired former Olympian Lyndsey Fry as a special advisor.

"Diversity of opinion just gives you more perspective and that limits your margin of error," Chayka said. "We have a very diverse group. We have multiple levels now of where we have a lot of interns and people working their way up, entry-level positions for people who don't have your classic traditional backgrounds."

3. Jeremy Colliton, Blackhawks head coach – Replacing a future Hall of Famer in Joel Quenneville and taking over a team that may be cycling out of its competitive window is a tough spot for the 33-year-old coach. It's been a bit of a rough start but to look beyond the standings, Blackhawks beat writer Scott Powers agreed to share three early observations of the Colliton era. Let's turn it over to Scott:

I've spent a lot of time the past couple years talking to the person who first hired Colliton to be a head coach in Sweden six seasons ago. What I heard multiple times was Colliton seemed to be older and wiser than his age. That rings true as I've gotten to cover him closely. He has a way about him in how he talks and acts that makes his age irrelevant. He's yet to prove it in the NHL, but his records elsewhere speak for themselves.

His former and current players rave about the way Colliton communicates. Especially players who are underperforming and may end up healthy scratches. He's very open about what players aren't doing and what they need to be doing. I think that's been refreshing for some players.

Colliton doesn't appear to get rattled. The Blackhawks are in a bad place right now and fans are directing the blame everywhere, including at him. So far, he's walked the perfect line between knowing it's going to take time to implement what he wants to do and understanding this season will slip away from the Blackhawks unless they begin to accumulate points. He's in a tough spot taking over for Quenneville and trying to convert a losing team into a winning one.

4. Dani Rylan, NWHL founder and commissioner – Rylan is the founder and commissioner of the first women's hockey league to pay its players a salary. Now, in its fourth season, the NWHL is being guided by Rylan through an era of expansion and, most likely, a move toward one women's league in North America, as addressed so well by The Athletic's Kaitlyn McGrath and Hailey Salvian.



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So let's pause this list momentarily for three quick questions with Rylan:

What advice would you give women trying to break into the hockey world and climb up the ranks?

"Sometimes you have to create opportunities yourself. When you see that there's an opening, to jump on it. That was one of the greatest things about the NWHL when we first launched. There was a demand for professional women's hockey in the U.S. and there was nothing to fill the demand."

Four seasons in, what has been the biggest challenge with the NWHL?

"The biggest challenge is proving the worth and proving the product. When you do something new, a lot of people are often worried. There are a lot of older folks involved in hockey and when you are disrupting the market, a lot of times people see that as a threat or see it as something that is too different to wrap your mind around. That's been the biggest challenge."

What have you learned most during this experience while building from the ground up?

"Patience. Patience is one of the biggest things I've learned. Often times we'll have big ideas and we'll want to see them come to life tomorrow. Patience as a startup, knowing the bigger sports world might not move as fast. ... Finding the patience and coming up with creative ideas and wanting to innovate. This past season, we hosted the Champions Cup and played the champions of Sweden's hockey league. It was an idea and we had to move to make it happen."

5. Sheldon Keefe, Toronto Marlies head coach – The 38-year-old Keefe has been very successful as the coach of the Marlies, although one NHL source suggested that he'd better win considering how much the Marlies spend on their AHL program compared to other teams.

The Athletic's Justin Bourne spent two seasons working with Keefe, so we'll hand the evaluation over to him: "I do think Sheldon could have success at the NHL level, for a number of reasons, but at the top of the list for me sits 'drive.' He wants that next level so bad, and wants success there, so he's driven to find every possible flaw that exists within his team. He puts in crazy hours evaluating what's been working, what hasn't, and why. 'I don't know' isn't a good answer enough for him, ever. 'Well, then let's find out.' In that way, he earns the respect of the players. He takes no nights off so the team is never underprepared. The players know that when they aren't properly prepared, the coach – putting in all that time with a wife and two kids – has every right to rip a strip off them. He leads by example in that way."

6. Steve Greeley, Sabres assistant GM – You're already seeing Greeley's name pop up as a candidate for NHL GM jobs and he's in that next wave of assistant GMs like New Jersey's Tom Fitzgerald and Columbus' Bill Zito who will eventually get their own team to run. According to multiple sources, he's already turned down one GM offer. He's still young but was mentioned more than anyone on this list when I was canvassing people to see who they would include. "He gets it," said one NHL executive, echoing the thoughts of many. "He's positioned himself really well. He's smart. He should be on your list for sure." Said another who recommended Greeley: "(Sabres GM) Jason Botterill has done a great job with hires there."

7. Dan Muse, Predators assistant coach – The 36-year-old Muse has been making a steady climb up the coaching ranks and now finds himself as a key contributor on a team that is poised to win a Stanley Cup. Muse is part of an impressive group of young coaches in the Predators organization who have earned a reputation as rising stars. I don't know how to evaluate this, but multiple people said that Predators video coach Lawrence Feloney is the best video coach in the league. And goalie coach Ben Vanderklok had the unenviable job of replacing Mitch Korn and by all accounts has done a great job.

Muse's path to the NHL is unique as a former D-III hockey player who broke into the world of coaching at 23 while also working as a paraprofessional in a special education class. His career is a great

example of what it takes to break into this world as an outsider, including these three keys:

Finding mentors – Every step of the way, Muse said he's had somebody generous with their time and willing to allow him to grow in his job. Florida Panthers skills coach Paul Vincent, Yale hockey coach Keith Allain, and the late Jim Johansson of USA Hockey are among the people Muse credits for assisting him in a big way. "I was given responsibilities that let my voice be heard," Muse said. "You need that in order to grow."

Taking the plunge – Muse took the LSATs and got into law school. He also thought about becoming a police officer. But he fell in love with coaching while an assistant coach at a Massachusetts prep school. Once he realized that's where his passion was, he went all in, ending his teaching career and putting law school on hold. He took a coaching job as an assistant coach at Williams College and started working his way up from there.

Constant self-improvement – "If you go a week and look back on your past week and say, 'I haven't gotten any better or learned anything new or haven't found new ways to help the players, you've failed in your past week,'" Muse said. "It's that constantly looking to make sure you improve and get better and work as hard as you can to have that. With coaches, it's the same thing we're asking of the players, to make sure we're getting better every day. That's the approach I've had."

8. David Carle, University of Denver head coach – One of the youngest head coaches in hockey, Carle replaced Jim Montgomery when Montgomery took the head job with the Dallas Stars. At 29 years old, he's already well thought of in NHL circles. "Very good coach," said one NHL executive. "Very smart. Very honest. What you see is what you get with this guy. He's going to have an opportunity to coach Denver for 30 years or the opportunity to coach in the NHL some day."

9. Meghan Chayka, co-founder, Stathletes, Inc. – In the last year, the analytics firm Stathletes has quietly continued to grow at an impressive rate, while consciously lowering their public profile. Part of the focus has been on scalability and that meant an increase in more league-centric deals, deals with agents and international deals.

"We wanted to diversify and continually improve," the 34-year-old Meghan Chayka said. "Just to create a more sustainable business."

Stathletes CEO and co-founder Neil Lane also deserves a spot on this list. He's been a crucial part of the growth and success of the firm.

"He's exceptional in operations," Meghan Chayka said. "He's a very strategic thinker and very good at executing ideas."

10. George Parros, NHL senior vice president of Player Safety – Parros, a former NHL enforcer, has an economics degree from Princeton and has quickly earned the respect of those in the game for his work in the NHL offices where he's tasked with handing out suspensions and other disciplinary action. This is a gig that is a very viable path to a GM job if that's what Parros, 38, wants to do next. Patrick Burke is another strong candidate in that department to transition to a management job.

"George is sharp. He's bright. He's courageous," Flames GM Brad Treliving said of Parros. "George isn't making decisions based on public opinion or what the noise out there might say. He believes strongly in what he believes in. I say that fully admitting that George and I haven't fully agreed on everything he's decided on. I value and respect his process and that he's very much going to do what he believes in. That's what you need there."

11. Chris Snow, Calgary Flames director of hockey analysis – Snow made the transition from journalism to NHL management in his early 20s when he was hired by the Minnesota Wild and in some ways has been a trailblazer for the non-traditional NHL executive. His focus has been on analytics, but the 37-year-old former NHL and MLB beat writer has rounded out his experience, now doing contracts, data analysis, roster construction and game strategy for the Flames.



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"There's this misnomer about him; I don't look at Chris as strictly a numbers guy," said Treliving. "Yes, he looks at the game from a different lens and does an excellent job putting together very deep, sophisticated analysis. The information we study is very, very relevant. ... That's where I like Chris, he's got the knowledge of what data is important and he can overlap that with how it can be really useful in making decisions. There's depth and width to him."

12. Judd Moldaver, Wasserman agent – Moldaver made waves in the NHL agent world this summer when he left CAA to join the agents at Bobby Orr's Hockey Group as part of Wasserman's new hockey division. It was big news, in large part, because Moldaver brought longtime client Auston Matthews with him. Moldaver, 37, formed a strong bond with Matthews and his family through the years and was part of the decision-making process to start Matthews' pro career in Switzerland, a decision that seems to have worked out just fine for the Maple Leafs star. Soon enough, Matthews' next contract will be one of the hottest topics in hockey, and Moldaver will be in the middle of it.

"I enjoy talking with Judd," said one NHL executive. "Your first 10 minutes talking, you're catching up and you talk about a million things and you're feeling like you're dealing with an agent you can trust. Which is exactly what he wants. And then he gets to business. He knows everyone at the rink and everyone gets along with him. You're taking his calls."

13. Dawson Sprigings, Kroenke Sports Entertainment analytics modeler – The Avalanche have to share Sprigings with the other Kroenke sports properties, but at 24 years old, the former college goalie has already made an impact on the hockey analytics world with his work developing hockey's WAR model. "He might be the smartest hockey acumen plus analysts person I've come across," said one NHL source.

14. Alexandra Mandrycky, Wild analyst – The Georgia Tech graduate, 27, drew notice in the hockey world with her work launching war-on-ice.com before being snapped up by the Wild under former GM Chuck Fletcher. She's now helping shape the Minnesota roster through her involvement in discussions regarding player evaluation for trades and signings.

"I have an opinion on these topics that management wants to hear," she told a Georgia Tech alumni publication. "I have a seat at the table, which is great."

One source speculated that they wouldn't be surprised to see Fletcher try and lure her to the Philadelphia Flyers now that he's the new GM there.

Another war-on-ice alum, Sam Ventura, is highly respected in the analytics community. He was hired by the Penguins as director of hockey research in 2017. "He's really bright," said one source. "He really hones his craft."

15. Andrew C. Thomas, Wild lead hockey researcher – Thomas, 37, co-founded war-on-ice.com. He also has a Ph.D. in statistics from Harvard. But let's be honest, the best thing he's ever done is appear on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire."

For the record, Wild analyst Andrew Thomas got this answer correct.

16. Jiri Fischer, Red Wings director of player evaluation – After nearly a decade of working in player development with the Red Wings, Fischer has shifted to his current position where he's focused on player evaluation and acquisition. For the Red Wings, Fischer runs point on recruiting free agents via college or Europe, a valuable way to add talent in a cap system. He also has worked his way up the Czech Republic management depth chart, where he was GM of the Czech team at the World Championships. It's clear his focus has shifted to one with management aspirations.

"When I was in player development, I think it opens the doors to coaching and management," Fischer said. "I chose the management side. ... It's a big difference in trying to build something long term vs. coaching and winning today. I chose the management route where I really enjoy the stability, the long-term focus. Stability only comes from building towards something in long-term success."

Dan Cleary, who replaced Fischer in player development, has been great in modernizing the way the Red Wings develop prospects while working closely with Shawn Horcoff. Cleary turns 40 this month.

17. Josh Flynn, Blue Jackets director of hockey administration – Flynn, 36, does contracts, is in charge of analytics for Columbus and is an expert on all things salary cap. But he's also a guy you'll see on the road scouting in rinks, with his opinion valued on the scouting side as well.

"He brings in a lot of different aspects," said Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen. "He keeps all the numbers in order and studies all the other teams and their cap situations. He does planning for us – one year, three years, seven years – with our structure and cap situation. He does a lot of different things."

The Blue Jackets also have a rising talent in assistant director of amateur scouting Chris Morehouse.

"He's done a good job," Kekalainen said of his 31-year-old scouting director. "Everybody criticized me and our scouts about taking (Pierre-Luc) Dubois (No. 3 overall in 2016). I don't think they are anymore. Chris and Ville Siren did a great job on that."

18. Rod Braceful, assistant director of player personnel for USA Hockey NTDP – Braceful's current job tasks him with recruiting and evaluating talent for USA Hockey's national development team in Plymouth, Mich., but those who know him suggest this is just a stop on a path that will lead to much greater heights. He was previously the director of scouting for the Muskegon Lumberjacks before being hired by USA Hockey in October.

"It's been awesome to be around Rod," said John Wroblewski, head coach of the NTDP U18 team. "My favorite thing about Rod is he has a quiet confidence about him. I haven't been in a room with him where he's felt the need to control it but at the same time, he's never intimidated by any room. That's a unique commodity, especially for someone striving to be a manager in the NHL."

19. Kevin Westgarth, NHL vice president of business development and international affairs – The NHL has ambitious expectations for growth overseas and Westgarth, 34, will have a big hand in that planning. But he's also been a big part of helping grow the college game in the U.S. Right now, the former NHL winger is the main contact from the NHL on the feasibility study that is looking to bring hockey to the University of Illinois. In October, he visited Marquette, Michigan, while working on a feasibility study to explore adding Division 1 women's hockey to Northern Michigan.

"He couldn't be a better partner," said one college hockey source of the Princeton-educated Westgarth.

20- 23. Darryl Metcalf, Cam Charron, Judy Cohen and Bruce Peter, Maple Leafs Research and Development – Dubas has collected quite the collection of minds in assembling this next generation powerhouse with Toronto's Hockey Research and Development team. Metcalf ran the popular website Extra Skater and has taken what he started there and increased it dramatically by implementing ideas from the talent around him.

Said an NHL team executive of the Maple Leafs' R&D crew: "I think they do a great job. Part of what Kyle (Dubas) drove there for a couple years when he was an AGM was the drafting aspect of it. They were heavily involved with draft pick valuation, why the trade-down strategy works, where to select guys from. What they did was not only draft the kids but indoctrinated them in a culture with the Marlies. Those guys have constant attention and [Toronto has] the money to do it."

24. John Wroblewski, U.S. NTDP U-18 head coach – Wroblewski is the head coach of one of the most talented teams to ever come through the U.S. program, led by top prospect Jack Hughes. Hughes, according to his dad, loves playing for Wroblewski.



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"Wrobo wants to possess (the puck) and he wants to attack off the rush," Jim Hughes said. "When they have it, they want to keep it. They play the modern day game."

The USNTDP has long been a springboard for coaches into the NHL but Wroblewski said he's not looking too far ahead at this point.

"There's a massive responsibility with Jim Johansson passing away last year to make sure USA Hockey and the NTDP is always a functioning entity that continues to push the envelope with the development of hockey," said Wroblewski, 37. "There's no hurry to be leaving right now."

25. Rachel Doerrie, Devils player information and video analyst – Doerrie has aspirations of becoming the NHL's first woman NHL GM and at the age of 22 has already quickly grown her résumé with stops in the OHL (Sudbury video coach), Hockey Canada, The Athletic (video analysis of prospects) and now the Devils. She's strong on strategy and works closely with the Devils coaching staff, management and scouting staff on a daily basis. She's also responsible for building out the Devils amateur draft video profiles.

This Laurentian University Sports Administration Q and A with Doerrie sheds light on those responsibilities: "I will create portions of reports for upcoming games, update our entry draft database, cut video on players (current/prospect/free agents/draft eligible), and push information out to necessary departments regarding the team (stats/reports). I also do studies for the coaches or management, by request. These studies go in-depth on the request and I present a conclusion/recommendation with a statistical report and video."

Devils GM Ray Shero has built a collection of smart, young talent in his front office that also includes the 32-year-old Scott Harris and player information and video assistant Kate Madigan.

26. Andrew Wilson, senior director at the NHL – Wilson, 35, is part of a team at the NHL's Central Registry that executives around the league rely on heavily. He helps train NHL executives on cap compliance, CBA rules and the minutiae of running a team. There are layers to every transaction made in the NHL and Wilson is part of the group that makes sure they all fall within the rules.

He was promoted to replace Brandon Pridham, when Pridham left the NHL to join the Maple Leafs. Wilson will no doubt get that opportunity if that's something he's interested in doing.

"He is absolutely brilliant," texted one NHL assistant GM. "All teams contact him daily about CBA and cap issues."

27. Wes Clark, Maple Leafs assistant director of player personnel – An assessment from an executive who knows Clark, 35, well: "I love him. He's got a good eye for talent. He's not overly biased towards any one aspect of the player. The best part about Wes is he has an opinion and he'll stick to it. I really respect his opinion on guys. He's very confident in the type of players he likes and he's a constant learner. He's always the guy walking around with a book, like Ray Dalio's "Principles" or "Grit" or "The Growth Mindset." He's always looking to break through in some other area."

28. Laura Keegan, CAA general counsel and player agent – The 38-year-old Keegan left the baseball division at Octagon to join CAA, where she works on negotiating and drafting endorsement agreements, sponsorships, and licensing partners among other responsibilities for an agency that represents players like Sidney Crosby, John Tavares and Jonathan Toews.

"Laura has something that a lot of younger lawyers don't have, which is humility. She's very smart. She works very hard but she's not trying to prove herself every day," said CAA agent Jim Nice. "She's very confident in her abilities without coming off as cocky. She has a really good relationship with clients and with brands she deals with. She's not just reviewing contracts, she has a marketing mentality. She's not just reviewing deal points, she's helping make the deal happen. For someone in that legal counsel role, it's pretty rare."

29. Jay Leach, Providence Bruins head coach – In his first season behind the bench in Providence, Leach guided the Bruins to 95 points. They're right in the playoff mix again this season and it's probably not all that long until his name starts surfacing for NHL jobs.

