



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Is Canes' Justin Faulk more driven to succeed this season?

By Chip Alexander

Feeling the need to intercede, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Justin Faulk joined the fray, soon dropping his gloves.

Sebastian Aho had scored an empty-net goal, giving the Canes a 4-1 lead Friday over the Anaheim Ducks and then getting a shove from the Ducks' Adam Henrique. Others joined in along the boards and before you know it, Faulk and Ducks center Ryan Getzlaf had the gloves off, moved away from the group and were face to face.

A few quick punches and it was over. But Faulk got everyone's attention taking on the 6-foot-4, 225-pound Getzlaf, the Ducks captain.

"It's the last minute, the game's over and they tried pushing us around a little," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the 4-1 win. "It's nice to see us stick up for each other."

A few days before, Brind'Amour had few words of praise for anyone after the Canes' 4-1 loss at San Jose. He did make an exception.

"Faulk was our best defenseman. He was the most competitive, for sure," he said.

It has been that kind of season for Faulk. When the Canes were undergoing an offseason makeover ordered up by new owner Tom Dundon, speculation began that Faulk might be one of those traded along with Jeff Skinner, Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin.

When the Canes obtained defenseman Dougie Hamilton in the June trade with Calgary, the whispers became even louder. Hamilton was a right-hand shot. The Canes had four - Hamilton, Faulk, Brett Pesce and Trevor van Riemsdyk.

Would Faulk be dealt?

No, he would not. Instead, the former NHL All-Star has joined Calvin de Haan in giving Brind'Amour his steadiest defensive pair.

"We've been together since day one, and right away at training camp we said let's make it work," Faulk said.

They've made it work. De Haan has a plus-7 plus/minus rating, the best among the D-men, and Faulk is plus-3 after 28 games.

"We're comfortable with each other," Faulk said. "We're not the same player, but we're comfortable with what each other brings to the table."

De Haan signed a four-year, free-agent deal in July with Carolina, but came in having missed the final 49 games last season with a shoulder injury.

"I'm sure he was a little frustrated with me at times at the start of the year when I was trying to get back into the swing of things and get adjusted to the speed," de Haan said. "But I think we jelled right away and complement each other pretty well.

"He's good jumping up into the play and I'm fine being the safety. But his defensive game is underrated and you don't always notice some of the stuff he does. He's physical. He's good in the corners and in front of the net. He's easy to play with."

In a recent interview, Faulk was told that some observers have mentioned that he seems leaner, quicker, more determined, more driven to help the team succeed this year in his ninth NHL season.

"Which one?" he said, smiling.

Faulk, 26, said his offseason conditioning routine had been the same, that he might be a couple of pounds lighter at 215 pounds. His body-fat percentage, he said, hasn't changed.

Is he more determined and driven?

"It has been brutal not to make the playoffs," he said. "As hockey players you want to see those hard times through and get on the other end of it and reap the rewards of the hard work."

Faulk, an alternate captain, said having Brind'Amour as the head coach, after the previous four years under Bill Peters, has brought about a "bit of a rejuvenation."

"Not to say anything bad about Bill but it is different," Faulk said. "The atmosphere in the room is different. Rod gave everyone a clean slate and said if you put in the work he's stick with you. I appreciate that. That's what you want in a head coach."

After scoring 48 goals in three seasons, with a career-high 17 in 2016-17, Faulk had eight in 76 games last season. His only goal this season came in the ninth game, Oct. 22 at Detroit, and he feels the need to be more productive at even strength and on the power play.

But Faulk has been solid enough in the Canes' zone. He has often been outstanding killing penalties. He has done his part.

Even dropped the gloves.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

About Last Night: Winning Time in Anaheim

The Canes salvaged the road trip with a much-needed 4-1 win in Orange County

By Brett Finger

At the end of the first period, it felt like it was going to another one of "those games".

Despite getting grade-A scoring chances in the first period, the Carolina Hurricanes saw themselves down a goal on the road against one of the best goalies in hockey.

Making it even worse, the flailing Carolina power play not only couldn't get much of anything going (outside of a strong 20-second push), they allowed a shorthanded goal against. A shorthanded goal against which was created off of Justin Williams mishandling a puck and Dougie Hamilton turning the puck over in mind-boggling fashion.

Through 20 minutes, it was 1-0 Ducks and the Hurricanes were outshooting them 13-6. It became clear that, again, the Canes would need to manufacture a goal to turn the tides and have a chance.

The difference between the first two games of the road trip and Friday's game in Anaheim was that they were actually able to make it happen.

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After an official review and a goalie interference challenge, Clark Bishop had his first NHL point. It was a huge goal for his team and a prime example of what a guy like Bishop needs to do to stick around in the NHL long-term.

Since the day he was drafted by the Hurricanes in the fifth round back in 2014, the report on him has been that he's a heart and soul type of player. He's not a guy who is gifted with a high skillset, but he's going to give you an honest effort. On his goal, he did just that. He kept his legs moving and drove to the net hard. He beat an excellent defenseman in Hampus Lindholm and drew a penalty in the process. When you do that kind of stuff consistently, you'll get your bounces.

These are the goals that the Hurricanes will need every single night moving forward if they want to maximize their potential. They aren't the Maple Leafs or the Lightning. They don't have world-class scorers littered up and down their lineup. They have to work to get their goals, and that's what Bishop did.

Just a few minutes later, Carolina needed a big kill. This was going to be the turning point of the game. If the Ducks score, they take back the momentum. If the Hurricanes keep them at bay, they have an opportunity to keep it.

Penalty = Killed

Momentum = Kept

The first three minutes of the third period decided the game.