"One of the things I respect about Jay is he's worked his way up to Providence," said one NHL source about the former NHL defenseman. "He's worked for multiple teams. Jay's a coach who has some presence. You can see the Providence players care about what he thinks."

The Bruins also have an executive in Evan Gold, their director of legal affairs for hockey operations, who is highly considered by those who know him well. The 38-year-old Gold advises Bruins GM Don Sweeney on a bit of everything, from salary cap compliance to contract negotiations. He has both law and MBA degrees from the University of Toronto and joined the Bruins after spending nearly a decade with the Capitals. "He's one of the sharpest minds out there," said one source.

30. Jack Han, Maple Leafs hockey operations assistant – We didn't want to lump Han in with the Research and Development crew because his strength lies on the strategy side. Read a few of his posts in The Athletic archives and you get a sense of just how good an eye he has when it comes to working with players.

"I think he has a big-time future," said one NHL source who knows him well. "I think Jack would make a great coach. That's where his future is."

31. Arik Parnass, Colorado Avalanche analyst – Before he was hired by the Avalanche in 2016, Parnass spent a lot of time devoted to special teams and the analytics that drive success in that area of the game. "He works his ass off," said one NHL source of Parnass, 26.

32. Doug Wilson Jr., Sharks director of scouting – On a list filled with people who have broken into the game in non-traditional ways, it would be easy to label Wilson as the opposite – someone whose family connections helped him land a job in a league with a long history of those kind of hires. He realizes that.

"I'm not ignorant, I have to prove myself even more because I'm Doug Wilson Jr.," he told The Athletic's Kevin Kurz when speaking on that topic. "That, I'm not too bothered by; it just means that I have to do more."

His father is, of course, the GM of the Sharks but those in the organization will tell you he's had nothing handed to him. Those outside San Jose have been won over by his drive and work ethic.

"I'm a big fan," said an NHL executive. "The tricky thing for Dougie is making sure he keeps building his network and establishing himself so he's not just Doug Wilson's kid. I think his work over the last 3-5 years has done that. He's a worker. You see him all the time. And as a personality, you want to work with the guy."

33. Mike Van Ryn, St. Louis Blues assistant coach – Since retiring from the NHL after the 2008-09 season, Van Ryn has quickly gathered a wide range of hockey coaching experience. He was an OHL head coach (Kitchener) and won a division title as an AHL head coach in Tucson. The 39-year-old is still close enough to his playing days that players really appreciate his opinions on today's game.

"He's played recently and understands a lot," said Blues center Ryan O'Reilly. "He's intelligent. And his little details on the PK – he just knows a lot. It's nice to be around and it helps a lot. Because he knows so many players in the league really well, he can see a lot and understand tendencies."

Ryan Miller, who is the Blues director of hockey operations, is another young executive who is well respected in league circles.

34. Noelle Needham, Maple Leafs amateur scout – We'll grant you that this list is Maple Leafs heavy but that's an indication of what Shanahan and Dubas are doing in casting a wide net to get a diverse group of people and thought processes into the organization. Perhaps nobody reflects that more than Needham. She played at Minnesota State, ran the elite training facility Legend Hockey and then became just the third



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woman to get an NHL scouting job when the Maple Leafs hired her in August.

During the post-hiring conference call, Dubas summed up his philosophy: "Research shows that the more diverse your organization the better your decision-making, the better your operation, in general. I think that if you're only hiring white males — and I'm saying that as a white male — you're probably leaving a lot on the table in terms of where your organization (is going) and how it can think, and how it can evolve and develop."

35. Brandon Naurato, Red Wings player development consultant — Naurato is the perfect mix of video, analytics and former player who is experienced enough to navigate effectively in all three worlds. After playing hockey for the University of Michigan and three seasons professionally, the 33-year-old founded the Detroit branch of Total Package Hockey, a company focused on elite hockey training. Read his work, like this post for The Athletic last spring, and you understand his mind. Work with him as a player, and the appreciation is even higher.

"(Naurato is) the most knowledgeable guy I have ever met in hockey," Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski told The Athletic's Tom Reed. "I am starting to realize that more than ever."

36. Marina Carpenter, Coyotes general counsel — Carpenter manages contracts, risk assessment and legal matters for the Coyotes and Chayka highlighted her as someone he relies on for unique solutions to the problems that tend to come up for the franchise. "She's always got a lot on her plate, she touches a lot of different areas of the organization," Chayka said. "She's really helpful on the hockey side when we need her here. She has a good strategic mind for finding creative solutions to complex problems. She's a good brain to pick."

37. Jason McCrimmon, head coach, owner of USPHL Motor City Hawks — It's fair to say it's a stretch to include a Tier III junior coach on this list largely populated by people already employed by NHL teams. But in a league that's actively looking to get more diverse, McCrimmon is a candidate for promotion in the sport if he's open to leaving the work he's building in Detroit.

McCrimmon, 35, played hockey professionally in Europe and now coaches and trains elite players in the Detroit area. He's also the founder of the Detroit Ice Dreams Youth Hockey Association, a non-profit group charged with providing underrepresented communities better access to hockey.

"I want to expand the Motor City Hawks as well as expand our non-profit Ice Dreams," McCrimmon told the Color of Hockey blog. "Whatever comes from there, if I get something big that I can't turn down we'll cross that bridge when it happens."

38. Cam Lawrence, Florida Panthers amateur scouting consultant — What the Panthers appreciate about Lawrence is that he synthesizes numbers in a way graphically that really helps present the value of a player clearly to the front office. His focus is primarily on the amateur side, where he'll compare historical data in the leagues where draft eligible players are competing to try and find similar production between draft eligible prospects and those currently in the NHL. He and amateur scouting consultant Josh Weissbock complement the traditional amateur scouts in the organizations.

39. Max Giese, Jets amateur scout — He was hired by the Jets in 2012 and Winnipeg has done a great job building through the draft, especially dipping into the U.S. to stock their system. Their success drafting Americans has bolstered Giese's reputation, since that's his area of focus.

One NHL source pointed to the Jets selection of defenseman Dylan Samberg with the No. 43 pick in 2017, grabbing him from Hermantown High School in Minnesota, as an example of a draft selection with a strong Giese influence. The NHL executive really likes the young defenseman.

"That was not an easy pick. He's drafting for a Canadian team," he said. "There are a lot of eyes on Max when that pick is made, good or bad."

40. Dustin Walsh, Vegas Golden Knights hockey operations analyst — An economics major from Dartmouth, the 27-year-old Walsh was hired in August of 2017 by the Golden Knights as an analyst. "He's really sharp," said one NHL source. "I could see him developing into a manager one day. He does everything." Walsh was a sixth-round pick by the Montreal Canadiens, giving him the mix of playing experience and brainpower that will serve him well as he works his way up in the game. "He has pedigree," said another source.

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The Athletic / The NHL's best young skaters all have something in common — how they tie their skates

By Jordan Samuels-Thomas Dec 7, 2018

A little over a month ago I hopped on a podcast with The Athletic's Craig Custance where we discussed a variety of topics including my hockey journey, religion, journalism and the talent that has flooded today's game. Today's players look different. The way they're built is different. The way they think is different.

I've been able to witness the progression of today's player first-hand throughout my professional career. I remember how different rookie camp looked after I was drafted in 2009, compared to rookie camp with the Buffalo Sabres in 2014. The highly drafted players that attended both camps were all talented and brought something to the table. But in terms of their physical build, creativity, and the ways in which they thought the game, there was a noticeable difference between the '09 rookies and the '14 rookies.

In one of my favorite clips from the 2015-16 season, Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel went head-to-head after being the top two picks in the 2015 draft. In overtime, Eichel picks up the puck just inside his D-zone and uses his long-stride to get to the middle of the ice in an effort to create space for himself. Eichel's push to the middle baits Oilers defenseman Andrej Sekera into taking a bad angle. This allows Eichel to cutback, forcing a recovering Sekera to lunge at Eichel. Reading Sekera's body position, Eichel uses his quick hands and edge work to set up a spin-o-rama chance that misses the net, setting the stage for...

McDavid picking the puck up at about the same spot where Eichel had moments earlier. Using a different approach than Eichel, McDavid blazes up the right side wall toward Rasmus Ristolainen, who initially has a good gap on McDavid. With one quick step toward the middle of the ice at the blueline and one handle of the puck with a wide push toward the boards, McDavid draws Ristolainen off balance just enough to give him a lane to the net to score the OT-winner.

That entire play was a window into the future of the NHL. When I first watched it, the play filled me with so much excitement, but now that kind of speed, creativity and individual effort seems to happen almost every night.

There's a lot that goes into what makes the players of today so special and dynamic. The Athletic's Sean Gordon wrote on the growth of skills coach, and Justin Bourne talked about the evolution of sticks and the technology that powers them. But it wasn't until I had a conversation with friend and former teammate Akim Aliu that I discovered a more subtle and hard to notice development in some of today's elite players.

The way top-end NHLers tie their skates.



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Aliu first shared this nugget of information with me and mentioned McDavid, Eichel and Johnny Gaudreau. They are Exhibit A to the NHL's elite who do not use their top eyelet on their skates. In other words, they don't tie their skates all the way up.

It turns out that there was something to this idea. But to get a better understanding as to why these players consciously or unconsciously tie their skates the way they do, I needed some help.

I called Dr. Kelly Lockwood, associate professor of kinesiology at Brock University. Dr. Lockwood is an expert on sports biomechanics, exercise training and coaching education. She also specializes in skating equipment and serves as a consultant, most notably to Canada's Olympic figure skating and speed skating teams, Bauer, CCM, almost every NHL equipment manager and more.

I posed to her the same question that had dragged me down the rabbit hole: Why do you see a lot of the NHL's fastest skaters tie their skates without lacing the top eyelet?

She asked for some names and I joyfully shared my hours of recon and discovery with her.

My list:

McDavid, Eichel, Gaudreau, Auston Matthews, Brady Tkachuk, Shayne Gostisbehere, Mathew Barzal, Taylor Hall (second eyelet untied instead of top), Jason Zucker, Mark Scheifele, Anthony Duclair, Morgan Rielly.

The players on this list have more than just speed in common. The first thing that jumped out to both Dr. Lockwood and I was just how young these players are, with the majority being under-25.

"A lot of young players find it cool to leave the top lace unlocked in order to have the tongues flop down on the skates," Dr. Lockwood said.

I laughed because I remember that's originally why I started skating with my top eyelets undone. This was an attempt to fit in and be cool with my new varsity teammates during my freshman year at Canterbury prep. I skated that way until four years ago when I made the switch from the Reebok Pumps to VH/True.

"I think a lot of coaches at the youth level realize that players aren't getting enough forward ankle and knee bend when they're skating and use untying the top eyelet as a quick fix to achieve the forward flexion that is important for a good stride." Dr. Lockwood said. "You want to feel like your weight is on the balls of your feet when you're skating and not the heel. Leaving the top eyelet untied can give the player the feeling of a forward pitch, which is present in all the best skaters."

And there it was, the answer to my question: Not tying the top eyelet is key for speed and NHL success. (Not quite, actually. Though the real answer was right in front of me, which we'll get to in a bit.)

Besides trying to look cool, what prompted this generation of young players to start tying their skates like this? Dr. Lockwood was able to provide some perspective on this by exploring the composition of skates today, versus 20 years ago.

"If you look at the skates of the early '90s almost all of them were made out of leather and materials that had some give. So you could tie those old skates as tight as you want and still achieve getting to the balls of your feet to skate. The players of that time were generally larger and playing at a heavier weight than the players do today. So their size also contributed to them creating the force needed for the leather boot to give."

Today's skates are mainly made of carbon fiber that has little to no give. Combine that stiff boot with the how much lighter the players are today and it makes it very hard to achieve the forward flexion required in a successful stride. That need for help in creating forward flexion is likely why you see the players above tying their skates the way they do.

However, skating with the top eyelet undone isn't the only way to achieve the forward pitch necessary to get a skater on their toes to have a

biomechanically sound stride. In fact, if not done correctly or done using a skate that is not properly fitted to a player's foot, skating with the top eyelet undone can cause more harm than good.

Pat Malloy, a high-performance consultant to NHL players, teams and agencies, agreed on the importance of a properly fitted skate.

"I don't have a hard rule on eyelets, but if guys are wearing the right skates and get into activated stance with deep knee bend with top eyelet then I'm good either way. For me, the priority is being able to get into the stance that allows them to best access their strength."

Claude Giroux, Tyler Toffoli, Ryan Spooner and the Sabres are just a few of Malloy's NHL clientele.

"I want to make sure there's no confusion," Dr. Lockwood said emphatically in regards to McDavid, who she's worked with in the past. "Conner's skating is mechanically untouchable. He's extremely well balanced and a long-levered kid who, based on his mechanics, would be a great skater in skates with no laces."

Dr. Lockwood said while leaving the top eyelet undone can help players find forward flexion, it can also hurt a player's lateral stability, which occurs when the ankle experiences a lack of support. Stiffer boots like the ones common today won't allow the ankle to flop side-to-side. However, when you take away the top eyelet on a boot that is not properly fitted to a player's foot, you compromise that player's lateral stability, which causes what Dr. Lockwood calls an "energy leak."

An "energy leak" can happen any number of ways and believe it or not, it happens to players at all levels, including the NHL. The most common cause of an "energy leak" comes from a skate that is simply not properly fitted.

"If you put your foot into the boot of the skate and the boot doesn't hold the foot in place when you lift your heel. That's a leak of energy."

Obviously I tried this out the next time I laced up my skates and was happy to find that my custom True skates did, in fact, fit me properly.

For those who have played hockey you might be familiar with the term and unpleasant site of a "Bauer Bump," a frictional injury that shows itself in a form of a bump that develops over time for players whose skates don't fit them properly and another example of an "energy leak." It shouldn't hurt to skate.

You might remember the Reebok Pump. One of my all-time favorite pair of skates mainly because you could get them in white. The pump air chamber in the skate was developed to reduce friction on the heel that was prevalent in other skates on the market. That skate also featured "lace lock" technology that we'll touch on later.

Another frictional injury for those who spend a lot of time in skates is the dreaded lace bite, which is a result of a player tying their skates too tight near the ankles in the hopes of increased stability. Once again, a proper skate sizing can almost always help rid these problems.

Dr. Lockwood has worked with equipment managers all over the NHL to help players with these exact problems.

"The summer is the time to make these type of tweaks to your equipment because once the season starts, players don't want to mess with their setup or it's too late to fix any frictional issues," she said.

Dr. Lockwood's season starts once the hockey season ends. She works with numerous professional players on all aspects of their game, ranging from power skating, to training, to equipment adjustments and even skate sharpening.

Her work often circles back to the idea of the forward pitch and having the player's weight placed on the balls of their feet. A feeling that a lot of players are looking for consciously or unconsciously. You want to feel good when you skate and have the ability to react immediately.

And while leaving the top eyelet untied or using lace extenders are a couple ways to somewhat achieve that desired feeling, there are some



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better ways to achieve that feeling with a little help from your local skate shop.

Players can first try getting their skates sharpened with a forward pitch. Ask your local skate sharpener to take a little off the toe next time you get your skates sharpened.

If that's not enough, you can try using a skate lift, which can be placed between the plastic holder and the boot of the skate or under the heels of your insoles (a good place to start if you're not committed to the idea). Theoretically, you can make them as large as you want, but I'd start with nothing more than 1/8 of an inch.

I started skating with a lift about a year ago and it's made a big difference in my skating. I have a lift both attached to my boot and under my insole because it's hard for me to get to the balls of my feet due to my pancake-flat feet.

Circling back to the lace-lock systems, among the research Dr. Lockwood has been working on (others include studies on eyelet extenders, which gives players more ankle room and also a study on how to achieve quicker starts) is a more updated version of the Reebok technology for the future. Her current subjects are Olympic hopeful speed skaters and her system of the future features two separate lacing systems (one for the bottom portion of the skate and another for the area around the ankle).

Currently, if you want the ankle of your skate to feel tight you have to tie the whole skate tight to get the desired tension at the ankle. Her new innovation allows players to tie their skates with different tightness throughout to find the most comfortable and efficient fit for them.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

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The Athletic / Hockey's most expensive position is trying to become more accessible

By Cat Silverman Dec 7, 2018

Ice hockey is an expensive sport. No matter how you try to shake it out, the game costs money.

Casual street hockey only requires a stick and a rubber ball, but the costs skyrocket the minute a kid steps onto the ice.

Skates aren't cheap, nor is ice time — and to fully outfit a player in the proper safety gear to get into the game, parents feel the financial strain almost immediately.

Add in league costs, and it's not hard to see why the majority of children in lower socioeconomic areas have no way to get started in the game. While a 2017 survey by Utah State University estimated that American families spend just under \$2,300 per child on youth sports every year, the average ice hockey family spends over \$7,000. Only lacrosse, on average, costs families more.

The NHL is working to change that, providing equipment and rink access to kids and demographics that never had opportunities before. But despite the growing numbers of low-income programs from coast to coast, one position, in particular, remains out of reach for most kids without families full of disposable income: Goaltending

There are lessons, which don't come cheap. The gear is more complex and more expensive. To buy a kid a pair of player shin pads, a parent needs to shell out around \$30; to purchase goalie pads alone, that cost goes up more than 400 percent, at the very least. For the fanciest sets, a

goaltender dead-set on something custom can expect to shell out four figures.

Even for families that have the financial means to spend their weekends shivering at the rink, there's a common mantra: My kid won't play goal. There's no way we can afford it.

Arizona Coyotes director of hockey development Matt Shott recognized that when he looked out at the Little Howlers program, which helps families get their kids on the ice at a reasonable cost while still getting the kids in safe, quality gear.

The Little Howlers program runs each family \$150 per child, starting with kids as young as 5 and capping the age limit at 9.

Each participant gets six one-hour skating sessions, with some of the participating rinks offering free access to any public skate sessions during the six-week session. They also get outfitted in head-to-toe gear, all brand new and for them to keep. From helmets and sticks to skates, pads, jerseys and pants, each participant is properly fitted for gear by PURE Hockey. The company's representatives also teach parents how to properly dress their skaters. At the end of the program, they've learned some basic skating and hockey skills, while also taking home a full set of new, properly-fitted equipment.

Little Howlers program (Courtesy Arizona Coyotes)

The program is a roaring success. Arizona became one of the fastest-growing states for youth hockey participation, and a large part of that came from the accessible introduction being subsidized by the Valley of the Sun's NHL club.

While the number of skaters skyrocketed, Shott noticed that goaltending still remained out of reach for too many kids. The Little Howlers all got to go home with player equipment, but none got a chance to try out goaltending — and for the families who use the Little Howlers program as a lifeline, that effectively limited the opportunity to try out the position.

The plan, looking forward, is to introduce a sibling program to the Little Howlers exclusively for "Little Tendys."

Negotiations are still under way to get the finalized pricing for the goaltending equipment, but the concept for the program's expansion is expected to be similar to what Little Howlers currently provides for skaters.

"The goal is to provide the kids with simple, basic instruction and rental equipment so they can try out the position," Shott explained. "Ultimately, the goal is to give them pads at a heavy discount if they sign up for the next step as a goalie."

Some youth programs still rotate players in the net, keeping a team set of loaner gear for that week's goaltender to wear in the game.

That's the standard in other nations. Just ask participants of Finland's hockey development system, where youth players don't participate in position-specific play until age 10 and are provided club-owned goaltending gear to use at no cost up until that point.

For many in North America, though, there's a push to specialize as early as possible. In a hyper-competitive generation of parenting, athletics has become a pathway to college — or beyond — for some children starting in grade school.

Kids show up to play for teams already fully outfitted in the nicest gear their parents can afford, insisting on full-time netminding duty when they're as young as 8 years old. That leaves the kids whose parents can't afford the most expensive position without an outlet to ever give it a shot.

With the Little Tendys concept, Shott hopes that the kids unable to afford their own equipment can give the position a shot anyway. After all, talent is limited to no one economic class.

"We want to make sure there is never a team without a goalie," Shott summarized.



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"We want to make sure there is never a kid who is interested in playing goalie, but not able to try due to the heavy cost burden that the position can be."

While programs like these are being developed, there's a simultaneous push to make the position more affordable from gear companies themselves.

In 2008, Bauer Hockey purchased a goaltending equipment company called Mission-ITECH.

The goal was to use the technology that ITECH created to build a new line of goaltending gear.

Bauer created a simplistic line of beginner safety gear for kids, called the Prodigy line. Designed to make equipment easy to use for new hockey parents and young players alike, it offered extra protection and easy-to-follow instructions in order to streamline the process of getting ready for games.

The line was extended to goaltending equipment, specifically offering pads that even the least hockey-savvy parent couldn't mess up.

Each pad is clearly labeled with the leg it belongs on, helping kids avoid the long-honored tradition of skating out for the first time with the pad rolls on the inside and the knee landings facing out. Replacing the old complex system every youth goalie of generations past remembers was a simple, three-strap system; the buckles of old were replaced with velcro, each strap labeled with numerical steps to make sure parents fit the pads on correctly. The toe tie is simple and easy to use, and the extra strappings and modifications seen on the fanciest sets are eliminated to avoid confusion.

According to Phoenix area Bauer representative Dan Kennedy, the pads were designed to make sure anyone could put them on, and to make sure they didn't take more than a few moments to get both in and out of.

"If you pick them up, they're so lightweight that they almost feel like you're just holding a shin pad," he explained.

"They're designed so even if a parent has never played hockey before, they can get their goalie dressed without any problems, and so the goalie can even do it themselves without much help."

And if a team wants to rotate goalies during the game? Kennedy said the pads were designed to take so little effort to remove that goalies can switch in and out as often as they want during the game.

The Prodigy leg pads will run parents \$149.99 USD at retail price, with the line's glove and blocker costing \$79 and \$69, respectively. CCM's YFlex pads, which are designed with the similarly-easy velcro strapping system (but without the step-by-step instructions for parents), are similarly priced.

It's still pricey, but a step in the right direction; with Kennedy explaining that youth goalies won't face hard enough shots to need specific goalie pants or masks, the only position-specific gear a goalie truly needs will cost a parent just under \$300 altogether.

Kennedy said the company designed a youth-specific mask as well, but did so purely to respond to customer demand. It's not likely an eight-year-old can shoot hard enough to even get the puck off the ice, much less at a speed to justify the über-expensive headgear seen on the pros.

The real focus, he said, was in making sure that the gear a goaltender can't play without was accessible to a broader group.

The obstacle to getting that kind of gear for new goalies at a similarly-low cost to the Little Howlers gear comes both from the cost of the gear at retail and the lack of ability to order it in bulk. Even with the ongoing decrease in pricing on the youth equipment, the pads themselves still cost more retail than the entire player sets cost.

Randy Exelby once played backup for Patrick Roy. Now, he's the owner of Behind the Mask, a series of hockey equipment shops in the greater Phoenix Metro area.

"When you buy the player equipment, you can buy more sets in bulk," he pointed out.

"With goalie stuff, it's a lot harder volume-wise. You can probably pick up four or five complete player sets for every goalie set, price-wise. You can put the goalies in regular hockey pants and helmets, but it's still harder to get the cost down even with bigger orders."

As difficult as it may be, it's certainly not impossible. And even putting aside the inherent bias every member of the goalie fraternity has for the position, Exelby stressed how important it is to get more kids in the net as early as possible.

"Every kid should really have the chance to give it a try," he insisted. "More kids need the opportunity to try it out. You never know how many kids could really want to play and aren't getting the chance, just because it's so expensive."

And the added benefit of giving everyone a chance to play back? To Exelby, every new player who gives goaltending a shot increases the level of empathy seen across the game as a whole.

"It teaches every kid what they're missing about the position," he said.

Parents, he alluded, even more so than the kids themselves.

"Every parent should have to be a goalie parent to see what it feels like, the way you feel about how your kid is playing," Exelby said.

More than the empathy, though, it's about giving everyone the same opportunity.

"There's I don't even know how many kids out there who want to be goalies and can't even get the chance to try it out." Exelby paused for a second. "If there's a way to get them in the gear, that'll be huge."

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The Athletic / How the next generation of arenas will flip the script, bringing the outside in and the inside out

By John Vogl Dec 7, 2018

At their best, arenas electrify and magnetize. They draw in fans and build up neighborhoods.

Brick restaurants bloomed alongside Columbus' building. A keg-filled brewery is on one side of Buffalo's arena, curling and bumper cars on the other. While celebrities sit courtside in Los Angeles, the courtyard bustles with bowlers, sneakerheads and food lovers.

In the middle of all this activity is a dark hole – the arena itself.

Sure, for 100 nights a year or so, it's the unquestioned hub that brings in 20,000 people. But for the other two-thirds of the year, it sits vacant, a cold, mammoth structure that is locked away from the public.

"On non-game days, their walls are solid," said Rashed Singaby, senior project designer for arena-builder HOK. "You walk around an arena and it's almost like this isolated island. Instead of it being able to act as a catalyst for its urban surroundings, it was almost hurting the urban environment."

The next generation of arenas will flip the script, bringing the outside in and the inside out. It's already happening in Las Vegas and Detroit, where patios overlook the Strip and themed restaurants beckon from breakfast to last call.



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And on game days, the new buildings will be the place to be. It's not just about being somewhere anymore, it's about telling people you're there. Arenas will sizzle with communal spaces, lightning-fast data, holographic replays, guest chefs, augmented reality, and upscale amenities for suite-holders and first-time ticket buyers.

"More and more people are coming for that social, all-inclusive experience," said Darryl Benge, executive vice president and arena general manager of the Tampa Bay Lightning. "Back 20 years ago, we all used to buy a seat and that was the only thing we did. We sat and watched the game. That was what you were there for.

"Now people come to watch the game but also to socialize and be seen and tell people they're there."

It's impossible to socialize when the doors are locked. A closed arena is an obstacle to fun, instead of a creator. The new buildings will be open and have the pulse of the community in their DNA.

"It is one of the bright ages of arena design," said Brad Clark, senior architect for Populous, which created new arenas in Vegas and Milwaukee. "We're in that place where every new building is exciting and expectations are higher."

Three of the newest buildings – Vegas, Milwaukee and Detroit – have innovations that will be replicated and serve as inspiration. Each fits the needs of its specific population, as the one-size-fits-all approach to buildings is obsolete.

The glitz and glamour of Vegas is evident before, during and after events. In the top corner of the seating bowl, a ritzy, liquor-filled bar juts over the 200 level, giving high-dollar customers a chance to look down at everything and everyone. Fans can walk from the concourse to the outdoor patios, which bask in the glow of neon lights.

"Those terraces kind of speak to the varying experiences that fans are demanding these days when they come to an event," said Gabe Braselton, an architect for Populous. "There's absolutely the in-seat experience, but throughout the duration of a hockey game in Vegas with the Golden Knights, that was a design solution that allows people to get outside, get out of their seat, socialize, be seen in a very Las Vegas way.

"It's not just about those minutes during the action but also what happens in intermission and halftime."

Milwaukee, meanwhile, prefers cans of locally produced beer instead of \$300 bottle service. A key feature of the arena, which opened this summer, is a huge, tap-lined bar in the lower bowl.

Inside Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee. (Courtesy Populous)

"That particular aspect falls right into that city," Braselton said. "That really looks at trying to grab something that is steeped in their social culture but also was something that provides an upscale experience and a communal, social gathering space for a general fan as well. That's not a club space. That's actually on the main concourse, so wherever your ticket is you can kind of pass through and get a good local craft beer and then hang out and interact."

While all arenas have places to grab a beer, Milwaukee's building has concession stands that never lose sight of the playing surface. The open design means fans can leave their seats for food and sodas while staying in the game. The days of standing in a closed-off concourse and hearing the crowd cheer will be a thing of the past as new arenas follow suit.

Milwaukee also answered its harsh-climate problem with a covered outdoor beer garden. Fans without a ticket can still be close to the action while staying warm in front of huge screens. Buffalo, by comparison, holds huge parties in its outdoor plaza in the fall and spring. The space is wasted during the long, snowy winter.

"If you look at a lot of the modern arenas, they have more enclosed space that they can do programming for their fans and actually enhance the fan experience. That's something that we are lacking," said Bruce Popko, chief operating officer of Pegula Sports and Entertainment, which

owns the Sabres and Bills. "You look at the plaza area, and while it's great, you know we're in a cold-weather market and sometimes that doesn't serve our purposes as much as it should."

Detroit also has its frigid months. In order to create a communal space, the Red Wings and HOK basically expanded the arena footprint. Rather than a covered beer garden, they essentially have a covered city. It includes a market, pizza place and a tavern named for local musician Kid Rock and those areas are accessible even when there's no game.

"The idea was, 'OK, maybe the walls of the arena can flip inside out,'" said Singaby, the HOK project designer. "That was sort of the driving mindset for the design in Detroit, which is how can we make the concourse become an amenity to the neighborhood rather than just to the arena?"

Outside T-Mobile arena in Las Vegas. (Courtesy Populous)

The new arenas have grand, sweeping atriums. At first glance, they simply increase the wow factor, but they actually help mask their main purpose: security.

New buildings must be secure against terrorist threats and the large atriums mimic airport design. People funnel through one area, then are free to wander anywhere after passing through security. As technology advances, the atrium checkpoints will feature facial-recognition scanning – if they don't already.

"People are worried about new security threats that were not an issue 10 years ago, including wild vehicles running into walls or whatever you can imagine," Singaby said. "So how can we secure the building, secure the fans and buy the client peace of mind? It's really starting to take a layered approach similar to airports where ticketing happens in a certain line outside of the arena or the stadium, then there is a pregame secured area that you get to and can move freely.

"That, from a technical standpoint, requires different depth, different dimensions and different design requirements that kind of impacted how lobbies are shaped."

Once security threats are minimized, it's time to have fun. Since Jeff Vinik purchased the Lightning in 2010, few teams rival Tampa in reshaping the fan experience. Aside from the site, the arena bears almost no resemblance to the structure that opened in 1996.

They've added "Thunder Alley," an outdoor concert and tailgating site. They removed sections of chairs and concrete for a massive pipe organ that's the centerpiece of the upper level. There are new seats, eats and suites, along with a party deck boasting views of the city.

"He tried to give something to everybody," Benge, the arena GM, said of Vinik's privately funded renovations. "Across all the different price points – whether you're up in the nosebleed section or if you're a premium suite holder – I'm going to make sure that everybody is getting something out of this.

"Every season we want to try and find projects that continue to provide everybody with something new and refreshing because if you just spent \$100 million, which is what we've done, and you just do it once, five years down the road it's like, 'What have you done for me lately?' Even though it's not old and tired, it doesn't have the feel like it's new and fresh and interesting."

One change, which is already trending, is the loge section at one end. The Lightning replaced 328 regular seats with 156 luxury chairs that feature in-seat screens and technology, catered service and private restrooms. As buildings go up or are remodeled, loge sections will replace traditional suites, especially in smaller markets.

"We don't have any Fortune 500 companies in the greater Tampa area," Benge said. "We have a lot of medium to small businesses. We're full on our suites, but how are we taking care of those individuals – the doctors, the lawyers, the construction contractors – that want something but can't fill up 15, 16, 17 people in a suite every night?"



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"The loge is a great product we can bring in. We've got four-seaters and six-seaters in there, and it's at a price point that's a lot less than a suite but it's a premium experience."

Vinik's vision extends outside the arena walls with the \$3 billion Water Street Tampa project, which includes commercial, residential, medical and cultural spaces. That development is pushing the Lightning to rethink the traditional restaurant housed on the lower level. It won't be able to compete with the new high-end dining spots, so the arena may transition to a food hall.

As people flock to Revival Food Hall in Chicago and the Plaza Food Hall in New York, new arenas may add that dining option. The halls would attract patrons on an everyday basis, alleviating the problem of being closed when there's no game.

Teams will also change the food inside the arena. Hot dogs have given way to haute dogs, and point-of-sale systems track what sells and what doesn't. Instead of a portable nacho stand, the Lightning may invite local chefs to serve their specialties for one game or one month.

"We've got a whole analytics team that is looking at this information that allows us to make better decisions," said Bengé, whose new sales system is part of a technological upgrade. "This building is 21 years old, and it was built without a whole lot of technology thought. Here we are and we're installing a whole new fiber network. We're upgrading our Wi-Fi and we're upgrading our cellular distributive antenna system. We know that we need to have these fans connected."

Phones are just as important as seats to many fans, even more so to the younger generation. Teams and arenas know they must cater to them.

Delaware North, which owns Boston's arena along with the Bruins, has funded multiple studies titled "The Future of Sports." As player tracking improves with sensors inside equipment and pucks, the study predicts fans will be able to point their phone toward the rink and not only see live action but stats for each player on the ice.

And with gambling on the way, those stats will lead to in-game bets on who'll score next. Once the puck goes in, fans will be able to see personalized replays on their phone, control the camera angle on their in-seat screen or watch the ice as holograms re-enact the play in stunning detail.

"From the buildings that we've built to the devices you carry in your pocket, technology pushes a lot of things," Braselton said. "We're always trying to find solutions to integrate all those things."

While food, bars and padded seats are nice, few things draw a crowd like winning. Though fans won't see it, the arena creations and renovations will also take place in the bowels of the building. Practice facilities, gyms, lounges, equipment rooms, locker stalls and dining areas will flow together in the arena, allowing players to be at their best while feeling at home.

"I can't remember the last time I was in a concourse," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said. "For us, it's all about the amenities and the setup."

In recent years, Buffalo has created a three-rink arena complex with a renovated gym, lounge and dressing room. Players and equipment managers don't have to travel or lug their gear from spot to spot.

"Oh my god, it's so great that it's a one-stop shop," Okposo said. "The way that it's set up now is just so much more efficient. It's been awesome."

While the Sabres have been innovators for players, the arena has fallen behind for fans. It's one of 16 NHL buildings that's at least 20 years old, and there have been no substantial makeovers.

"There is a laundry list of things that we can go through with a 23-year-old building like we have here," Popko said. "We're ready for the next phase of development."

It's a major development. The Sabres' arena opened in 1996, and the Bills' stadium first welcomed fans in 1973. Pegula Sports announced last week that is beginning a comprehensive study to determine whether renovations or new buildings are the best option. The study, which is expected to last six to nine months, will include preliminary sketches from Populous.

"We're really excited about the opportunity to do work up there and help reimagine what the arena can be," said Clark.

Buffalo's also in the market for a convention center, which could be tied to a new downtown football stadium.

"It's all on the table," Popko said.

Though it seems unimaginable, Buffalo could construct just one building for a hockey arena, football stadium and convention center. The building would transform itself from a sprawling 60,000-seat stadium to a more intimate 20,000-seat arena in a matter of hours. Instead of having two facilities that sit empty most days, the city would have one multipurpose, high-tech marvel that would attract concerts and retail opportunities to go with the games.

"It definitely can be done," Singaby said. "We've studied and explored many design solutions that combine the stadium size with the arena size, and we are very excited about the potential."

He pointed to Pierre Mauroy Stadium in France. It's a 50,000-seat soccer stadium with a retractable roof and dual-level floor. The grass field sits on hydraulic lifts, which raise and move the playing surface to reveal a subfloor that is used for everything from tennis to hockey to motocross.

As the grass field is hauled away, a huge curtain narrows the building's appearance, and tier-level seats are brought in to flank the rink or court.

"It's a huge engineering and coordination effort to pull off both into one transformable building and it comes with a premium price tag as well," Singaby said. "The benefits of combining may include maximizing the use of less land or that one transformable building is cheaper than two standalones in the case of one owner."

The Bills and Sabres do have one owner, so the study may show that a superstructure is the optimal solution. While it seems far-fetched and futuristic, it wasn't long ago that a ticket merely got people into the game. Now some arenas don't even take tickets, ushering fans into a world of concourse bars, rooftop patios and stat-laden LED screens through their phone.

That world will keep changing.