Less than two minutes into the final frame, Sebastian Aho was able to get the puck out of his own end, eventually leading to an odd-man rush the other way. Brett Pesce knew that Aho was well-behind the play, so he jumped in and took a 4-iron to Teuvo Teravainen's pass to beat Gibson and give Carolina its first lead of the road trip.

All of 61 seconds later, the Hurricanes were rewarded for not letting up after the second goal. Bishop's long-range floater wasn't handled cleanly by Gibson, and Justin Williams took advantage of the elite goalie's mistake to cushion the lead.

Then, penalties happened.

Pro tip: when you're up 3-1 on the road in the third period against one of the best goalies in all of hockey, it would be wise to not take two stick penalties in a matter of 44 seconds and give the home team an opportunity to get right back in the game.

After more than 75 seconds of a 5-on-3 chance for the Ducks, Teravainen exited the box, supported Jordan Martinook in the defensive zone, cleared the puck down ice, and the Hurricanes killed the remaining seconds of Calvin de Haan's tripping penalty.

Tempers flared late after Aho netted an empty net goal but, by and large, the fireworks were over. The Hurricanes went into Honda Center and salvaged what had been an extremely disappointing road trip.

The Good

- Sebastian Aho had what he deemed his best game of the season on Friday. That might sound strange given that his empty net goal was the only thing that got him on the scoresheet but, for a player who cares so desperately about winning hockey games (more so than his box score), it's just another example of his selflessness and high character. To boot, he might be right in his analysis. On top of playing in his normal offensive role, he saw 2:30 of PK ice time and was on the ice for a vast majority of the 5-on-3 kill in the third period. He was awesome in all three zones and we were given a glimpse of what he can be. He has franchise center potential in that he might just end up being the first-line center, a top-unit power play forward, and a first-unit penalty killer. Who knows if that'll happen, but there's no reason to think that he can't one day be that kind of rare and incalculably valuable player.
- Clark Bishop was the game's first star after posting a game-high two points - the first two points in his NHL career.



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- The Canes are still easing Brett Pesce back after missing so much time with the lower-body injury, but he was excellent in Anaheim. It might have been his best game of the season.
- Petr Mrazek had a quiet night, facing just 19 shots, but he had another great start. The lone goal was a SHG off of Jakob Silfverberg in front during an egregious Carolina power play. While the team in front of him had a forgettable road trip, Mrazek put together two strong outings, allowing just two goals on 53 shots against the Kings and Ducks.

The Bad

- The power play still isn't where it needs to be. It's not even close. Outside of a couple of pushes, they just looked inept. Surprisingly, using Phil Di Giuseppe on the power play as a fill-in for Staal didn't make things much better. Martin Necas (17 points in his last 17 games) and Janne Kuokkanen (26 points in 25 games this season) are dominating in the AHL and have both been electric on the man advantage. One

would wonder when the Canes will finally decide to give them a look. Friday was not the time for that, though. Saku Maenalanen made more sense to join the team on short notice, and the 24-year-old Finnish winger had a pretty impressive debut despite not seeing much of any ice time.

- Warren Foegele just can't buy a goal right now, and I don't know what you do to get his confidence up. He is still playing hard and doing what he is supposed to do, but a 21-game point drought is just impossible to ignore. Rod Brind'Amour loves him, but maybe a stint in Charlotte could help him. He's not a great offensive player, but he's not 21-straight-games-without-a-point bad.
- Justin Williams netted a big goal in the third period, but he had a brutal game. His inability to handle a puck led to Anaheim's lone goal and he took two stick penalties, including an offensive zone tripping penalty.

Saturday, the Hurricanes reassigned Maenalanen and Alex Nedeljkovic to the Charlotte Checkers.



Injury Winds Blowing at Hurricanes

By Mark Shiver

It is almost ironic that a team named the Carolina Hurricanes would find itself weathering a storm. But, they are doing just that. A supposed to be period of calm with the tenuous goaltender situation finally settled has instead turned blustery in the form of one injury after another. Rod Brind'Amour, head coach of the good ship Hurricanes will have to navigate through these rough injury waters for his first time as a head coach.

Scott Darling

The Hurricanes have had their share of injuries this season. Scott Darling's redemption tour was derailed by a hamstring injury he suffered during the last game of the preseason. He never got back into what was a good rhythm at that time and has since been put on waivers, cleared waivers and sent to play with the team's American Hockey League affiliate Charlotte Checkers.

Victor Rask

Victor Rask sliced his hand instead of the intended dinner item and missed a significant part of this season. He has since returned but would have been a welcome piece to the Hurricanes' puzzle during the first 20 or so games that he missed.

The team scored like crazy in the preseason and started the season playing an uptempo strong forechecking brand of hockey. It was working for a while and then it wasn't. Rask's

return to the lineup will hopefully bring some strength to the faceoff circle and some scoring.

Rask can do all of those things and more but unfortunately has had two years of less than impressive play. Since his recent return, he has only put in one goal. Brind'Amour will need to figure out how best to use Rask now that he is back and hopefully see him contribute at the level at which he is capable.

Brett Pesce

The dynamic defensive duo of Brett Pesce and Jacob Slavin have not seen much time together as mates on the blue line. Of 28 games played Pesce has played in 19.

Just a year or so ago, they were being touted as an elite defensive pair.

Between missing games due to injury and Brind'Amour's pairing these two with others there have not been a lot of games where they were together. Whether apart or paired up, though, the Hurricanes can all-afford to have either off the ice for any length of time.

Pesce is not a big defensive scorer, but he did get the game-winner Friday night against the Anaheim Ducks.

Petr Mrázek and Curtis McElhinney

Petr Mrázek is back from injury. He was out for about three weeks starting on Nov. 3 with a lower-body injury. In fact, Curtis McElhinney was brought in to the 'Canes because of the injury to Darling and got to hang around after Mrázek got



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hurt. Now McElhinney is injured, having left practice early this past Thursday.

The Hurricanes called up goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic from the Checkers to backup Mrázek. It is not known how long McElhinney will be out nor if Nedeljkovic will actually see any ice time. Some have called him the next Hurricanes goaltender, but most feel that he is still developing.

Jordan Staal and Michael Ferland

If reading this is starting to spark thoughts of, "Gee whizz, how many guys are hurt" then imagine how Brind'Amour must be feeling. The team announced on Dec. 6, that Hurricanes center Jordan Staal had been diagnosed with a concussion. Staal left Wednesday's game in San Jose midway through the third period and did not return. He did not practice with the team on Thursday and did not dress for Friday's game in Anaheim.

Staal's concussion comes on the heels of Michael Ferland being placed on injured reserve retroactive to Nov. 27 after being diagnosed with a concussion. He had been doing the bulk of the team's scoring and still leads the team with 11

goals so far this season. He had been on a three-game pointless streak when placed on injured reserve.

Brind'Amour Weathering the Injury Storm

These injuries have made the way for Clark Bishop – who scored his first NHL goal Friday night against the Ducks. Saku Maenalanen made his NHL debut for the Hurricanes in place of the injured Staal.

With so many injuries to deal with seemingly one right after another, Brind'Amour himself has remained fairly calm. Defenseman Haydn Fleury was out with a concussion in November. It has been a challenge that Brind'Amour knows can be a part of hockey.

He also knows that all he can do is play the hand he is dealt. Against the Ducks, he put Sebastian Aho back in the center slot for Staal and Aho played extremely well.

Brind'Amour's team was losing even when taking what seemed like thousands of shots a game. The win against the Ducks was crucial, as it allows the Hurricanes to finish their road trip on a positive note and get back home to try to heal.



Checkers score twice in final minute, shock Thunderbirds in OT

By Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers won their third straight game in thrilling fashion with a stunning comeback to shock the Springfield Thunderbirds in overtime.

Down by a goal late in regulation and looking to strike with the extra attacker, the Checkers saw the Thunderbirds hit the empty net from the length of the ice to go ahead 4-2 and seemingly put the game away.

The visitors pulled their goalie again in another attempt to rally, however, and with just under a minute left Jake Bean threaded a point shot in to pull them back within one. With their goalie on the bench once again the Checkers completed their unlikely path back thanks to a snipe through traffic from Andrew Poturalski with 32 ticks left on the clock, sending the contest to overtime.

Over halfway through a back-and-forth extra frame, Trevor Carrick joined the rush and ripped a wrister past Michael Hutchinson to stun Springfield and send Charlotte home with two points.

Prior to the Checkers' furious rally the contest had been a tight affair that featured Nick Schilkey driving the Charlotte

offense with a pair of goals, his third and fourth over the last four games.

Scott Darling started the night between the pipes for the Checkers but it was Jeremy Helvig who earned the win as he replaced the veteran at the start of the third period to make his AHL debut and stop seven of the eight shots he saw.

NOTES

The Checkers have won three straight games and erased a two-goal lead in each one ... One day after recording a career-high four assists Martin Necas led tonight's game with three helpers ... Nick Schilkey recorded his first pro multi-goal game and set a career high with three points on the night ... Tonight was Trevor Carrick's first career overtime-winning goal ... Jeremy Helvig made his AHL debut and picked up his first AHL win ... Scott Darling exited the game after the second period ... Spencer Smallman and Josiah Didier missed the game due to injury ... Zach Nastasiuk and Josh Wesley were healthy extras

UP NEXT

The Checkers finally return home on Thursday, Dec. 13 and will face the Hartford Wolf Pack to kick off their six-game home stand.



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SportScan

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

1120047 Carolina Hurricanes

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

CHIP ALEXANDER

DECEMBER 08, 2018 08:50 AM

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.

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 5-on-5 score 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.

News Observer LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120048 Carolina Hurricanes

Injury Winds Blowing at Hurricanes

MARK SHIVER

DECEMBER 8TH, 2018

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Injury Winds Blowing at the Hurricanes

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Victor Rask Hurricanes

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Rask can do all of those things and more but unfortunately has had two years of less than impressive play. Since his recent return, he has only put in one goal. Brind'Amour will need to figure out how best to use Rask now that he is back and hopefully see him contribute at the level at which he is capable.

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Jacob Slavin and Brett Pesce have to be the two best defenseman in the NHL that people don't even realize exist.

— Adam Herman (@AdamZHerman) December 3, 2016

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Alex Nedeljkovic Hurricanes

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1120049 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes Snap Ducks' 5-Game Win Streak

Staff Writer

DECEMBER 8TH, 2018

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

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.

Clark Bishop scored his first NHL goal and 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.

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.

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 floating puck from Teuvo Teravainen for the defenceman's third goal.

John 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.

Anaheim Ducks Jakob Silfverberg



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Bishop, a 22-year-old former fifth-round pick, got credit for a messy goal in the second period when he slid into Gibson while the puck trickled underneath the goalie. The rookie forward couldn't celebrate his first goal until a lengthy video review concluded the puck had crossed the line — and a second video review denied Anaheim's claim of goalie interference.

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. ... Maenalananen, 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 of Carolina's loss 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.

The Hockey Writers LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120140 Toronto Maple Leafs

If NHL players hadn't caved on cap, Nylander mess would have been avoided

DAVID SHOALTS

NOVEMBER 30, 2018

Anyone looking for someone to blame for the William Nylander contract standoff can look at the NHL players themselves.

Well, at least those NHL players who were active in 2004-05, the season lost to the owners' lockout, the one that resulted in the adoption of the hard salary cap commissioner Gary Bettman and the owners said they needed so badly. It was that group of players which capitulated to the owners in 2005, crying uncle after losing one year's pay to the lockout.