"We're always looking at ourselves and saying, 'What's the next thing?'" Bengé said. "We're trying to figure out what is that next thing that we need to do to either be out in front of somebody or catching up to somebody."

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119996 Websites

The Athletic / DGB Grab Bag: The NHL's next commissioner, the Canes and Ducks go dark and when expansion gets Wild

By Sean McIndoe Dec 7, 2018

From the headlines

It was Future of the Game week here at The Athletic, with dozens of articles about what hockey will look in the years to come. There was lots of neat stuff. I spoiled the next five years of Cup winners. Pierre LeBrun



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fixed the NHL. Tyler Dellow looked at the next generation of analytics. It was all pretty great.

But my favorite piece was Katie Strang's look at who might replace Gary Bettman, if only because it reminded me that somebody will eventually replace Gary Bettman. And it got me wondering about how much planning the NHL has already put in place for finding its next commissioner.

A lot, as it turns out – the league has already prepared the online job posting so that they'll be ready to go when the role opens up. And my spies got a copy of it:

Hello, job seeker!

Are you a dynamic sports executive who has always dreamed of working for one of the most innovative and popular professional leagues on the planet? Would you be willing to settle for the NHL instead? If so, you might be just the person we're looking for. The National Hockey League is seeking its next commissioner and we want to hear from you!

Responsibilities for this position include sneering, the ability to lift 34 pounds while dodging trash and bottles being hurled at you, more sneering, and saying "Yes sir Mr. Jacobs" every few minutes just in case he's around. The ability to defeat Ron MacLean in a fistfight would be considered a plus. Experience negotiating a new CBA without a lockout is nice, we guess, but really not necessary come to think of it. Forget we mentioned it.

Candidates should be fluently bilingual in English and Lawyer-Speak, although the ability to say "Oh no, we're totally still thinking about expanding to your city" in French is a nice-to-have. The salary for this position is negotiable and based on experience, but not artificially capped in any other way because who would ever want to work under those conditions?

Please note that while the NHL is an equal opportunity employer and would like to hear from as many potential candidates from as many backgrounds as possible, we must insist that the successful applicant have at least 54 years of experience in being Bill Daly.

(Unsuccessful applicants will not be contacted for interviews but will still be awarded a point in the standings for some reason.)

The week's three stars of comedy

The third star: Evgeny Kuznetsov – You have to give him some credit for creativity. But he went Full Bobby Ryan. You never go Full Bobby Ryan. (Unless you're Bobby Ryan, in which case it works out great.)

NICE TRY, KUZ. #ALLCAPS PIC.TWITTER.COM/MCV7XWSSJD

&M DASH; WASHINGTON CAPITALS (@CAPITALS) DECEMBER 5, 2018

The second star: Jonathan Drouin – I mean, he's not wrong...

WHY IS NO ONE TALKING ABOUT THIS SLIP UP FROM DROUIN ABOUT THE OTTAWA SENATORS? 🤔🤔🤔
PIC.TWITTER.COM/MQANYPM7N9

&M DASH; LEAH KESSEL (@LEAHFLAME) DECEMBER 6, 2018

And that wasn't even the meanest thing anyone from the Habs said about the Senators this week.

The first star: Rick Middleton — Good lord, Nifty, I know it's your ceremony, but maybe cool it with thehaymakers.

🤔 PIC.TWITTER.COM/XI9QXAFQQM

&M DASH; NHL GIFS (@NHLGIFS) NOVEMBER 30, 2018

The NHL actually got something right

The Ducks and playing the Hurricanes Friday night, in one of those regular season games that you probably won't pay much attention to if

you're not a fan of one of the two teams involved. But you probably should, for two reasons.

First, it's the Ducks and the Hurricanes, which means it's the best chance we're ever going to have to see a team record a 100 percent Corsi in a single game. Given where both these teams are at when it comes to shots for and against, it's possible that the Hurricanes record a zero-save shutout. I'd just go without a goalie and play the entire 60 minutes as an extended 6-on-5 powerplay if I was Rod Brind'Amour, but I don't want to tell anyone how to do their job.

But the second reason to watch is that it will be one of the best-looking games of the season, because the two teams have agreed to go dark-on-dark, with the Hurricanes planning to wear their reds while the Ducks are in their blacks. We almost never see that in the NHL, and it's even more rare to see it indoors. The last two times it happened, according to people who follow this sort of thing, was at last year's outdoor game between the Flyers and Penguins. The Leafs and Red Wings memorably did it for the Winter Classic in 2014, and it looked freaking amazing.

For the last time it happened in a run-of-the-mill indoor game, you may have to go back to 2000, when the Rangers and Canadiens did it. But there was a time in the early days of the league when most NHL games looked like this. And back in the 1991-92 season, as part of the league's 75th-anniversary celebration, it was a regular occurrence for matchups between Original Six rivals.

You obviously can't do it for every matchup – imagine the nightmare of trying to watch a Lightning/Leafs game. And you wouldn't want to beat the idea into the ground by doing it all the time. But every now and then, why not? It's something different. And anything that injects a little extra interest into a mid-December game without much else riding on it is a good thing.

And yes, this all may sound odd coming from a staunch proponent of the "go back to the home teams wearing white" movement. But there's no reason we couldn't have both – home teams in white most of the time, with the occasional dark-on-dark matchup to mix it up. Maybe we're already headed there. After all, one of the best games of the week featured a team wearing its white jerseys in front of an adoring home crowd.

Obscure former player of the week

Last week, we had some fun with Ron Hextall's playoff goal. That was Hextall's second career goal, with his first coming in 1987. That goal, as every hockey fan knows, made Hextall the first pro goalie to ever shoot and score.

And every fan is wrong. Because while Hextall was indeed the first NHL goaltender to shoot and score, he was beaten to the scoresheet by three days by an AHL goaltender. That would be this week's obscure player, Darcy Wakaluk.

Wakaluk burst onto the scene, sort of, by going 2-22-0 with the WHL's Kelowna Wings in 1983-84. That performance was enough to see him picked in the seventh round of the 1984 NHL draft, when the Sabres nabbed with the 144th pick, two rounds ahead of Luc Robitaille. Wakaluk spent two more years in junior before graduating to the AHL's Rochester Americans in 1986.

That's where he made North American pro hockey history. On Dec. 5, 1987, Wakaluk shot the puck down the ice and into the open net against the Utica. (You can see the goal 1:20 into this clip.) Later that same week, Hextall duplicated the feat for the Flyers.

Wakaluk eventually made the NHL in 1988. He'd spend two years as a part-time backup for the Sabres before being traded to the North Stars. He spent five years with the organization and was part of the move to Dallas that did not result in space cowboys. While never a full-time starter, he played 153 games for the Stars, posting a record of 54-64-17.

He'd sign with the Coyotes in 1996, but suffered a career-ending knee injury during that first season. His NHL career didn't amount to as much



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as he may have hoped, but he was inducted into the Americans' Hall of Fame a few years ago in recognition of a fascinating AHL career – he reportedly once dressed as a forward when the Amerks found themselves a man short. He didn't score that night, but remains one of the only goaltenders to ever light the lamp.

Classic YouTube clip breakdown

The big news this week was the NHL finally confirming what's been well-known for the last year: They're expanding to Seattle, with a new team arriving in time for the 2021-22 season. Having been through this with Las Vegas a few years ago, we know what comes next. We'll get announcements of a team name, and later a logo and uniform design. Eventually, there will be an expansion draft. Then the team will debut. Then they'll almost win the Stanley Cup. You know, all the usual expansion team stuff.

But this makes for a good time to look back on how expansion used to work in the NHL. So today, let's go back two decades and recall the late-90s birth of the Minnesota Wild.

Our clip starts in June 1997, as the NHL unveils its expansion plans. We only see the Wild mentioned, but this was actually part of an ambitious announcement of four new teams: Minnesota, Atlanta, Nashville and Columbus. They'd join the league over the course of the next three seasons, with Minnesota and Columbus arriving for 2000-01, so at this point the Wild still have over three years before making their debut.

That's Robert O. Naegle Jr., the Wild's original owner. He was a local businessman who'd grown up playing and loving hockey, and was the driving force behind bringing the league back to Minnesota after the departure of the North Stars in 1993. Naegle would own the team until 2008; he passed away just last month.

We jump ahead to 1998 and the announcement of the team name. This part includes a few seconds where they scroll through some of the finalists, and I think we need to take a moment to ponder an alternate history where the team is called the Minnesota Blue Ox. That name is apparently based on Minnesota's team from the defunct Roller Hockey International league and is now being used by a USPHL team, but I think we can all agree that it would have been a way better name for an NHL team than "Wild." Hey Seattle, I'm just saying, the door's open.

We see the unveiling of the name and the groundbreaking for what would become the Xcel Energy Center. We also get a delightful shot of a little kid telling us that "hockey's back in Minnuh-sooo-tah." Yah, hon, you betcha.

Next up is the logo unveiling, which apparently featured a marching band and like nine fans, one of whom is wearing a North Stars jersey. That's a bit awkward. It's kind of like going to a wedding wearing a t-shirt with a photo of the groom's ex-girlfriend. Hey, sorry it didn't work out and she moved to Dallas with a richer guy, but we need to acknowledge the history, right?

Also, they unveil the name by having a child who may or may not be a young Zach Parise skate in and score on a breakaway. Don't get used to it, Wild fans, you're going to see like 11 more goals in the next five years.

Now we get to the good stuff: The expansion draft. And for the only time in the last quarter-century of NHL history, it really is an expansion draft – as in two teams taking turns picking players, and not just one team handing in a list. Expansion drafts are the best, and we need to bring them back. There's still time for some NHL team out there to choose the Nuclear Option and draft against Seattle in 2021. I'm not too proud to beg for this.

I want you to take a moment to think back to the Golden Knights "draft." Remember all the glitz and glamour and "How You Like Me Now" playing 30 times in front of a cheering crowd? Yeah, this isn't going to be that. Instead, we get the Wild front office crammed into a room in Calgary, with whiteboards and big sheets of paper taped to the walls. It's every terrible meeting you've ever been in, except without the room smelling bad from the uneaten vegetarian pizza that nobody wanted.

Speaking of things that stink, check out what Wild GM Doug Risebrough and friends have available to them. It's not a great list, as you might suspect when you hear that their first pick is Jamie McLennan. Good guy. Great broadcaster. But not exactly a Marc-Andre Fleury-esque franchise building block.

Speaking of goalies, we should note that the Wild accepted Jan Caloun and a ninth-round pick from the Sharks in exchange for not picking some unprotected rookie named Evgeni Nabokov. So they're off to a great start all around.

Uh, Risebrough already seems to have all the goalie picks for both teams written down in advance and is just circling them as he goes. He may be able to read minds. It's also possible there wasn't as much suspense around this draft as I'd like to remember.

We actually get a pretty cool shot of the Wild's rankings for the available defensemen. Among the revelations is that they had Montreal's Eric Weinrich ranked first; the Habs blocked that by bribing the Blue Jackets to take goalie Fred Chabot instead. But way down in 14th spot is Filip Kuba, who had just 18 games of experience but ends up being arguably the Wild's best pick from the entire draft. The lesson, as always: Nobody in the NHL knows what they're doing and this is all just luck.

Shout out to the guy who correctly spells "Leschyshyn" by hand, which might be the most impressive moment of the whole clip.

Minnesota's first pick in the forward round is current Lightning front office exec Stacy Roest, who at this point is a 26-year-old with 11 career goals. I'm starting to think the Golden Knights had better draft rules, you guys.

We close with a beaming Risebrough shaking hands with everyone and telling them "good job". Was it? Among the 26 players taken by the Wild, six never played in the NHL while only four were still in the league after the lockout and only Kuba scored more than 50 goals after the draft. On the other hand, Jacques Lemaire got them to the conference final in Year 3 by winning every game zero to negative-one, so maybe they were on to something.

And that wraps up our clip. Hope this was useful, Seattle. I'm guessing that your \$650 million will earn you the right to pick players who are slightly better than Stacy Roest. But you might want to start stocking up on markers and whiteboards, just in case.

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1119997 Websites

The Athletic / How climate change will have a major impact on hockey's future

By Josh Cooper Dec 7, 2018

Wayne Gretzky's narrative on how he became one of the greatest players in hockey history may be less possible for future generations.

Gretzky's father, Walter, famously flooded their backyard in Brantford, Ontario, allowing Wayne to hone his skills on the frozen surface in the winter.

But because of climate change and the increasing global mean surface temperatures, hockey parents wanting to create backyard rinks for their children won't have the same opportunity as the Gretzky family.

"I mean, I think there's a danger of (hockey) becoming less accessible to anybody," said H. Damon Matthews, Concordia University's research chair in climate science and sustainability, geography, planning and environment.



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"You point to Wayne Gretzky as the iconic example of someone who learned to skate and developed his skills on an outdoor rink that his dad built for him. It's not to say hockey's going to be in trouble, but that venue of entering hockey is going to be harder to find. So there is a danger that hockey and winter sports, in general, will require more personal resources to access as a sport."

Recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, the global temperature could increase by 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels by 2040. Also, 2018 is expected to be the fourth-warmest on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

As the world continues to warm, the ability to play hockey using natural non-refrigerated resources could be lessened further, since it would – and in some respects already has – increase the cost of the sport.

While this can't be directly correlated with climate change, in recent years Canada has shown dips in the hockey playing population in the country with the cost of the sport being prohibitive for families. Less free ice certainly won't help.

"In Canada, in southern Canada, increasingly people have to pay ... free ice is going away," said Dr. Allen Hershkowitz, the chair and founding director for Sport and Sustainability International. "People have to pay to get on frozen ice indoors. It's already happening. It's not like, 'At what temperature will frozen pond hockey end?' It has basically. The availability of frozen ponds for hockey or ice skating outdoors, the season is diminishing already."

A study on the impact of global warming on hockey released in 2012 by Matthews stated that, "Since 1950, winter temperatures in Canada have increased by more than 2.5 (degrees Celsius)." But Matthews estimates that number is closer to 3 degrees Celsius now.

This has caused "a statistically significant decrease" in the outdoor skating season in Southwest and Central Canada, according to the study, which would "significantly compromise the viability of outdoor skating in Canada."

Robert McLeman, associate professor department of geography and environmental studies at Wilfrid Laurier University who also helps run a website called RinkWatch that tracks outdoor skating days in North America noted that "even a degree or so is enough to flip your rink from skateable to not skateable."

He also said that the United States, specifically the "southern part of the outdoor skating world, sort of the Chicagoland areas and New England and even down into Long Island," would be the spots that will see the biggest near-term shift.

Still, Canada, where hockey is the most popular sport, is where issues with climate change should continue to hit a larger population density.

The city of Brantford itself has a successful outdoor rink program where neighborhood associations are paid for every skateable day. Volunteers do the best they can to ready the rinks, but they can't compete with impacts of the weather.

"When we see a decline in the amount of grants that are paid out, it is not relevant to volunteer involvement. It is relevant to the weather and what mother nature is bestowing to our program, which hasn't been very kind the last few years," said Lori-Dawn Cavin, the manager of community recreation development for Brantford. "So it has very much impacted ... I believe the last maximum rink payout year was 2014."

These issues are big reasons why the NHL has put such stock in sustainability and green technology. The league launched NHL Green in 2010 and put out its first sustainability report in 2014. The most recent report was released in 2018. The league also had a presence at the Paris climate conference in 2015.

"Before many of our players ever took their first stride on NHL ice, they honed their skills on the frozen lakes and ponds of North America and Europe," commissioner Gary Bettman said in the league's first report.

"Our sport can trace its roots to frozen freshwater ponds, to cold climates. Major environmental challenges, such as climate change and freshwater scarcity, affect opportunities for hockey players of all ages to learn and play the game outdoors."

Said Hershkowitz: "Gary Bettman is a spectacular environmentalist. He is without a doubt one of the greatest environmentalists in the history of sport."

Essentially, the NHL understood that the environmental cost for the league to put on an event was greater than other sports – in part because of the amount of energy that needs to be used to keep a building cool. So the NHL embarked on green practices to try to make sure its member clubs lessened its carbon footprints.

Through food recovery, water restoration, energy reduction in buildings, offsets and even making sure the latest technology in ice resurfacers is used, the NHL tries to stay on the cutting edge.

"Ice hockey is one of the most energy-intensive sports out there because we essentially play in a giant refrigerator," said Omar Mitchell, the NHL's vice president for sustainable infrastructure and growth initiatives. "So from that perspective, we use energy. Whether it's from electricity or natural gas. And therefore we want to make sure that we are addressing whatever we can to mitigate environmental concerns or to reduce energy and resource consumption within the league and its member clubs."

Not all buildings are created equal, but the league tries to be available to teams as they further embrace green initiatives.

In the past 10 years, the Minnesota Wild have aggressively pushed green technologies with the Xcel Energy Center and Saint Paul RiverCentre, including switching out all sport lights to LED.

Three years ago, the Los Angeles Kings were introduced by the NHL to a local green company called BluEco and this year used them to make their ice for games. BluEco essentially makes an independent water source from the air that can be used for many purposes – making ice, landscape irrigation, cleaning, etc. It is estimated to reduce Staples Center's kWh by 8,208,000, per the company's website. Furthermore, BluEco says it will save Staples Center over 500,000 gallons of water per year. Kings COO Kelly Cheeseman said carbon footprint reduction because of BluEco is 8200 metric tons.

"The system has great benefits for all. By dehumidifying and reducing the moisture in a more efficient manner than we have in the past, we have significantly reduced the energy consumptions and gas consumptions for the building while improving the indoor air quality by naturally cleaning the air of particulates," Cheeseman said. "All of these benefits have a positive impact on the fans, players and building management."

BluEco's environmental impact comparison. (Graphic provided by the Los Angeles Kings from the Environmental Protection Agency's website)

The NHL's 2018 report said the league as a whole decreased its carbon footprint by two percent year over year from fiscal year 2014 to 2016, along with a reduction of energy consumption and water consumption.

The league has a subsection in its sustainability report to highlight all team practices, and each team has several that they push.