Incidentally, those players included William Nylander's father Michael, seen by many as stage-managing his son's contract negotiations with Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas. The elder Nylander — a notoriously tough player to deal with on contracts — finished up the season leading into the lockout with the Boston Bruins, earning US\$2.675-million.

There was still no word by early Friday evening of any progress in the contract talks as the NHL's deadline of 5 p.m. EST Saturday approached. Restricted free agents must be signed by Dec. 1 or they cannot play for the rest of the season.

Despite the absence of any optimism for a new contract — the only news were reports Dubas was checking back with some NHL teams to gauge how serious they were about a trade for Nylander's rights — Leafs head coach Mike Babcock remained upbeat in his daily media scrum. "In my heart and in my mind I know he's gonna be on the team. That's how I gotta think," he said.

It was the surrender of Michael Nylander and his NHL Players' Association colleagues that allowed Bettman and the owners to establish the current system, which ties the hands of both the clubs and the players in these situations. These situations usually involve a player such as William Nylander, one who is not quite among the top two or three players on a team but is still one of the best half-dozen or so.

In these cases, clubs simply can't justify paying them the US\$8-million-plus they are demanding on a long-term contract. The biggest money has to be reserved for the Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner of the hockey world with the next-best group of players settling for several million dollars less per year.

If Dubas agreed to give the Nylanders the US\$8-million they were said to be seeking in a long-term contract a few months ago, it would easily be accommodated by the Leafs' current salary-cap room. According to CapFriendly.com, the Leafs have nearly US\$17-million cap room under the US\$79.5-million payroll limit. The Leafs, as the richest team in the NHL, could easily afford it. However, the trouble is not today but next summer when 12 players on the current roster become either restricted or unrestricted free agents.

The 12 players include Matthews and Marner, who are both showing on the ice they will have to be paid around the same as the US\$11-million annual stipend paid to John Tavares, who became the highest-paid Leaf last summer. Bowing to Nylander's demands or even getting him to lower his salary demands to \$7-million means Dubas could have \$40-million of his salary cap tied up in four players. That is an untenable situation, even if next season's cap goes above US\$80-million.

This is the worst effect of the salary-cap system. A team such as the Maple Leafs finally gets its development act together, builds a talented young roster after decades of incompetent regimes and then is kneecapped when the players get in position to demand big money. Even if you want to pay them, the system won't let you.

It is safe to say not many of the NHL players of 2004-05 thought through such scenarios when they realized the owners were not going to cave on the idea of a cap after one year of no hockey. Most of the players were just thinking they were tired of going a year without pay and wanted it to be over.

That is not to say they weren't warned to prepare for a standoff as long as two years. Bob Goodenow, who was executive director of the NHLPA at the time, told the players he thought the owners were prepared to lock them out for at least a year, that if they wanted to avoid a salary cap they would probably have to contend with a lockout going into a second season and to save accordingly. Not enough of them listened or were prepared to fight that long.

But it is interesting to think of what might have happened with Nylander if his predecessors were willing to hang in there. Goodenow was adamantly opposed to a hard salary cap (Bettman argued it was the only way to save the owners from their own over-spending and save some teams) and eventually paid for it with his job.

Goodenow wanted a luxury-tax system similar to the one used by Major League Baseball. Clubs could spend to an agreed-upon payroll threshold and clubs that wanted to go above that were assessed a luxury tax according to a formula. Under Goodenow's proposal, the luxury-tax revenue would be distributed to the low-revenue teams, which would be able to increase their own payrolls.

But most of the owners would not even consider the idea (the Leafs were noted moderates on the question). They wanted a hard cap tied to league revenue with a payroll limit even the poorest owners could afford. And the players weren't willing to resist beyond one season.

That's too bad in retrospect. If the luxury-tax system prevailed, then any resistance to Nylander's contract demands would be simply up to the Leafs. If they spent what they could afford, then a healthy sum would go to the NHL's charity cases (hello Ottawa Senators) and Leafs Nation would have a lot less to scream about on social media.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120141 Toronto Maple Leafs



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Game Centre: Maple Leafs fall flat to Bruins in Boston | The Star

Kevin McGran

BOSTON—Once again, the Maple Leafs were not the better team. This time, just for a change however, Toronto lost in regulation because of it.

The Boston Bruins took it to the Maple Leafs – physically and offensively — and skated off to a 6-3 win Saturday night in a game involving two teams that don't like each other very much.

The Bruins' Brad Marchand tussles with Leafs defenceman Nikita Zaitsev during first-period action in Boston on Saturday night.

That ended a Leafs' points streak of five wins and an overtime loss, during the last two games of which the other teams — Buffalo and Detroit — had played the better game.

"I was disappointed, I thought we'd come in here and play real well, especially after (Thursday's overtime loss). Obviously we didn't," said Leafs coach Mike Babcock. "We had a pretty good run. Now we have to regroup.

"Every once in a while, you get fed your lunch. Today was one of those days."

Perhaps more remarkably, the game featured two fights, three game misconducts, one 10-minute misconduct a boarding penalty, 98 minutes in penalties and at least one hit — Zach Hyman on Charlie McAvoy — that was under review by the league.

"It's a rivalry game, right?" said Leafs centre Auston Matthews. "It's going to be physical. I thought it was a good fight by (Nazem Kadri) to give us a wakeup call on the bench and get everybody going. We dug ourselves a hole that we couldn't climb out of."

Falling flat: Until Saturday, the Leafs had been able to outscore their errors, having scored at least four goals in each of their six previous games. But a rash of penalties in the second period against Toronto kept the Leafs off track and kept the Bruins in the Toronto end.

Nothing seemed quite in sync for the Leafs, even for the top line, which is the only one that's intact since William Nylander returned. John Tavares (minus-3), Mitch Marner (minus-3) and Hyman (minus-1) were outplayed by Boston's big guns of David Krejci, David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand.

Matthews and Andreas Johnsson each had a goal and an assist. Travis Dermott had the other goal. Jake Gardiner had two assists. The Leafs' offence all came in the third period, after Boston built a 4-0 lead.

Shades of Rosehill and Orr: It was like something was in the air. Both the Leafs and the Bruins had been criticized by their fans for not being tough enough, not having enough sandpaper to their games. The names of Jay Rosehill and Colton Orr — Leaf enforcers of the past — had even been brought up to Babcock morning skate, prompting the coach to say things aren't the way they used to be.

"In the old days what you used to do is you could skate around in warmup, you could growl at each other and it actually made a difference because there was someone out there that could actually whack you," the coach said. "It doesn't work like that now and you're not expected — if someone hits you hard, you're not expected to take a penalty. You're expected to keep playing, so it's different."

Dropping the gloves: Seemingly ignoring that piece of advice, the game got dirty in a hurry. Charlie McAvoy went after Marner. Hyman went after McAvoy. On the first shift.

Eventually, Kadri and Bruins defenceman Brandon Carlo dropped the gloves in the second period. Kadri had stripped the puck off Carlo, and Carlo stripped it back in a tough head-to-head shift. It was the Leafs'

second fighting major of the season, and first since Josh Leivo dropped the gloves Oct. 11 against Detroit's Danny DeKeyser.

Hyman later laid out McAvoy — just back from a concussion — with a shoulder-to-chest late hit. That was followed by a near head shot by Chris Wagner on Morgan Rielly in mid-ice, prompting Ron Hainsey to drop the gloves.

Fights that just don't happen anymore were happening, aided, of course, by the lopsided score.

War of words ... Kadri: "I don't feel at all as if we got pushed around ... That last hit (Wagner on Rielly), that's the video they show us at the beginning of the year of what not to do in my opinion."

Wagner: "He (Rielly) was the one with the puck, so you can't really cheap-shot someone. I thought it was a pretty clean hit for the most part, stayed on my feet. When something like that happens, (Hyman on McAvoy) you want to respond in the correct way."

Matthews: "I mean, that's hockey and it's our job to respond."

Torey Krug: "I thought we did a good job of responding after that (Hyman hit on McAvoy), you know, going hard against their skill. Obviously Wagner came through and hits their top moving defenceman. It's a tough part of the game."

Pulling the goalie: Garret Sparks came in to relieve Frederik Andersen with Boston up 6-1 (on 27 shots) and 13 minutes left in the game. The Boston crowd loved it, jeering Andersen's name throughout the third period ... Andersen flubbed a shot, leaving Ryan Donato an easy tap-in for a 6-1 Boston lead ... It was the first time this season coach Mike Babcock switched goalies during the game.

Defensive miscues: Tavares skated the Leafs blue line awkwardly, and surrendered the puck in the first period, leading to Boston's first goal ... Killing a penalty, Connor Brown seemed panicked into making an odd choice of sending the puck back towards the Leafs net instead of over the blue line. The play backfired when the puck hit Ron Hainsey. A few seconds later Boston was up 2-0 ... Igor Ozhiganov made a bad pinch, leaving Par Lindholm as the last guy back on Boston's fourth goal.

For the Bruins: Jakob Forsback Karlsson — nicknamed JFK in these parts — opened the scoring in the first period during some 4-on-4 play. David Backes scored a power play goal in the second, followed by an even strength seeing-eye shot from the point from Krug for a 3-0 lead heading into the third. Danton Heinen deked Lindholm and beat Andersen with a backhand for a 4-0 Boston lead early in the third. Krejci scored on a rush to make it 5-1.

Up next: The Maple Leafs return home for a practice on Monday, but continue their five-game road trip Tuesday in Carolina.

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1120142 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs finally have a full lineup, but it'll take time to find its stride | The Star

Kevin McGran

BOSTON—His full lineup — almost a dream team — finally assembled, all Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock needs to do is find a way to keep his players healthy.

With William Nylander and Kasperii Kapanen involved in a car accident on their way to the airport Friday, and Auston Matthews' physically



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manhandled into the boards on Thursday, it may be easier said than done.

While some within the locker room made light of the accident, Nylander took a serious tone.

"Just happy everyone was OK after," said Nylander, whose Volvo S-60 was severely damaged on the passenger side. "Everyone is feeling OK. Me and Kappy are good."

Nylander said the other driver and passenger were OK as well.

"We were just driving to the airport and it was just one little second it took to get into one little accident. A car just turned into us. It happened from behind. I didn't have time to react."

Babcock made light of it. "Sounds like he did some good driving so Kappy didn't get hit."

The coach said the accident reminded of a time when Tomas Holmstrom and Nicklas Lidstrom showed up late for a Detroit Red Wings game. "Tommy comes running in my office and says: 'We had a big accident, but don't worry. We knew we were going to get hit, so I dove in front of Nick. He didn't get touched.'"

Still, it's a lesson into how quickly fortunes can change. For Matthews as well; the Leafs' star centre has developed a habit of putting himself in harm's way on the ice. His aggressive move to the net — always encouraged by coaches — in a game against Winnipeg resulted in a separated shoulder and cost him a month of action.

On Thursday, Detroit's Niklas Kronwall pounded Matthews into the end boards. It winded Matthews and — briefly — took the air out of the crowd at the Scotiabank Arena, now getting all too familiar with seeing Matthews on the injured list.

As for Babcock, the coach didn't seem worried about it.