The ultimate hope is that as hockey rinks around North America need to modernize to lessen their environmental impacts, they can use the NHL as an example. And if they do, they'll have a supplementary impact of making the sport more affordable, which would be important if it continues to become more indoor-centric globally.

"First is we hopefully reduce a barrier to entry to our sport because our thesis goes with higher energy cost it equates to higher ice time cost, which becomes a barrier to our sport. So by taking all the best practices from our NHL arena level and bringing it down to the community rink level, we hopefully will reduce those energy costs and hopefully reduce ice time costs, which will hopefully reduce that barrier to entry," Mitchell said. "And so that is one of our theses is to really inspire and bring all those best practices down and show how private developers or



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municipalities should be thinking about building new rinks or refurbishing new rinks.”

Some may question the NHL’s green initiatives since the league has expanded into the Sun Belt, where it’s assumed that arenas and teams have higher energy costs due to a greater need for air conditioning. But this is not the case since the ecosystem around the building, the makeup of the power grid and certain green practices within an arena play a big role. Because of these factors and offsets, NHL team arena usage in the Sun Belt could actually have a smaller carbon footprint than a building in a cold weather spot.

“People say, ‘Well you have hockey in Florida, hockey in Las Vegas, that doesn’t make sense.’ It’s not the making of ice in Florida that’s the problem. It’s the source of energy used to make the ice,” Hershkowitz said. “Working on sports they say, ‘We should do away with night games.’ I say, ‘It’s not the lights. If the lights are powered by solar, if they’re powered by renewable energy and energy sources that are not contributing any global warming pollution then it’s fine.’ There’s nothing wrong with ice being made in Florida if you’re making it from zero climate impact energy sources.”

In the absence of any meaningful societal shift from fossil fuels and greenhouse gases to clean energy, the dire reports for outdoor hockey continue to get more dire. Matthews is coming out with a new study that projects a worst-case scenario 90 percent reduction in skateable days for Montreal by mid-century.

“Some of that is mediated considerably if we follow aggressive climate mitigation pathway,” Matthews said. “We see kind of small decreases but not complete decimation of the skating season.”

Though Gretzky’s story remains the most romanticized in regards to the impact of outdoor skating on a player, current NHLers who grew up in the colder parts of Canada can sympathize with the importance of pond hockey to their careers.

“I mean from mid-November to end of February (I would play outside) pretty much as much as I could. Any time I had free time at the outdoor rink. Any time there was a two-week Christmas break, you were just out on the rink,” said Colorado Avalanche forward Colin Wilson, who grew up in Winnipeg. “Just going out there and playing shinny hockey is the best time to have the puck on your stick, try things you wouldn’t try normally and you definitely developed a skill set through that. Even then just going out on the pond with a bunch of pucks on your own and shooting and stickhandling ... it’s huge for your game.”

Environmental issues are important for Wilson, and he tries to do what he can on a personal level (like driving an electric car for example) to ensure that he’s taking part in green practices, while also explaining their importance to others.

“I just try to personally educate people as much as possible because if you explain the basics of science and it’s very evident of what’s happening,” Wilson said.

Former players care as well. A bunch of NHL alumni will lend their voices to the cause by playing at an event in April called The Last Game, to bring awareness to global warming.

“We think it’s an incredible initiative,” NHL Alumni Association president Glenn Healy told The Athletic’s Scott Burnside about the initiative.

Without meaningful changes to global environmental policy, more than just outdoor hockey will be at risk. The cities that house NHL teams may be impacted as well. Specifically South Florida, Tampa and New York City are often mentioned by scientists as major metropolitan areas that could see flooding in the future. Other spots could see changes in weather patterns that could impact their ecosystems.

“I mean, I know one professional sports team that built a spring training facility in Arizona and they built a lake to supply water to that spring training facility and they can’t fill the lake,” Hershkowitz said. “Professional sport is at great risk through climate change.”

These practices by the NHL, in some respects, could create green habits and awareness from a citizen perspective. At Wild games, initiatives are in plain sight – such as with waste sorting between trash, recycling and compost.

“Some of our premium areas in our suites, you either have recyclable or compostable. There’s no other choice. There’s no trash choice. It’s just one of the two,” Ibister said.

Some see hockey specifically as a potential vehicle for change. The sport is uniquely impacted by nature and needs global warming to be mitigated or these shifts will continue.

“If you look at the history of sports, it has been enormously influential in influencing our relations and perceptions about race relations. Of course Jackie Robinson and Jesse Owens and others. Sports has been extremely influential in influencing our attitudes about gender relationships, of course Billie Jean King and others. Title IX. Sports is now increasingly, and I’m happy to be part of this movement and lead this movement, sport is also being influential in promoting climate literacy and environmental literacy,” Hershkowitz said. “Sport has the opportunity to reduce the cultural polarization around environmental conversation.

“We are destabilizing the functional integrity of the biosphere and of course sports is not immune to that.”

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1119998 Websites

The Athletic / How Alexis Lafrenière grew from being a no one to the Next One

Sean Gordon Dec 7, 2018

The toys inside the split-level in Saint-Eustache, Que., this particular one is gray in colour, were always in new or nearly-new condition.

The children of the house, a boy and a girl, didn’t have much use for them.

“I never played with Barbies when I was little,” said Lori-Jane Lafrenière, a 19-year-old college student.

On one occasion Lori-Jane’s younger brother opened a gift, a Lego-style figurine of some sort. He would have been 4 or 5 years old.

“He didn’t play with it,” said Hugo Lafrenière, the father.

“Actually, he ended up making a Stanley Cup out of it,” added Lori-Jane, who is studying to become a teacher.

“He’d walk around with it like this,” said the mother, Nathalie Bertrand, miming a player hoisting the Cup.

This is a little boy who, it appears, learned to count with NHL uniform numbers. Who at age 3 conscripted his big sister to play nets – and continued to do so for the better part of 10 years (today she says she wouldn’t trade it for the world). Who would eat the inside of a piece of cucumber and pop the peel over his teeth as a faux mouth-guard before heading down to the basement for yet another interminable game of mini-sticks.

Lori-Jane: “That might be the one thing that’s scarred me for life.”

You could say future NHL star Alexis Lafrenière, lately of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League’s Rimouski Océanic and the consensus choice to be the first pick in the 2020 NHL draft, has been single-minded about his sport for a while.



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Like, in roughly the way lungs are about air.

Most players who reach the professional ranks are hockey obsessives, and all of them have uncommon athletic gifts. At 6-foot-1 (or maybe a tad more) and about 195 pounds, Lafrenière already has an NHL build. He also has the skating agility — although scouts say his speed grades out as above average rather than elite — dipsy-doodling skills and pro shot.

Franchise-defining players, the Next Ones, tend to have a trademark — Sidney Crosby's gravitational pull on the puck, Conor McDavid's knack for teleporting around the rink, Auston Matthews' other-worldly wrists — Lafrenière's signature is best summed up as clairvoyance.

As befits a future star, there's an unmistakable sense when Lafrenière is on the ice that he knows what's coming; all that's missing is the 1-800-PSYCHIC number and low-fi infomercial.

Laval Rocket head coach Joël Bouchard, who has known Lafrenière since his early teens, put it this way: "Lots of players have hockey sense, but he also has feel, you know?"

During a recent viewing at Rimouski's Colisée Sun-Life, the left-winger — it's a misnomer, he plays all over the ice — provided an illustration.

In a game against the Gatineau Olympiques he neatly pulled the puck out of a scrum on the right-hand boards, cut toward the blue line, shimmied around a defender and looked at teammate Charles-Edouard d'Astous, a defenceman who had rotated down to the left hash-mark. As d'Astous cocked his stick for a one-timer, Lafrenière zipped a no-look diagonal pass against the grain, through a lane that seemed to appear in just that moment for that exact purpose. The puck skimmed off the target's stick — it's an unfortunate reality that none of his teammates can match his skill level.

Not that Lafrenière would ever say that; in fact, he'd probably be horrified even to read it.

"The coaches here help me a lot and so do all my teammates," he said, sitting in the Océanic players' lounge. "There are lots of challenges for me here. The biggest one is to win a cup . . . with the team we have I think we can believe."

A few hours later he made what can only be described as a hockey-sense backcheck — racing to a spot on the ice where he (correctly) assumed a pass would be heading, and then squelching the Gatineau attack by tipping it over the glass.

In the two-game set against Gatineau, Lafrenière would be held to two assists; with a little more luck and a deeper supporting cast — Rimouski is 7th in the league, a healthy notch or two below the elite teams — it could easily have been six or seven points. This is a player who creates high-event hockey.

D'Astous, who serves as team captain and happens to hail from Rimouski, considers that his young teammate has "changed the face of the franchise."

"He's unique, I mean not a lot of players have that much talent at that age. It makes life easier for a whole lot of guys when you have him on your team," said the 20-year-old, who leads all Q defencemen in scoring thanks in part to Lafrenière's savvy on the power play.

A few days later, Lafrenière was slotted onto the top line for the Quebec portion of the Canadian Hockey League's Canada-Russia challenge. Early in the second period of the final leg, in Drummondville, he hopped over the boards just as a teammate was harrying Russian defenceman Alexander Lyakhov on the far side of the ice.

Lafrenière quickly looped into the offensive zone — an ostensibly offside position — and as the Russian turned his head to evade the forechecker, made three or four hard strides. When Lyakhov looked up he visibly flinched as he discovered Lafrenière, by then on the proper side of the blue line, about to steamroll him. In the event, Lafrenière contented himself with stealing the puck and breaking in alone on net. He made a

terrific forehand-backand-forehand move, goalie Daniil Tarasov came up with an even better save.

The sequence was one of several scoring chances Lafrenière created for himself; in the third period he turned provider. Playing on a line with Detroit Red Wings prospect Joe Veleno, the Canadians began playing some big boy hockey on the cycle; Lafrenière won a puck battle in the corner and headed directly to the front of the net, where he monopolized two defenders. The jousting match gave defenceman Noah Dobson an opening to zip a shot into the top shelf from the side of the net for the go-ahead goal.

If the Canada-Russia challenge was a final exam for Hockey Canada's World Junior Championship selectors (and it was), Lafrenière passed easily.

Next week, Lafrenière will fly to British Columbia for Team Canada camp. He's only the second Quebec-born 17-year-old to earn an invite in the past 20 years, the Canadiens' Jonathan Drouin being the other.

When he was little, Lafrenière would put on his red Team Canada t-shirt and watch every World Junior tournament in rapt attention.

"It was a classic," he said. "Honestly, it's an honour just to be invited, all I can do is give it all I've got. I have three games to worry about this week, then we'll see."

Though Lafrenière sees the game at a savant level, his dad says he didn't learn by watching on TV so much as he did by playing. At the same time, it's to wonder how much he picked up by proximity, or perhaps osmosis.

His mom, a hard-core Canadiens fan growing up, remembers her son, not yet two years old, leaping through hockey pooler guides on the floor of the living room.

"We'd have a hockey pool with friends most years, so he'd be there on his tummy with his godfather looking at the magazines and turning the pages. Whenever we did the pool he had to be there," she said.

"It's basically how he learned to count," chimed in Hugo. This is a family whose members regularly finish each other's sentences.

"I used to tape him. What's Patrick Kane's number? Eighty-eight, he'd say in his little voice," added Nathalie, who is an elementary school teacher.

There are a million anecdotes.

Little Alexis scooting around the rink his dad built in the back yard and put in countless, often unhappy hours maintaining ("the first year just about burned me out," he said). Lori-Jane, who isn't much of a skater, was often pressed into service as a referee.

Little Alexis putting dings in the walls with miniature pucks. Little Alexis playing hockey by himself in the basement and narrating the games.

"You'd walk downstairs and he'd be sitting on a chair. You're not playing? 'No, I'm in the penalty box'," said Hugo.

"I just hit Saku, so I got a penalty," laughed Nathalie.

The boy's shooting improved in lockstep with his dad's skill at drywall repairs.

"So, so many dents," Hugo said. "And more than a few holes."

You won't hear any of these stories from Lafrenière, who in addition to being a young man of relatively few words — publicly anyway — prefers not to talk about himself.

Whatever he wishes to express generally shines through in his game.

Only three other players in QMJHL history scored more goals before age 17 than Lafrenière: Sidney Crosby, Mario Lemieux and Jimmy Carson.



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Two Hall of Fame players and a former second-overall choice and Calder Trophy finalist who chalked up a couple of 100-point seasons, including one where he scored 55 goals. Not bad.

Just behind Lafrenière: former first overall draft pick Vincent Lecavalier. It's all the more remarkable when you consider Lafrenière is more of a playmaker than a goal-scorer.

The hockey world loves comparisons – the way stats have traditionally been compiled tends to invite them – and so compare Lafrenière we must.

First off, he's not Crosby (who is?) or McDavid. But scouts do project him as a superstar; his production in junior to this point compares favourably to Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon, a top-five player in the NHL. In 29 games this year, Lafrenière has chalked up 49 points and sits just three points off the league scoring lead.

An October birthday, Lafrenière will miss out on the 2019 draft by a few weeks, like Auston Matthews and John Tavares did in their 17-year-old seasons, but had he been eligible it would have made for an interesting conversation between him and Jack Hughes, the consensus top pick next summer.

"Hughes is a more dynamic skater, but Lafrenière's game projects really well for the NHL. I mean you could probably put him in our lineup tonight," said an amateur scout for an Eastern Conference team. "I hate comparisons, but if you held a gun to my head I'd say he's got the best attributes of (former Rimouski players) Lecavalier and (Brad) Richards; he's cerebral and can pass, but also strong and can shoot."

A Western Conference amateur scout's assessment sounded a similar effusive note.

"Incredible vision offensively and even defensively, plus shot, plus passing, dynamic hands and feet. He's also courageous, not only physically but in attempting plays. There's no fear to his game," he said. "I don't see serious competition for first overall (in 2020)."

It can be hard to tell from speaking to Lafrenière whether he much cares about such things, but the evidence suggests a fiery competitor.

Every so often he'll throw a Peter Forsberg-style reverse check to create room for himself along the boards or in the corner. He's not reluctant to stick up for himself; like all future stars, he has become accustomed to being singled out for rough treatment, and does not mind responding in kind.

That competitive nature can also be traced back to his family.

His parents, both of whom are Saint-Eustache natives, were serious softball players — they met while playing in a mixed league, and won a Canadian championship — and his sister is an elite-level soccer player.

In other words, there were no gimmes for the youngest person in the house.

"I used to work four days a week when he was little so one day a week it was just the two of us and we'd cook muffins or a cake — he's allergic to nuts — and then we'd go downstairs and play 10 goals. I was the goalie, when he scored 10 times, it was his turn. At the start you say, well, give the kid a break. But eventually I started having to give it all I had, he was scoring and he'd celebrate. Well I'm going to show the little so-and-so," Nathalie said.

"I'd get home from work, and he'd be waiting," said Hugo, who works in the parts department of an agricultural equipment maker.

The elder Lafrenière presented a higher degree of difficulty, and not because of his skill. He is a bear of a man — even today he has three or four inches and perhaps 30 pounds on his son — and would simply plunk himself down in front of the net.

"There was nowhere to shoot. He used to get so mad," Hugo said.

One has little trouble imagining acrimonious games of Scrabble unfolding at the Lafrenière-Bertrand dinner table.

"Not really, because I always win," said Nathalie.

"Hang on, we haven't played in a while," said Hugo.

Lafrenière's competitive streak is no accident, given his environment. His parents and sister live in the house he grew up in — they bought it to accommodate a second baby — and it just so happens Saint-Eustache was a good place to become a hockey player if you were born in 2001.

One block over, you had the Lafrance brothers, Félix and Simon, and just a couple of streets beyond that the Légarés.

Today, Félix Lafrance plays for the Cape Breton Screaming Eagles, Simon plays for the Victoriaville Tigres, and Nathan Légaré is starring for the Baie Comeau Drakkar.

Everybody still trains together and keeps in touch during the season. Chirping is involved.

"There's a pretty good rivalry between Baie Comeau and Rimouski so that adds a little spice for sure," said Légaré, who is currently sixth in QMJHL scoring, within seven points of his buddy, and eligible for the 2019 draft.

The group, along with several others, grew up playing minor hockey together — Lafrenière, Félix Lafrance and Légaré played on the same line in Bantam and Midget. Thanks to the miracles of the Internet, they still do.

"We play NHL 19 online, in fact we usually play on the same line," Légaré laughed. "We still have pretty good chemistry."

The closeness of Lafrenière's community was also evident in a recent game between the Océanic and the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada, whose home rink is just a few minutes' drive from where he grew up.

A relative decided to buy a bloc of tickets for the game, after mentioning it in an email chain the idea grew to the point where friends and extended family swept up nearly 500 seats and took over an entire section.

"It was pretty special to see all those people when I came out for the warm-up, yeah," said Lafrenière.

Given the atmosphere, the Armada decided to pay special attention to the hometown kid by having pesky winger Anthony Poulin spend the evening velcroed to his hip and bracketing him with a defenceman (Poulin and Lafrenière often faced each other in minor hockey).

Poulin did the job flawlessly until 6:52 into the third period. That's when Lafrenière read a developing play near the offensive blue line, jumped in to grab the puck and accelerated into space before sliding a perfect one-time pass for centre Jimmy Huntington to hammer into the net. Huntington, another 20-year-old, is among the league leaders in goals this season, and his teenaged linemate has been in on the bulk of them. Anyway, it stood as the winning goal, Lafrenière earned a huge ovation as the game's second star, ho-hum.

All this unfolded in the same complex where the winger started doing fitness and skill training as a 12-year-old; the Académie de Hockey Joël Bouchard has an affiliation with the Seigneurs de Mille-Îles, the PeeWee and Bantam AAA program Lafrenière played for.

Not long after, he started working with a nutritionist; Lafrenière is very much the exemplar of the modern player who benefited from specialized training from a very young age.

"You don't always know when what you're eating isn't good for you. I concentrate on that a lot, especially in summer," he said. "I can make some things in the kitchen, but my mom still has to help a lot."