"It was two guys bumping into each other," said the coach. "It probably wasn't even a penalty. Those things happen. But when you're just coming back from injury, you're not in sync the same way. And you end up getting blown up a few times."

Both Nylander and Matthews are key cogs for the Leafs and they'll both need time to get into tip-top playing shape after having missed so much time.

Nylander has the most catching up to do, one of a handful of players who took part in an optional workout Saturday prior to the Leafs-Bruins game in Boston.

"The biggest thing was getting the practice in (on Friday) was a real positive," said Babcock. "In saying that, just getting back and getting playing and being part of the team is important. The jokes, the amount of abuse you take. Just getting in. It's going to take him time when you haven't been here every day."

"He's an important part of our team, and we've got to get him going."

Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly said patience is key regarding players returning to the lineup following long layoffs.

"For him (Nylander) to jump in 28, 29 games in, you're playing against guys who have been at it for a while," said Rielly. "We're happy to have him back. With each game that goes by he'll be more and more comfortable. We're looking forward to watching him get into his groove."

The Leafs can be thankful they've only lost 17 man-games to injury. Their sports science team deserves some of the credit the way they monitor the players, recommending days off or optional skates because the belief is a tired body is more prone to injury. It also helps with peak performance.

As talented as the Maple Leafs are, it will take some time for the team to reach its peak level.

"We haven't had our team together all year," said Babcock. "I think I'll know about our team better in three weeks. Any time we've changed our roster, we haven't been quite as good right away for a bit. We're trying to find the best image of ourselves for 60 minutes that we can turn into a blue print to do it over and over again."

"We've got to get everyone on deck first. And then I think we can find that. We have a group that believes we're pretty good. To be really good and to be a champion, you've got to do it everyday and you've got to do it with detail. You've got to do it hard. You've got to have people step up. We've got a long way to go. This is Game 30."

"The season goes by quick."

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1120143 Toronto Maple Leafs

Bruins maul Leafs in Boston again

Lance Hornby

BOSTON — The Maple Leafs don't need a research paper from the New England Journal of Medicine to know tangling with the Bruins here is hazardous to their health.

Though Toronto hit the 30-game mark of the NHL schedule in range of first place in the conference, a second spanking in a month at TD Garden will mess with their minds, pending spring playoff matchups.

With some key personnel missing, Boston still laid a 6-3 beating on a full Leaf lineup, which had zero traction much of the night, until finding some fighting spirit after the clubs started exchanging dangerous hits.

Saturday's result was on top of a 5-1 loss in November and three of four in the playoffs, including a 7-4 series' clincher.

"I wouldn't say (they're in the Leafs' heads), they just come out hard and this is a tough building to win in, let alone come from behind a couple of goals," said Nazem Kadri. "They take advantage of the atmosphere and certainly got the better of us tonight. I don't feel we got pushed around, they just capitalized on their opportunities."

After a 5-4 overtime loss to Detroit at home and a day to get ready, this was not the response Toronto expected from itself.

"It's got to piss you off," said first-year Leaf John Tavares. "You don't get the result you need in a big divisional game. We have to learn from it and obviously add some bite to our game, have better execution."

The last three Boston goals by Danton Heinen, David Krejci and Ryan Donato came with the Leafs gambling to break Jaroslav Halak's shutout, which Travis Dermott, Auston Matthews and Andreas Johnsson managed to achieve with the game out of reach.

The Bruins, losers of three straight and four of the past five, had only held a lead for a total of 12:55 in that span. So they wanted to flip the script at home against a division rival. They put a line of Leaf killers together; Krejci, David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand and piled on with fired up grinders.

While Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, Tavares and William Nylander looked for daylight, Kadri's anger boiled over after an uncalled cross check, a second period fight with Brandon Carlo. He was hanging on at the end as the 6-foot-5 defenceman tried to rag doll him.

That set the tone and as the score veered out of control, so did decorum. Zach Hyman popped Charlie McAvoy after he'd released a pass and Matt Grzelcyk jumped him. That was an interference major and a game



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misconduct for Hyman, while Chris Wagner tried to take out Morgan Rielly in a fly-by retaliation, bringing Ron Hainsey to answer the challenge. Wagner received two for charging and a 10-minute misconduct.

"That (Wagner's run) is the video they show us at the beginning of the year of what not to do, in my opinion," Kadri said. "It's in the league's hands now, I'm sure they'll have another look at it."

On the game's first shift, McAvoy pushed Marner hard into the boards, leading to a cross-checking penalty and the night's first scrum, but the Leafs saw a seventh advantage in the past three games go for naught. That, and a Halak stop on Connor Brown's partial breakaway, cost them when Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson — nicknamed JFK in these parts — beat Frederik Andersen at 11:20.

The Toronto goalie, in his 24th start, left a soft rebound laying around at the side of the net and support dwindled as the night unfolded. After the sixth goal on 27 shots, coach Mike Babcock made his first goalie change of the season, calling on Garret Sparks.

Instead of the Leafs using their speed to draw some penalties, they found themselves down a man four times in the second period alone. All but one was killed, Backes getting time and space after a Brown clearing attempt went the wrong way.

With Matthews' line unable to get past The Hub logo at centre, consistent Bruin pressure resulted in a Torey Krug point shot finding the mark to make it 3-0.

"Every once in a while you get fed your lunch and today was one of those days," Babcock said. "We had a good run of five wins and an overtime loss. Get yourself regrouped and get back at it (for four more road games)."

HIT FROM BEHIND

Nylander absorbed a few jabs from teammates, but is "just happy everyone's OK" after a Friday afternoon fender bender.

Nylander was at the wheel en route to Pearson airport with fellow winger Kapanen for the flight here. They were rear-ended by a female driver, who was also unhurt according to Nylander, as was her passenger.

"A car just turned into us," Nylander said Saturday morning. "It just happened from behind. I didn't have time to react that much. It's just a little second that's needed to get into an accident."

Nylander said the other driver knew that the two young men played for the Leafs, though there was little time for chit-chat. After getting the paperwork sorted, the players continued to the airport.

It has been quite a week for Nylander, with his return to the team coming down to a deadline signing last Saturday, a cramming of practices to get re-acclimated and two games in three nights.

"Sounds like he did some good driving so Kappy didn't get hit," quipped Babcock.

The coach related a similar story of Tomas Holmstrom and Nick Lidstrom getting in an accident in Detroit when all were with the Red Wings.

"They showed up late for the game, Tommy comes running in my office and says: 'We had a big accident. But don't worry. When I knew we were going to get hit, I dove in front of (Lidstrom, their star defenceman) so he wouldn't get touched'.

"Maybe it was the other way now (with Nylander just signing a \$41-million US contract getting shielded by Kapanen)."

TURNING A NEW LEAF

It was five years ago Saturday that the Bruins beat the Leafs 5-2, facing a Toronto lineup that had names such as Jerry D'Amigo, Carter Ashton and Frazer McLaren pressed into service. Only Rielly, Jake Gardiner and Kadri remain from that night's roster.

"There have been a lot of changes over the years, new (hockey operations) faces, new players, you name it," Rielly said. "But we're more worried about the future than the past."

Instead of Kadri and Tyler Bozak being the go-to centres, Bozak is gone and Kadri is now playing down the depth chart behind Matthews and Tavares, while Marner, Kapanen and Nylander are on the wings.

"We feel good around one another," Rielly said. "Most of us have been here for a few years. I think the chemistry is good and we feel comfortable with the coaching staff and what's going on with the team. It makes life a bit easier. It's important we build and grow together.

"We're getting there (confidence-wise). I think that's an important quality. We have to earn a little bit more of that when it comes to winning in the post-season. We have work to do in that respect. There are things that have happened over the years that have been worthy of gaining confidence in that room and that's important. I think we're on the right path."

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Before Saturday's rough stuff, Babcock could sense a frustration among fans that someone should've done more to stick up for Matthews when the young star took a hard hit from Detroit's Niklas Kronwall on Thursday.

"In the old days you could skate around in warmup, growl at each other and it actually made a difference," he said. "There was someone out there who could actually whack you. It doesn't work like that now. Someone hits you hard, you're not expected to take a (retaliation) penalty, you're just expected to keep playing.

"The bottom line for me is the league is really tight. Really good players can create space, the rest of us feel like there's no room. There are a number of ways to create room — be physically strong on the puck, end up in a battle with two guys and create space for somebody else. The other way is to be physical on the forecheck, cut off arms on big guys, get on the right side, own the puck and then you have them on the wrong side.

"When you're coaching, you look at your best assets and try and create the best image with the group you have."

SAVING FREDDY

Before Saturday's game, Babcock said he wasn't too concerned about Andersen's heavy workload, as far as it looked on paper.

"He's in a good spot," the coach said. "

There are a lot of things you can evaluate; the shot attempts, shots on goal. What really matters is the scoring chances and how much wear and tear is on the goalie.

"I'd like Freddy to get no shots tonight, but that's probably not gonna happen."

BEAR POPULATION REDUCED

Scratch another Bruin after winger Jake DeBrusk was absent from the team's morning skate with what appeared to be concussion symptoms. Patrice Bergeron, Zdeno Chara and Kevan Miller were already out of Boston's lineup. Toronto-born Gemel Smith, picked up on waivers from Dallas, was pressed right into duty on Saturday.

LOOSE LEAFS

Leafs prospect Joseph Woll made 28 saves for Boston College on Friday in a 3-2 home win over Connecticut ... Not long after he retired, former Leaf Frederik Sjostrom entered management with Frolunda of the Swedish Hockey League. His 2016 champions included current Leaf Andreas Johnsson, while this year's No. 1 overall pick by the Sabres, defenceman Rasmus Dahlin, was also Frolunda trained ... Still tracking former Leaf Swedes, Mikael Renberg is now a TV commentator back home ... The Leafs will return home to rest Sunday, practise Monday and resume five consecutive road games on Tuesday in Carolina.



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FIVE TAKEAWAYS

1. FRED EX CAN'T ALWAYS DELIVER

It was Frederik Andersen's worst game of the year, the autumn MVP letting in a soft early goal and unable to bail out his mates when the Bruins turned on the heat. Good move to get him out of this lost cause to save him for the rest of the road trip.

2. POWER PLAY PAIN

An early goal on the first-minute minor to Charlie McAvoy would have put Boston behind the eight ball and snapped the slump for some big name Leaf talent on the unit. But their only goal with the man advantage by Andreas Johnsson didn't come until it was too late.

3. STARS TARGETED

When things get a bit ugly, the Leafs can expect their best players to be circled by foes. Chris Wagner said his run at Morgan Rielly was justified because he had the puck after Boston thought Zach Hyman went after McAvoy too late.

"It's part of the game, it's going to happen, especially in a rivalry like that," Wagner said of the exchanges.

4. OUT OF SORTS

The Leafs defence abandoned structure a few times trying to make things happen – with predictable results. But Mitch Marner and John Tavares were each minus three.

5. WILLY NEEDS WORK

William Nylander is now pointless in two games and though his ice time went up to 16 minutes and change, he's not been his creative, game-breaking self just yet after his layoff.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120144 Toronto Maple Leafs

SIMMONS: Is a 50-goal season even possible for Leafs' Matthews?

Steve Simmons

Can Auston Matthews score 35 goals in his final 53 games to become the first Maple Leafs centre to net 50 in an NHL season?