The Armada's home rink is also the facility where he has been playing 3-on-3 summer hockey with NHL players since he was 15.



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"It's pretty great because we have pros with us in the gym . . . it helps a lot. You get to see what it means to be a professional, and they give you all sorts of little tips and tricks," Lafrenière said. "Just lots of advice on little things, like how to gather passes. Things that you wouldn't think to do on your own, it's a little of everything."

The summer 3-on-3 group includes the Sabres' Jason Pominville, the Canadiens' Charles Hudon, and the Red Wings' Jonathan Bernier, and is run by former NHLer Ramzi Abid (who worked with Lafrenière's Saint-Eustache Vikings in midget).

"He's obviously very talented, he sees the ice so well. He was only 16 last (summer), for him to be able to play with older guys and work out with older guys . . . he's always a step ahead of everyone," said Pominville. "His puck skills are pretty phenomenal as well. His stickhandling, his edge-work is really good. A lot of younger guys work on their edges and with skills coaches."

"He's been working with pros for a while, and you can tell. He's a mature kid. It's been fun to watch him."

The other part to the story is that the teams are chosen via a mini-draft. Rumour has it the first pick in 2018 was 16 years old (Lafrenière, who turned 17 on Oct. 11, spent the summer playing on a line with Pominville and Vegas Golden Knights minor-leaguer Stefan Matteau).

As a former first-overall QMJHL pick and the heavy favourite to repeat the feat in the NHL version, Lafrenière is evidently a hot commodity.

It wasn't always thus.

Around the time he was choosing between hockey and baseball — he won a provincial PeeWee AA championship with the Laurentides Red Sox, and counts a couple of his teammates among his close friends — other players in his 2001 cohort were considered much better prospects (including Samuel Poulin of the Sherbrooke Phoenix and Jakob Pelletier of the Moncton Wildcats).

Several of the people involved in coaching him at that age admit as much, as do his parents.

"People were always talking about the 2001s, but never Alexis," said Nathalie. "He wasn't exactly the fastest skater."

The story of how Lafrenière found his stride — metaphorically and literally — is a function of wounded pride, stubbornness and biology.

In his first year of Bantam hockey, Lafrenière had designs on playing in the Quebec Winter Games, but when the emails went out inviting players to the regional team, he didn't get one.

His parents told him he had two choices: sulk, or make them regret it.

"He took door number two," said his mother. "That was in December. In January, just before the team was set to leave, he was at a friend's house and we got a call that someone had been injured."

Great news, right?

"He didn't want to go. He said 'I'm not a stop-gap. Forget it,'" Nathalie said.

A teammate's older brother, who had played in the event, ultimately convinced him to go. Lafrenière would end up playing on the top line and having a good tournament, though his team would finish eighth.

"We think that's where it really started. The following spring he played at the Quebec U-15s, and it went really well," she said (Lafrenière scored in the final, which his team won). "Then the agents started phoning."

At first the family wondered why they'd bother signing with an agent — Alexis is good, but he plays for fun. In the end they would decide on retaining Momentum Hockey; he is represented by Emilie Castonguay, one of the rare women in the hockey agent business.

That summer, in 2015, he did his usual offseason routine of fitness exercises, goofing around with his pals, and noodling around on the

baseball diamond. Oh, he also grew three inches and put on 10 or 15 pounds.

"I matured a fair bit physically and got a lot stronger . . . I've always worked pretty hard, but that's kind of when everything came together," he said.

At training camp that fall, his second year Bantam, he was a different player. Other parents came up to Hugo and asked which power-skating instructor he'd gone to in the summer. In reality he hadn't done anything special, other than grow.

Lafrenière's coaches from that period will tell you that if they'd had to vote for a most-likely-to-go-first-overall player in PeeWee or Bantam, Lafrenière would not have been top of the list.

"He was a really good player, and he had a great work ethic, but would have I been able to predict he could be considered a first overall pick? No," said Patrick Boileau, who also played 700 professional games, 48 of them in the NHL. "At the same time, there are things that we spend years teaching, like where to put your stick in this situation, subtleties . . . he was one of the few players who assimilated information very quickly."

Boileau coached Lafrenière with the PeeWee AAA Seigneurs (and later in Bantam), which was affiliated with the Bouchard academy's stable of coaches, all of whom are former pro players.

"They were the first class, they were the year one babies," laughed Boileau. In retrospect, he said Lafrenière's main qualities were obvious even then.

"He's a player who doesn't live in the now, he sees into the future," he said. "He sees where everyone is on the ice, he knows what's about to happen."

Lafrenière's slow build meant that he wasn't pushed toward the fast track; instead, as his confidence grew he dominated his Bantam league. Then he dominated Midget.

According to Rimouski coach and general manager Serge Beausoleil, who by then had taken notice of the kid from Saint-Eustache, standing above the crowd paid dividends.

In the summer of 2017 the Océanic won the draft lottery (although Moncton had better odds) and selected Lafrenière with the top pick.

It was a good fit for multiple reasons, not the least of which is the Rimouski sweater Lafrenière used to wear as a kid (it had Crosby on the back). The Océanic have had an unusual run of success in grooming number one picks. Unless something drastically changes, the alternate captain who wears No. 11 will be their third since 1998.

Courtesy of the Lafrenière-Bertrand family.

The prize recruit was billeted with the family of a Rimouski banker who owns a small stake in the club (they declined an interview request through the team) and Beausoleil, a history teacher by training, set about instituting additional supports.

This year, former Océanic assistant Donald Dufresne rejoined the team after losing his job in the Canadiens organization; he was also on staff when Crosby played in Rimouski.

Because of his late birthday, Lafrenière is still in high school, and the Océanic's academic tutor this season happens to be Beausoleil's wife; there will be no bunking off or ignoring homework. Lafrenière enjoys a few perks that not all QMJHL players do, like no roommate and a loaner from a local car dealership (his name is splashed across the passenger side, where he spends most of his time given he still has a learner's permit).

The perks, however, don't extend to the Océanic dressing room.

"I wouldn't be doing him any favours if I treated him any differently than anyone else," Beausoleil said. "I'm just as hard on him as the other guys,"



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in some ways maybe harder. He may be an elite player but he can still be better defensively and without the puck."

In his first year with the Océanic, all Lafrenière did was score 42 goals.

This past summer, Lafrenière was chosen for Canada's entry at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup under-18 tournament in Edmonton, the second time he had worn the maple leaf (the first was at the U-17 championship in Dawson City, Yukon, three months after he turned 16; he scored in the final but his team lost to Hughes' U.S. squad). Not only that, but he was named captain of the Hlinka team and went on to score the championship-winning goal, a coast-to-coast stunner that encapsulated what he's all about.

It involved anticipation, and decisiveness, and skill, and power, and the willingness to rise to the occasion; the sort of memorable goal that big-time players score.

At one point during the Lafrenière family's interview with The Athletic, the doorbell rings. It's a kid selling chocolates to raise funds for his school, which happens to be Lafrenière's alma mater.

As Hugo Lafrenière answers the door, the kid says in wonder, "is this Alexis' house?"

It is.

In a small community, everyone knows where the stars live. Even if they're barely old enough to drive.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.08.2018

1119999 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' offensive explosion a reward for solid defensive play

Mark Spector | December 8, 2018, 1:18 AM

EDMONTON — You could hear the commentary from around the National Hockey League, as the Edmonton Oilers built up a 5-2-1 run under new coach Ken Hitchcock on the strength of just 16 goals in eight games.

"They're playing Hitchcock hockey," they said, as if the coach was asking his team to stop each night at two goals. "This is what you get with Hitch."

The reality in Edmonton is this: this team lacks scoring depth — especially on the wings — so the only way for Hitchcock to succeed is to coach the puck out of the Oilers net. Make 'em confident enough in their defensive game, ensure you don't need more than three to win, salt in a good break or two, and presto!

As Teemu Selanne always said, the ketchup bottle always finds a way to flow. And flow it did, in a 7-2 win the Oilers cooked up Friday night against the Minnesota Wild.

"First of all," began reclaimed goaltender Cam Talbot, "knowing that we can win those tight games (builds confidence). Then, knowing we can come out and when we play the right way we get rewarded on the odd night?"

"It's good to know that we can check for our wins, but it's also good to know we have that firepower that we can get some depth scoring."

The Oilers had scored two regulation goals, or less, in six of eight games under Hitchcock. But the goaltending was good, and their defensive game has begun to solidify.

Like the pitcher that fills from the bottom up to the top, they've taken on Hitchcock's identity in the defensive zone, and gone to work on their neutral zone play. Hitchcock has largely left them alone in the offensive zone, and the Oilers have run dry — until Friday.

"Offence is something that comes in waves, and for whatever reason we haven't been able to find it — but we've been solid defensively," said Connor McDavid. "It doesn't really matter how good your offence is if you're only giving up two a night. You're going to be in the game."

The Oilers have a terrific Corsi under Hitchcock, but all those shots and all that possession time somehow haven't translated to goals. We still wonder how much of that is bad luck, and how much is a reflection on the roster, but at times like these, every team in hockey simply hopes for the former, and averts its eyes from the latter.

"We have a lot of faith in each other, and we've been battling really hard a lot of games and they've been one-goal games," said winger Jujhar Khaira. "A game like this, it shows that all the hard work we're putting it is working."

"We know we have (offence) in us."

Of course, McDavid led the way Friday with three assists and a goal you've likely seen 19 times on the highlight shows already. Leon Draisaitl was really hopping, rifling home a lovely game opening goal, another in the third, and adding an assist on a plus-4 night.

The blue line chipped in five points, the fourth line scored, the second line slammed one home, and Talbot gave the Oilers his second straight Grade A performance. He's won two straight now after losing six straight, and with Mikko Koskinen unbeaten at Rogers Place (5-0), Edmonton suddenly looks very solid in the pipes.

Sure, Devan Dubnyk gave up a freebie for the second goal, and once Dubnyk got the hook Alex Stalock didn't exactly lock things down. But have no doubt: this was a game between a team that's gaining confidence, and one that's heading the other direction.

Talbot appears to be back in form. Dubnyk, meanwhile, had another stinker, just when it looked like he might be stabilizing his game.

"To say I'm not concerned, I'd be lying to you," said Wild head coach Bruce Boudreau. "I am concerned about a lot of guys on this team right now. He's not the only one."

"It's a test of character now," Boudreau emoted. "You either bounce back or you start blaming everybody else. We have to look at ourselves. This has been the same group for almost three years now. We have to right the ship and go from there. We have to be ready for the next game and play the right way."

Here in Edmonton, with a new coach, it doesn't seem like the same group at all. It may turn out Edmonton can't score enough, but for now, it's been a long while since we've an Oilers team clamp down defensively like this.

"I thought we played so well for each other in the third period," said Hitchcock, who made a rare post-game oration to his players Friday. "I told the players that at the end of the game, the things we did, the way we covered our own net, the way we got out on transition... I thought we did a heck of a job and we were rewarded for the goals."

"When you continually spend time in the offensive zone, eventually things like this happen. We haven't finished. We had way more opportunities in St. Louis than this with in-zone time but today we scored on our chances."

"But when you spend that much time, good things happen. We're trying to stay with it."

That's what they always say. That the ketchup bottle will always flow, eventually.

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Sportsnet.ca / Mystery of Duchene's Senators future deepens with injury

Wayne Scanlan December 7, 2018, 12:04 PM

Not much could stop Matt Duchene this season.

That is until he pulled up lame Thursday night on an innocent-looking chase for the puck, trying to nullify an icing call in the second period of Ottawa's 5-2 loss to the Montreal Canadiens.

Duchene's "lower-body" injury appeared to involve a groin or right leg. He did not return to action and post-game Senators head coach Guy Boucher said the injury "could be" long term. He said the same of an upper-body injury to Bobby Ryan. Minus these two veteran forwards, the Senators are in a world of hurt.

For Duchene, the injury could not have come at a worse time as the pending unrestricted free agent was having the best season of his career, beefing up his negotiating position.

The mystery of Duchene's future in Ottawa just got a little more intriguing.

Duchene, 27, has been flying around and putting up numbers since he joined the Colorado Avalanche in 2009 out of OHL Brampton.

The third overall pick by the Avs in 2009, Duchene leapt into Colorado's starting lineup, his dynamic offensive game putting him in Calder Trophy contention in 2009-10. He ultimately finished third to Buffalo Sabres defenceman Tyler Myers. Duchene produced 24 goals and 55 points in his rookie season and hasn't looked back.

Though he experienced occasional slumps with the Avs, Duchene was a productive player in Colorado, including a career-best 70 points in 71 games in 2013-14, as close as Duchene had come to being a point-per-game player. Until now.

Duchene's 22 points in November for the Ottawa Senators have elevated him to a pedestal of production he hasn't known before. Playing guilty? Maybe. Twenty-one of the 22 points came after the players' Uber video went viral on Nov. 5, although as he told visiting Montreal media Thursday that the video is "old news."

Duchene, who featured prominently on the video, afterwards apologized publicly for mocking the coaching of assistant Martin Raymond, in what he believed to be a private discussion among teammates. He went on to shred the opposition with eight goals and 14 assists in November.

Duchene knows full well his role as go-to guy on a young Ottawa team is a factor in his point tear.

"I had two years in Denver, where the opportunity was similar," Duchene says. "I expect this out of myself."

Ottawa Senators centre Matt Duchene (95) celebrates a goal against the Florida Panthers during first period action in Ottawa on Monday, Nov. 19, 2018. (Sean Kilpatrick/CP)

Until getting injured in game No. 29 of the season, Duchene was scoring 1.21 points per game, or 34 in 28 games. Prior to Thursday's home game against Montreal, he was asked by visiting reporters about his contract situation.

Duchene said he hasn't "heard anything" and that his position on the matter hasn't changed. He hinted at the fact Ottawa is still deep in a rebuild, leaving all to wonder if he's willing to wait.

"These guys have shown what they can do," Duchene said of the young Senators. "It might take a few years for this team to get where it needs to

go ... it's got a good mix of youth and veterans right now, and we'll see what happens."

His own injury might conspire against the Senators' case to get him back. Without Duchene and Ryan, the Senators are a one-line team (Stone-White-Tkachuk), and at risk of having their season implode after getting to within two points of a wild-card spot earlier this week.

Senators general manager Pierre Dorion has made it clear he hopes to sign both of his major pending unrestricted free agents, Duchene and Mark Stone, who has helped make rookie housemate and linemate Brady Tkachuk an instant success. Dorion says there will not be an issue finding money in the budget to offer Stone and Duchene suitable long-term contracts.

The sense in Ottawa is that Stone, who is not eligible to be signed before Jan. 1, will be the easier of the two to get done. Although he will want to know if Duchene is likely sticking around.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

Reading the tea leaves of Duchene's intent is a little more difficult. From the day he got here, Duchene has said all the right things about being in Ottawa. Early in the season we had a discussion about his hometown of Haliburton, in Ontario cottage country, which he considers a convenient three-hour ride away through central Ontario.

The Senators gave up a lot to get Duchene back when they were in the go-for-it mode following the 2017 run to the Eastern Conference Final. On Nov. 5, 2017, Ottawa got Duchene from Colorado in a three-way trade that sent centre Kyle Turris to Nashville. From Ottawa, the Avs received goalie Andrew Hammond, forward prospect Shane Bowers, the Senators' first-round pick in 2019 and a third-round pick in 2019.

It behooves the organization to try to keep Duchene, although there is an argument to be made that if this is a true rebuild, he could be flipped in a trade to acquire an asset or pick. After all, that is the argument Dorion makes to this day in explaining why Erik Karlsson was traded.

But Dorion seems adamant about doing what it takes to keep his star centre. Duchene is in position to seek a massive raise from the \$6.5 million he is earning this season (cap hit \$6 million). Assuming the dollars and term can satisfy Duchene and agent Pat Brisson, the larger question is whether Duchene feels the Senators can be competitive enough fast enough.

The timing isn't right for him to articulate just how badly he wants to be on a contending team, after eight-plus seasons of mostly also-ran status with Colorado. Duchene will be 28 on Jan. 16. This next contract is the most important of his career. He can't afford to make a mistake. From 2009 to 2017, Duchene saw action in all of eight playoff games. He has yet to score a playoff goal and has six assists.

Stone is two years younger and has already been in 27 playoff games, all for the Senators. He's on a one-year deal earning \$7.35 million.

Sometimes, it can be insightful to hear a player talk about his intentions while confronted by a reporter in another city, where the sound bite is less likely to turn up on local radio. Last week, Duchene made some interesting comments in New York City to Dan Rosen of NHL.com.

Duchene started the interview by talking about how much he loves playing in Ottawa. So far, so good.

But Duchene quickly added: "I want a chance to play for the Stanley Cup."

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

As Duchene repeated on Thursday morning, Ottawa is likely a few years from legitimate contention. While Duchene appreciates the club's young talent he must decide if Ottawa's ownership is willing to do what it takes



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financially to put the club over the top, as teams like Tampa, Toronto, Nashville and others routinely do.

"Without me knowing at all what's going to happen, I do know my mentality is to find the best hockey fit for now and in the future," Duchene told NHL.com. "It's not about really anything else for me."

In Ottawa, Duchene can be assured of a leadership role and possibly the captaincy. He undoubtedly can keep his role as No. 1 centre, first-unit power-play duty and anything else he might desire.

He told Rosen that while he loves his role with the Senators, "at the same time I want to see more wins in the win column for us." He went on to say this is "an evaluation process."

Except that it's not the player being evaluated in this case, it's the team, by the player. And that team just lost its most productive player. Matt Duchene.

LOCK UP CHABOT

The Senators have three main UFAs to consider – Ryan Dzingel being the third. Considering the rise of the kids, some of the up-and-coming RFAs are worth thinking about ahead of time.

Centre Colin White, who has blossomed into a top-six player, is an RFA next summer. Chabot, whose 31 points in 29 games have him tied with Toronto's Morgan Rielly for the lead in NHL scoring among defencemen, has another year left on his entry-level deal, but can be extended next summer and should be a priority before he becomes too expensive.

Chabot showed his youth Thursday, struggling with a minus-4 against Montreal. He is playing too much for a second-year player (24:06 TOI), but remains the future on the blue line.

As for his big two UFAs, Stone and Duchene, Dorion has said repeatedly, "hopefully the next time we talk about either one of them we can announce a contract extension."

The priority now is getting Duchene healthy again.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks feel closer to progress this season, even amid recent collapse

Iain MacIntyre December 7, 2018, 3:26 PM

VANCOUVER — As he talks about last season, Vancouver Canucks goalie Anders Nilsson extends one hand, points to the ground and slowly starts a circle with his finger.

It is unclear if he is imagining a toilet or a sink, but it's obvious that water is spiralling down a drain.

"It's not like guys weren't trying, but we knew," Nilsson said. "You could see how the season was going. We weren't coming back. We weren't close in a lot of games. Guys didn't give up, but you could tell."

And that, he said, is why the epic crash of last season was different than the epic crash of the last four weeks for the Canucks. Because this Vancouver team, younger and faster and starting to emerge from its rebuild, believes it can come back from its lost month.

There was a lot of talk around the team this week about positivity, about guarding against resignation, and dealing constructively with the psychological challenge of going 1-10-2.

Coach Travis Green, who said a couple of startling things before Thursday's game against the Nashville Predators, claimed the Canucks were actually playing better in the latter part of their losing streak than they had when they dashed to a surprising 10-6-1 start.

"We've got a lot of young players we're trying to make better," Green said after the morning skate. "But you're also worried about their emotional psyche. We're trying to ... be really honest with them. It would be different if we had a bunch of guys that I didn't think were playing that well. That would be a different conversation. But quite honestly, we might have played better this last stretch of games than we had when we were winning."

"I know if we keep this up, we're going to be OK. We're going to find a win and then all of a sudden it will start to turn if we keep playing that way."

As if to make their coach look smart, the Canucks then dumped the powerful Predators 5-3 at Rogers Arena — they led 2-0 and 5-1 — in their best game since Nov. 8 to launch themselves into a three-game road trip that starts Sunday.

Will the Canucks recover from their nose dive the last four weeks or just swirl down the drain like they did last winter, when they went 2-11-2 amid a crush of injuries between Dec. 7 and Jan. 9?

We'll see how they do next week in St. Louis, Columbus and Nashville. But inside the dressing room, Nilsson said the feeling is entirely different than a year ago, when three guys driving the attack were soon-to-be-retired 37-year-olds Daniel and Henrik Sedin and soon-to-be-traded Thomas Vanek, who was 34.

"I think the spirit is higher this year because even when we've been losing, we're close," Nilsson said. "We've been playing good hockey. And everyone wants to turn this around. No one is giving up or waiting for next season. I feel that vibe and energy in here coming to the rink every day."

"I think it's that, in the organization, we have some really good potential on this team, and in the years ahead guys are just going to get better and better. In the locker room, you're more in the present moment. You're not thinking: 'Next year we're going to be better.' It's more about doing a good job today because if you don't do a good job today, you're not going to get next year."

The Canucks have been far more competitive the last month than when they collapsed last winter.

Of their 10 regulation losses, six were by one goal. In their 11 regulation losses during last year's streak, they were within a goal only once at the end of a game. Six other defeats were by at least three goals, and the average margin of loss in the 11 games was 3.18. The Canucks were not close.

"It was kind of difficult last year because it was the end of an era (for the Sedins and the organization)," defenceman Eric Gudbranson said. "Maybe you were working towards the inevitable."

"We set the standard (for this season) with our start. We set the bar pretty high and that's how we compare ourselves. That's the template that we look at as far as what we expect of ourselves. You can take a large-number amount of minutes almost every game and say we won those minutes. But in a smaller amount of minutes, we lost the game. That's kind of what we've been dealing with."

Rookie-of-the-year candidate Elias Pettersson, 20, who has 25 points in his first 25 NHL games, makes a huge difference to the Canucks compared to last season. So does a healthy Bo Horvat, who has 27 points in 30 games and has reached yet another level.

Wingers Jake Virtanen and Nikolay Goldobin are having breakthrough seasons. So is defenceman Ben Hutton, who is the oldest of these players at age 25. Against the Predators, the average age of forwards on Green's top two lines was 22.3.



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"I was out (injured) during that time last year, but I feel like the guys are a little more positive," Horvat said. "We know that we're playing really good hockey for 50 or 55 minutes. The frustrating part is knowing you're playing well enough to win but not getting results."

"I'm really hopeful," veteran centre Jay Beagle said. "We're a young team that had success at the beginning. We have to continue to push and continue to build and get better."

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers settling into Ken Hitchcock's possession-heavy style

Mark Spector | December 7, 2018, 3:54 PM

EDMONTON — The numbers barely make any sense. And surely they cannot be sustainable.

Can they?

Since Ken Hitchcock took over the Edmonton Oilers their record is 5-2-1. It's an identical record to the Toronto Maple Leafs over the same span of games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2018

But here's the kicker: Edmonton has scored just 16 goals over that time, compared to Toronto's 32.

The 11 points Edmonton has picked up under Hitchcock is tied for seventh in the NHL, but the 16 goals they've scored ranks 29th.

The team has a great five-on-five Corsi — 52.9%, ranked ninth in the NHL — which tells us that Edmonton has found a way to possess the puck more than its opponents. And the old hockey adage goes, "As long as we keep getting chances, eventually they'll start going into the net."

So we asked Hitchcock at Friday's morning skate, with the Minnesota Wild in town for a key Western Conference game Friday night: how long do we hang on that old adage, before we decide that the offence needs to be upgraded?

"Well, that adage has changed," Hitchcock said. "To me, getting chances is not relevant. Possession time is everything. The more possession time you have, the higher quality of chances you get.

"We are significantly increasing possession time, and there's a philosophy that goes with that," he continued. "How do you maintain possession of the puck? What do you do in the offensive zone? What do you do on your entries? What do you do on your forecheck? It's all connected, and our players have really bought into that.

"We're getting that, and that's why I'm not worried about scoring goals right now, as I am about consistent possession time. Possession time equals offence."

Just eight games under a new coach, the Oilers are the proverbial work in progress. He's got them halfway there, in that they're maintaining possession and grinding teams down in the opponent's defensive zone.

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Hitchcock talks about turning on the video of a game with no sound ("No offence to the play by play people,") and seeing five Oilers in the TV frame at the same time — both on offence and defence. That's when he knows his team is supporting each other in the necessary way.

"We're out there as a unit, as a group," said defenceman Oscar Klefbom. "And it's not just the forwards job to score goals. We've got to score goals from the back end too. And it's not only the defencemen's jobs to defend. We've got to do everything as a whole group here."

Of course, the next step becomes actually scoring. Because in a 3-2 league, you can't live on two goals per night.

That leads us to another truism in hockey: the team defending always tires before the team on offence does. That's why possession leads to offence, because a worn-down defensive unit simply has to give up chances eventually.

Don't they?

"When the other team starts to play straight-legged, you know you're going to get a real quality chance. It looks like you're on the power play even though it's five-on-five," Hitchcock said. "We're getting to that, where we're making the other team play more and more straight-legged.

"That's what you've got to try to get to."

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Sportsnet.ca / Truth By Numbers: How Colorado's top line is finding its success

Andrew Berkshire December 7, 2018, 10:18 AM

The Colorado Avalanche have one of the league's top lines, but how much of their success is driven by the league's top scorer, and how much of it has to do with superstar Nathan MacKinnon's play driving? Are the Philadelphia Flyers the most obvious team that is just a goalie away from being a really tough team? We dive into those questions, and more, in this week's column.

SPOTLIGHT PERFORMANCE

Last season the Colorado Avalanche were a bit of a Cinderella team that made an unexpected trip to the playoffs and met the Presidents' Trophy-winning Nashville Predators. Everyone expected that series to be over quickly and cleanly in Nashville's favour, including me.

But the combination of Colorado being a very strong attacking team off the rush and Nashville being relatively weak at defending off the rush made things a little dicey for the Predators, who were outplayed for much of the round and forced into a longer series than expected.

Nashville still won, but Colorado succeeded in raising eyebrows around the league as Nathan MacKinnon was able to dominate his matchup against P.K. Subban and Mattias Ekholm. In watching the Avalanche you could see they had a chance to be more than just a one-time deal, even if the numbers weren't great last season. This was a team on the rise.

Lo and behold the Avalanche are getting about 56 per cent of the high danger chances, 54 per cent of the scoring chances on net, and 52 per cent of the passes to the slot all at 5-on-5. Suddenly last year's pretenders with a bright future are right in the middle of it.

A big part of the Avs' success this season is that top line of Nathan MacKinnon between Gabe Landeskog and Mikko Rantanen. And though Rantanen struggled to score in the playoffs last year, he's building on his 84-point season in 2017-18 to lead the NHL in scoring so far this season with a whopping 47 points in 29 games.

Right behind Rantanen is MacKinnon at 44 points, making them the highest-scoring duo in the NHL by 10 points ahead of Brayden Point and Nikita Kucherov in Tampa Bay.

The Avalanche as a team look excellent, but how sustainable is it for Rantanen and MacKinnon to be on pace for 135 and 126 points, respectively?

MacKinnon and Rantanen are great on the power play, but looking at just 5-on-5 gives us a bigger sample of controllable minutes to deal with, so we'll stick to that for now.

Through that lens, it's clear MacKinnon is the shooter and Rantanen is the playmaker, but it's far more pronounced than I was expecting, with Rantanen showing as a far below average scoring chance producer at even strength.

I was also surprised to see that it was more MacKinnon who makes plays off the rush than Rantanen, both as a shooter and a passer, which makes some sense since he's the primary puck carrier on the line. Still, you would expect a pure playmaker like Rantanen to set up a few more plays for MacKinnon off the rush, but instead it appears that MacKinnon is more of a singular force who isn't necessarily helped a bunch by his teammates once he gains the offensive blue line.

Rantanen's ability to make passes to the slot is exemplary — there are only a handful of players in the league who can do it more often. But that appears to be more of a complement to MacKinnon's elite play than two elite players stuck together.

Even in terms of scoring chance generation Rantanen isn't as far above league average as you might expect. So while he's a good player, I'm hesitant to come to the conclusion that his incredible start to the season is a result of Rantanen asserting himself among the league's elite.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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It might more be about playing with one of the league's best players, while also being quite good himself – and maybe a bit lucky.

THE QUESTION

This week Steve Dangle went broader and asked an NHL-wide question instead of team- or player-specific:

"How many teams are a goaltender away from being good this season?"

When I looked into this I was genuinely surprised to see that, according to Corsica, 12 of the NHL's 31 teams have total save percentages in all situations under .900. The NHL's average save percentage is down to .908 this year from .912 last season, but even then it's somewhat shocking to see the regularity of save percentages in the 80 per cent range nowadays.

What is somewhat interesting is there just isn't that much variance in save percentage across the NHL this season. The league median are the Vegas Golden Knights at 90 per cent, and the worst team is just 1.88 per cent below that, while the top team is just 2.31 per cent above that. A spread of 4.19 per cent across the league is much bigger than last year's 3.01 per cent spread from best to worst team save percentage, but I expected more variance with just a third of the season played so far.

One team that sticks out like a sore thumb is Philadelphia, who over the past few years were actually quite strong defensively, and now have the worst team save percentage in the NHL. So are they suddenly bad on defence?

The Flyers do give up more scoring chances off the rush than league average, which is a bad thing because those are the most dangerous types of chances. But the Flyers also give up the absolute fewest cycle chances, third-fewest chances off the forecheck, and the third-fewest passes to the slot. This means they are essentially the NHL's best in-zone defensive team, with very little pre-shot movement allowed.

They also give up fewer high danger scoring chances and scoring chances in general than the league average, which means they were extremely unfortunate to have to rely on Calvin Pickard for a good chunk of this young season, and that Brian Elliott's above league average save percentage isn't really much to write home about.

I have the Flyers ranked as about the 14th-best team in the NHL this year, which means they're a fringe playoff team, and their 27th-place position in the standings can be laid mostly at the feet of goaltending.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

BUY OR SELL

- The Maple Leafs continue to move on from their perennial press box crew, sending Josh Leivo to Vancouver after trading Connor Carrick to Dallas earlier in the year. In limited minutes Leivo ranks 150th in scoring chances and 236th in chance creation per 20 minutes at 5-on-5, so expect a middle-six level of production for him if he gets lots of minutes for the Canucks.
- I might eat a lot of crow over Brady Tkachuk after not liking him as a top pick last summer. Per minute he's putting up the fourth-most scoring chances of anyone in the NHL, bested only by Brendan Gallagher, Auston Matthews, and Timo Meier. From the high danger area Tkachuk's 2.64 chances per 20 is miles ahead of Paul Byron in second place at 1.98, who himself is a big outlier ahead of Ty Rattie at 1.66.
- The Ducks have won five straight and boast the ninth-best record in the NHL at 15-10-5, but I'm not buying it. Looking at all the numbers, they've been the worst team in the NHL this season, it's just that John Gibson has been playing Hart Trophy-quality hockey and the team has been lucky.
- The Wild's Jason Zucker has had a fine start, on pace for 55 points, but don't be surprised if he ends up surpassing last season's 33 goals. He's

one of the league's leaders in chances off the rush, and he's got a bullet shot.

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Sportsnet.ca / Mike Smith, Flames firing on all cylinders as wins pile up

Eric Francis | December 7, 2018, 1:43 AM

CALGARY – No amount of post-game accusations or controversy could wipe the smile from Mike Smith's face.

Already subjected to enough debate early this season, the Calgary Flames netminder was happy his 31-save shutout could do most of his talking.

A 2-0 win over the Minnesota Wild marked his fifth-consecutive win since The Meltdown against Montreal put his status in question.

No longer.

Mike Smith is the team's starter, a realization he punctuated with several intense fist-pumps following the final horn.

"I definitely feel I've come a long ways in the last few weeks," said Smith, who has spent the better part of the last two months openly battling confidence issues.

"The game feels a lot more calm and confident and that's a big thing in this position."

Does he feel like he's 'back'?

"It's a double-edged sword – it's easy to say 'you're back' and then next game anything can happen," said Smith, who has a 1.50 goals against average and .939 save percentage in his last five games.

"You've got to not ride the roller coaster. It's easier said than done. When things are going well you don't want to take anything for granted, you want to do the things that helped you get it back on the rails.

"I would just say it's a work in progress every single day."

Progress is the key here, as Smith's early struggles threatened an otherwise solid start for a team now officially firing on all cylinders.

On this night it was a pair of Elias Lindholm snipes that aided Smith's cause.

He was brilliant – by far the best skater on a night in which a third goal of his was erased following a coach's challenge on an offside call.

A pair of assists by Johnny Gaudreau and Mark Giordano spoke to their excellence as well, as the Flames have snagged 17 of 20 points recently.

These Flames are rolling.

Yet, during post-game scrums it was a violent late-game exchange that had everybody taking sides.

As Mikael Backlund started heading up ice in search of an empty-netter with his head down, Calgary native Matthew Dumba stepped up to the blue line with a hellacious hit that sent Backlund laboring back to the dressing room for the night.

There was no update provided on Backlund after the game.

No sooner had Backlund left the ice than Ryan Lomberg jumped on, racing towards Dumba who hit the deck as Lomberg threw a punch after tackling him.



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An automatic suspension is likely in order for instigating a fight in the final five minutes, although the league has some discretion. A coach's fine is included in such matters.

Not surprisingly, both sides saw the exchange differently.

"(Backlund) was facing him and had his head down a little bit – a good hockey hit to me," said Wild coach Bruce Boudreau.

"The other part, (Lomborg) comes flying off the bench. I don't know if he was sent out because he's certainly not playing the last minute-and-a-half of the game no matter what the score is.

"We'll have to let the NHL make the decision on that."

Boudreau also wants the league to look into a third period hit along the boards Mark Giordano made on Mikko Koivu that prompted the enraged Finn to leave the game.

"I don't know," said Boudreau when asked if the Flames captain should be suspended on a play he was whistled for tripping on.

"He stuck his leg out pretty good if you guys saw the same thing I did."

Flames coach Bill Peters threw a little shade at the officials for allowing the hit on Backlund to occur

"We created a turnover in the neutral zone and Backlund had the puck and got tripped — that's a goal," said Peters.

"It's 3-0, game over. That's where it should have ended. Ref the whole game, play 60 minutes like a player, don't put the whistle away as a ref. I think there was a trip on Backlund from Granlund."

Lindholm had strong words on the play.

"I think it's kind of showing no respect for the player and for the game" he said of the Dumba hit.

"They're down 2-0 and there's 40 seconds left. I thought he left his feet a little and it's kind of a high hit. Hopefully Backs is okay because we're going to need him."

Lindholm went out his way to thank Smith for lifting the team to a win despite not being as sharp defensively as he'd like.

So did both coaches.

"He was good tonight – when he's on he's really on, everybody knows that," said Boudreau, providing an addendum obvious to Flames fans.

"When he's off he's really off.

"I knew when he was picking (dump-ins) off the boards and the glass he was on his game."

Reminded how painful his morning skate was when he took a puck to the groin, Smith was asked if he'd endure similar pain for a win every time out.

"100 per cent," beamed Smith.

Be careful what you wish for.

After all, most of his wishes have certainly come true of late.

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TSN.CA / Matthews, Nylander working to regain their form

Kristen Shilton

TSN Toronto reporter Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team held a noon practice at MasterCard Centre on Friday.

When the Maple Leafs fell 5-4 to the Detroit Red Wings in William Nylander's season debut on Thursday, head coach Mike Babcock said the winger's 12:29 ice time (and lack of play entirely through the final 11:37 of the third period) wasn't a reflection of his preparedness, but rather that it will be a "slow crawl" for both Nylander and Auston Matthews to get their games back in top form.

In Nylander's case, it had been nearly 230 days since he'd last played in an NHL game before Thursday's contest, while Matthews was playing in only his fourth game back from a shoulder injury that held him out for more than a month which translated into 14 missed games.

"Did I expect [Nylander] to be any different than he was? Not really. Do I think this is going to take some time? For sure," Babcock said after the Leafs practice on Friday. "But I don't think Willy is too wound up about it, I'm not wound up about it. It's no different than Auston. When these guys come back, it takes you a period of time to be feeling as good as you can so your legs work and your brain work at the same time."

Yet, it's not as if Matthews, at least, hasn't been a key part of Toronto's offence since his return to game action on Nov. 28. Over his first three games alone, Matthews amassed five goals and two assists, including one overtime winner.

"They're really good players so they're going to be able to do things in the meantime anyway," Babcock said. "But for them to feel as good as they want to feel and know they have rhythm and know that it's going, their best is going to take them some time. But they're confident in their abilities, we're confident in their abilities, we're not letting that get in our way."

Managing expectations is part of the job for both players, and Matthews didn't think anyone could judge Nylander based on Thursday's season debut alone, especially not when his first practice since signing a six-year extension last Saturday was Friday.

"I don't know how I would feel if I was literally just jumping into a game from summer skates for the last couple months," Matthews said. "Willy is a guy who can slow things down [on the ice] but when you haven't played a hockey game and you jump into Game 29, it's pretty tough."

"It's going to take a couple games before you get there," admitted Nylander. "Practices and stuff are going to help speed the process up. You have to practice the way you play. It was pretty fast out there, the game was going pretty fast so it felt better and better as the game was going on."

That's how Matthews has been feeling lately, too. While he played 11 games prior to getting hurt and was able to skate throughout his recovery, his starts haven't been as strong since coming back, and they might not be up to par for a while yet.

"It really takes about a month almost to get back and game by game you want to feel more like yourself," Matthews said. "These last couple games, the first period has been really tough for me to kind of get myself going because you just haven't played hockey in a while. In the second and third I start to feel much better, but I want to feel good the whole game."

It was with his recent injury in mind that there was a collective cringe when Matthews was sent flying into the endboards on Thursday by Red Wings defenceman Niklas Kronwall. At first look, it appeared Matthews had led with his right shoulder, an area he hurt last season. Babcock theorized it was actually his back that took the heaviest contact, which was another injured spot for Matthews last year.

But on Friday, Matthews said there was nothing to worry about.

"I was fine. Just kind of lost my wind for a second," he said. "I didn't really feel anything there [on the shoulder], was just kind of one of those things."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Matthews didn't miss a shift against Detroit, and once his health was established a larger question loomed – did the centre's teammates do enough coming to his defence? Toronto is a team brimming with speed and skill, but lacks tough guys like Matt Martin, Leo Komarov and Roman Polak who all departed via trade or free agency last summer, leaving the Leafs short on physicality.

Still, Morgan Rielly did rush into the fray after Matthews initially went down, but tensions were quickly extinguished as Kronwall was assessed a two-minute penalty for boarding.

Babcock wasn't exactly surprised that's where the Leafs' reaction ended.

"I just think you look at our personnel, you look at what we got; we are what we are," he said. "Our toughness is our power play; take all the penalties you want."

It's not that Babcock wants his players to avoid mixing things up entirely. He would just rather see them display toughness in different ways.

"I would like our team to be physical on offence," he said. "What that means to me is when you get the puck, you hang onto it, you get your ass out, you protect the thing – you play heavy in the offensive zone. To me that's physical for our group. I'd like to finish checks when checks [are] there; when a guy is twice as big as you I'd like to cut off his arms."

At this point, the hit on Matthews is an isolated incident. There hasn't been a pattern this season of opponents taking a run at Toronto's stars, and the Leafs want to keep it that way. Just not at the expense of potentially winning hockey games.

"At that point in time [midway through the second period when Toronto was trailing 4-1] we realized we still had a chance to get back in the game," said Nazem Kadri. "The last thing you want to do is try to be revengeful and put your team down another man and they score on the power play and the game is really said and done. For us, you just try to be play hard, try to play physical and remember."

After only seeing two periods of action together, longtime linemates Nylander and Matthews were separated at Friday's practice – Matthews had Andreas Johnsson and Kasper Kapanen on his flanks, while Nylander was on Kadri's line with Connor Brown (Patrick Marleau, who missed the session with a maintenance day, is expected to take that spot on Saturday against the Boston Bruins).

While he was looking forward to getting in a groove with Matthews again, the change is suiting Nylander just fine for now.

"I've played with Naz in the past a lot [last season]. I think there's some chemistry there and we had it going today in practice," Nylander said. "We want to get some speed and o-zone time and create some scoring chances and work hard every shift."

And Kadri could certainly use a player with Nylander's potential to play with, too. The veteran has registered just one goal and three assists in his last 11 games, and knows how much of a difference-maker Nylander can be for those around him.

"It's just another great player you have to worry about," Kadri said. "For other teams, just having that matchup quality out there and being able to decide who's going to play against who is a tough decision for a lot of teams to make and that certainly gives us the advantage."

The focus immediately, though, has to be getting Nylander comfortable at game speed again. That's when the possibilities really start to expand for the Leafs' offence.

"I think just the physical aspect of having that contact [is hard]," Kadri said. "You may think you're in shape and he may have done everything he can on and off the ice to be ready, but once you add the physical and contact component, it really changes it. For him, I think just getting his rhythm back...he's a great player, he's going to be fine."

In the first three games after Matthews returned from injury, Toronto's power play looked like it was firmly back on track. Those units had

produced a slight 4-for-26 record in the 11 games prior to Matthews coming back, and then went on a scorching 4-for-7 run in their next three games.

Then against Detroit, the Leafs' power play was far from being on fire, even with Nylander slotting onto the second group. They finished the night 0-for-4, the first time Toronto had posted a record that poor in a game since Nov. 9.

"We just couldn't really set anything up," Matthews said. "They did a really good job, you have to give credit where it's due. I think we have to look at it as a power play and maybe get a little more hungry out there, keep things a little more simple, get the puck in, get guys down there."

A lack of urgency, not just on the power play but everywhere, was also evident to Babcock. That made it hard for him to single out just special teams as the culprit in why Thursday's game went off the rails through the first 40 minutes.

"Our power play has been great. Last night we weren't very good on it," he said. "I didn't think we were good at lots of things. So we're going to just put [it] aside and get on with life."

It's a logical conclusion to draw, though, that other teams will try to duplicate what the Red Wings did to stifle the NHL's sixth-ranked power play (26.7 per cent) in the future.

"Sometimes you're not going to be threading the needle every time and backdoor plays aren't going to be open every game, so teams will penalty kill differently," said Matthews. "I'm sure teams are going to look at what [Detroit] did last night and try to do what they did because they did a really good job, so now it's our job to respond."

Leafs lines at practice:

Forwards

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Brown-Kadri-Nylander

Ennis-Lindholm-Gauthier

Maintenance day: Patrick Marleau

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Marincin-Holl

Goaltenders

Andersen

Sparks

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TSN.CA / Why the Tkachuk family's front window could join NHL lore

Ian Mendes

The stories of future NHL stars learning how to play hockey around their homes have often become the stuff of legend.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 8, 2018

Wayne Gretzky's outdoor rink at his childhood home in Brantford, Ontario is arguably the most famous piece of backyard real estate in Canadian history.

Sidney Crosby's old family dryer – which is riddled with dents and puck marks – has been on display at a museum in Nova Scotia.

And perhaps it's time for the reinforced front windows at the Tkachuk household in St. Louis to be added to the list of the most iconic childhood stories in NHL history. After all, they might be the only family in hockey history to have their front windows protected with real plexiglass from an NHL arena.

When Keith Tkachuk was playing for the Blues, his two sons Matthew and Brady were learning the game like most kids by playing on the driveway. However, unlike most kids who use a tennis ball or an orange hockey ball outside, the Tkachuk boys were using a real puck so they could learn how to shoot properly.

And as you might expect, with a couple of boys around the ages 12 and 10, accuracy was not their strong suit.

"One day it got to the point where I was watching TV and the puck came flying thru the window and almost killed me," laughs Keith. "Glass everywhere. It was a double window and it still came thru. That must have been Brady shooting because he had a harder shot than Matthew."

Indeed, it was the younger Tkachuk who was the culprit on that afternoon. And this came even after he had a specific warning from his mom Chantal about where they were shooting the puck.

"I think the day before we broke the outer window and my mom said 'Alright – don't shoot at the net towards the house. Shoot on the other one,'" recalls Brady. "I guess I missed the net and put the puck right through the window. I remember my brother and I looking at each other and we slowly went inside the house."

Instead of receiving a tongue-lashing and a punishment when they sheepishly walked in the front door, the boys were spared due to Keith's soft spot for seeing his boys outside playing the game he loved.

"I didn't care. At least they were out there playing and working on their game," says Keith.

But that afternoon, the eldest Tkachuk did reach a breaking point – pun intended – with his front window.

"Multiple, multiple windows were broken with pucks going through, but after about the tenth or twelfth time, I'm like 'Let's get it going. We gotta figure something out here,'" Keith said.

"Pretty soon after that," Brady recalls, "the plexiglass came in."

When Keith went back to the Scottrade Center – which was the home of the Blues – he connected with the arena workers to help him find a solution to his perpetual cycle of broken front windows.

They determined it was possible to protect the family's front window by using the same plexiglass that is used around the boards inside NHL arenas. After taking some measurements, the ice crew came to the Tkachuk home to do a personal installation. And to the passerby, they wouldn't have known that anything drastic had been done to the house to protect it from the parade of errant flying pucks.

"It didn't really look any different. The Blues guys who came over from the rink to set it up - they measured it perfectly with our windows - so nothing really changed," recalls Brady. "It was the same house."

The home didn't look any different, which allowed Brady to dazzle his friends once the windows had been protected by the plexiglass.

"I kind of showed it off to my friends. I'd be like 'Hey watch this', then I would try and hit the window and it would bounce back and make that noise and it wouldn't break," says Brady.

"And they'd be like 'What is that?'"

"And I would say 'Oh it's just the plexiglass from the rink.'"

While his windows were spared, Keith remembers his ears taking a beating from the constant sound of pucks hitting the plexiglass outside his front window. "It was great, but man it made a lot of noise," he says.

Brady even admits the installation of plexiglass didn't do anything to help with their shooting accuracy.

"Then we started to miss the net on purpose just so we could hear the sound of the plexiglass," Brady says.

Keith says the Tkachuk family also had to replace the garage door every couple of years as well – although that wasn't solely because of pucks doing the damage.

"The garage doors is where the hitting took place. It was always big hits by the garage doors," Brady says of practicing bodychecking with Matthew. "I think that helped with the competitive nature between my brother and I."

The youngest Tkachuk says the damage was isolated to their own property and they never received any objections from those living around them.

"No complaints from our neighbours. The only damage we did was to our windows and the garage doors," he says.

While he was extremely lenient and patient with his sons' destructive tendencies, Keith isn't completely sure he has a definitive list of all of the damage the two boys did while they were growing up.

"I'm sure there are other things that they broke," chuckled Keith. "Like if I was on the road and they probably went running to their mom and said 'Don't tell dad.'"

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TSN.CA / Sens need to open the vault for Stone

Travis Yost

If you are caught up in the frenzy of this NHL regular season – well, I don't blame you. Pace of play and scoring are way up and we already have interesting divisional races building.

But we're also about six months away from what could be one of the more intriguing free-agent classes in quite some time. Some of these names will be extended as the season progresses, but right now names like Sergei Bobrovsky, Jordan Eberle, Matt Duchene, Joe Pavelski, Artemi Panarin, Semyon Varlamov, Jeff Skinner, William Karlsson, Anders Lee, Eric Staal, and Gustav Nyquist all need new contracts.

That's a lot of impactful names, and even if half of these guys end up extending before July 1 comes around, it will still be an interesting talent pool left to pick at for 30 other NHL teams.

Maybe the most interesting name on the list is Ottawa's Mark Stone. Stone, if you recall, signed a one-year deal last summer to avoid arbitration. The one-year deal was curious, particularly since Stone – with Erik Karlsson now in San Jose – has emerged as a face of the franchise. And because of that one-year deal, Stone and the Ottawa front office can't begin contract negotiations until the calendar flips over to 2019.

Stone's player profile is fascinating. When Stone entered the league, there were significant questions about his ceiling as a player – primarily related to concerns about his skating ability. Those concerns never manifested. Stone's not a lightning-quick skater, but his hockey sense



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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and spatial awareness are exceptional. It's made him one of the league's most reliable defensive forwards. Combine that with his knack for the net – Stone, by season's end, will almost certainly have five consecutive 20+ goal seasons – and it's clear he's developed into one of the league's most capable forwards.

Stone is going to get paid a fortune, either by Ottawa or another team in the league. Matt Cane's salary projections heading into last summer projected him to take 10.8 per cent of the cap starting in 2018-19. Extend that by a year with reports of an \$83 million salary cap in 2019-20, and a reasonable guess would see him lining up a contract around \$9 million average annual value. This is the going rate, roughly, for a first-line winger in today's NHL.

The fascinating question is whether or not a rebuilding Ottawa team pays him. He will be competing with the aforementioned Duchene for big money from Ottawa, and although the Sens say their intention is to sign both, we still don't know how the story will end.

What we do know, though, is that Stone is going to make it awfully difficult for the Senators to say no. In his final year under contract, Stone has exploded. His team-leading 13 goals and 30 points are both in the top-25 league wide. Despite playing on a defensively nightmarish Ottawa team, the Sens are still somehow comfortably outscoring the opposition when on the ice. (Ottawa is getting 57 per cent of the goals with Stone on at 5-on-5)

Most notably, it's become very, very apparent when Stone is on the ice and when he isn't. Ottawa's young core tends to play tremendously well with Stone and tremendously poorly without him. For my money, the best thing you can say about a player is that he elevates the performance of those around him.

This season is essentially a repeat of what's happened every year in Ottawa since Stone entered the league. If you look at how Ottawa's Corsi% falls when a player is playing with Stone versus without, you can see how disparate the results are:

The results are stunning. Effectively every Ottawa player (sans Cody Ceci and Mark Borowiecki) sees favourable shot differentials when playing with Mark Stone. Some players, like Thomas Chabot, Brady Tkachuk and Dylan DeMelo, are getting Ottawa more than 55 per cent of the shots when paired with Stone. That's the type of performance that puts teams into the playoffs.

Notice that when Stone moves away from a given player – indicated by the red bars – his results really don't change. This shows Stone consistently drives play and generates positive results for his team, regardless of teammate quality, environment or deployment. This is what we would expect from a first-line forward.

The grey bar – how a player performs away from Stone – is where things get dicey. Every single Ottawa skater sees an exceptional drop in performance when Stone's not on the ice with them. Getting 40 per cent of the shots is woeful in today's NHL. What's incredible is that nine different players – DeMelo, Ryan Dzingel, Colin White, Ceci, Max Lajoie, Chris Tierney, Christian Jaros, Borowiecki and Mikkel Boedker – are seeing shot percentages in the 30th percentile. That's unspeakably poor and the biggest reason why Ottawa, despite their ability to seemingly score goals at will, are still at the bottom of the NHL standings.

In total, Ottawa is getting 54 per cent of the shots and 57 per cent of the goals with Stone on the ice. Take him off of the ice and use any other combination of skaters at the Senators disposal, and those numbers change to 39 per cent of the shots and 41 per cent of the goals. That's the difference between a bona fide playoff team and a bona fide lottery team.

Ottawa is becoming increasingly reliant on Stone and may have no choice but to pay up for his services. Based on his profile and how the market has behaved over time, that's likely going to be an incredible pay day for the Winnipeg native.

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USA TODAY / Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella causes fashion stir by wearing hoodie on bench

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 7:28 a.m. ET Dec. 7, 2018 | Updated 3:20 p.m. ET Dec. 7, 2018

Columbus Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella was battling flu-like symptoms, not channeling his inner Bill Belichick, when he wore a team-branded hoodie on the bench for a game against the Philadelphia Flyers Thursday night.

Tortorella's attempts to find warmth and comfort created a buzz on social media. Even his team's website changed its photo to Tortorella wearing the hoodie.

Jokes were made about the Columbus Blue Jackets being renamed the Columbus Blue Hoodies. Not knowing Tortorella's medical issues, some thought he was being a rebel with a fashion cause.

Players poked fun at their coach becoming a rogue fashion icon.

"I think it's a fine," Blue Jackets player Brandon Dubinsky said jokingly to The Athletic. "Coaches in the NHL wear suits on the bench. He's going to have to pay some cash into the fine fund."

Said assistant coach Brad Larsen, who handled the postgame news conference for Tortorella: "Did you see his face? It was pretty white. He battled through. He had a tough night. I think he had about seven shirts on, and I'm sure there's a lot of talk about the hoodie. He was shaking like a leaf."

John Tortorella has flu-like symptoms.

His solution? Throw on a hoodie. ☺ pic.twitter.com/rwUSTOm6dT

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) December 7, 2018

The NHL doesn't have a dress code for coaches, but traditionally a coach wears a coat and tie behind the bench for games. New York Islanders coach Barry Trotz told USA TODAY Sports in 2017 that his coaching wardrobe consists of 25 suits. NHL coaching legend Scotty Bowman said was superstitious about his attire, choosing sport coats and ties based on the winning percentage in games he wore them.

Tortorella isn't the first to buck tradition with his game day coaching garb. Jean-Guy Talbot wore a warm-up suit with a turtle neck when he coached the New York Rangers in 1978-79. Robbie Ftorek opted for a sweater and tie, instead of coat and tie, when he coached the Los Angeles Kings from 1987-89.

"I'm not a big fan of being all bundled up when you work," Ftorek told USA TODAY Sports last year. "So I said, 'To heck with it, I'm going to wear a sweater. I felt comfortable in it.'"

Ftorek started receiving new sweaters in the mail from fans. He also wore sneakers with his non-traditional coaching ensemble, but not one noticed that.

You can be sure Tortorella will receive some hoodies in the mail. Maybe he will be offered a hoodie endorsement deal. In the playoffs, will all of the Columbus fans show up wearing Blue Jackets hoodies? The team's marketing staff is probably already considering that.

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