It isn't out of the question.

No Leaf has ever scored more at centre than Darryl Sittler's 45 goals in 1978. That record came at a time when NHL teams were averaging 3.62 goals per game.

Matthews scored 40 goals as a rookie, a 45-goal pace as a sophomore and has been goal-a-game while missing 14 games to injury in today's NHL environment in which 2.78 goals per game are being scored by teams.

The Leafs have had only three 50-goal scorers in their history. Rick Vaive did it three times and doesn't get nearly enough acknowledgment for his scoring feats. Dave Andreychuk did it once and, shockingly, Gary Leeman did it once. And that's it. Five 50-goal seasons for the franchise — two fewer than Alexander Ovechkin in total.

It's been more than 20 years since any player (Peter Bondra) scored 50 goals playing fewer than 70 games. Cam Neely did it twice in Boston as did Mario Lemieux in Pittsburgh. Steve Yzerman scored 50 in 64 games for Detroit once. And Bobby Hull scored 54 goals in 65 games for Chicago back in the Original Six days.

It's a big order for Matthews, but it's nowhere close to impossible. The NHL hasn't had a 50-goal scorer the past two seasons. That's the first time in 53 years there has been that kind of drought. I won't question whether Matthews can do it or not: With 15 goals in 15 games to start the season, anything seems possible for the future Maple Leafs captain.

THIS AND THAT

A former NHL player named Bob MacMillan, who once scored 108 points in a season, asked his general manager if he was going to be traded. The reason he asked: He was planning a major renovation of his house. So what happened? The renovation began and almost immediately thereafter, MacMillan was traded for Lanny McDonald. The moral of the story for William Nylander? When your general manager tells you he's not trading you, in that moment he may be telling the truth. One phone call later and you could be gone ... Why is there training camp and why is there an NHL pre-season? Watch Nylander in his first game back against Detroit and the question is pretty much answered for you ... This isn't anything new: I don't see Garret Sparks as a long-term solution in goal, even as a backup. Unless someone can get him to be more positionally sound, to square up more often and calm his side-to-side motions down, I can't envision a long NHL career ... If Travis Dermott gets just a little stronger, or plays just a little stronger, he should soon vault past Jake Gardiner and Nikita Zaitsev on the Leafs defence. He is a prototype modern-day blueliner ... If there were such a thing as Toronto athlete of the year for 2018, would Mitch Marner win? And if not Marner, then who? On a 12-month basis, no Raptor, no Blue Jay, no Argo would compare. The tennis guys, Milos Raonic and Denis Shapovalov, didn't have great years. Andre De Grasse was hurt. Penny Oleksiak was in transition. From Jan. 1 to now, who was better than Marner?

HEAR AND THERE

Fred Van Vleet is missing 80% of his three-point shots this month. Kyle Lowry isn't shooting much better than that and C.J Miles, well, that is a great television commercial. If this continues, Raptors need to acquire another shooter. Kawhi Leonard loves to kick the ball out, but somebody's got to make the shot ... You don't win an MVP award in the first third of any season, but you can lose one. After Kevin Durant and maybe LeBron James, those fine feuding fellows, is Leonard the next choice as NBA MVP of the first third of the season? ... The giant pressure spots in the NHL right now are San Jose, Minnesota and St. Louis. Peter DeBoer is on the clock with the Sharks and the vibe around the team seems so bad right now that Erik Karlsson is hinting he won't sign to stay there next season. In Minnesota, after a great start, the Wild is playing horrible hockey, which tests rookie GM Paul Fenton for the very first time. And the whole year seems wrong in St. Louis, where the Blues are either slow or just play slow ... A good chunk of media seems myopically obsessed with John Chayka, the young GM of the Arizona Coyotes. Who knows? Maybe one of these years Chayka will actually manage a team that makes the playoffs. In the meantime, there's a whole lot of hockey people I trust and believe who call the Coyotes front office hockey's most dysfunctional. Somebody's right here and somebody's wrong. The question is: Who? ... Phil Kessel has played for three NHL teams with at least one common theme. There came a time when all three teams wanted to trade him away.

SCENE AND HEARD

If I want to talk to Leafs president Brendan Shanahan, I pick up the phone. If I want to talk to Raptors president Masai Ujiri, I call him. If I want to talk to Argos bosses Jim Popp or Bill Manning, it's easy. His highness, Blue Jays president Mark Shapiro, is holding a rare press availability 10 days from now. The invitation has already been sent out. I think I'll pass ... Excellent candidates for the Lou Marsh Trophy, as Canada's athlete of the year, include skier Mikael Kingsbury, golfer Brooke Henderson, swimmer Taylor Ruck, speed skater Ted-Jan Bloeman, hockey players Connor McDavid and Taylor Hall. But if the figure skating pair of Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir were eligible — which they currently are not — they would win. I actually have a soft spot for the full-year team-changing performance of goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury, who was 12-3 in the first three rounds of playoffs heading into the



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Stanley Cup final ... It isn't Justin Smoak's fault that he was voted Blue Jays player of the year after Josh Donaldson won the award three consecutive times, Jose Bautista won three times and Edwin Encarnacion won twice in the previous eight seasons. Smoak was a unanimous choice, which tells you all you need to know about the 2018 Blue Jays ... An NHL scout on Freddy Gauthier: "What's the point of being that big if you're not going to hit anybody?" ... Now that Seattle is the 32nd team I wonder if there will be ever be a 36-team NHL with franchises in Quebec City, Houston, Kansas City and a second team in Toronto?

AND ANOTHER THING

When it comes to daily drama, the NBA has become the General Hospital of sports. It's part-soap opera, past-basketball, part-drama. No wonder so many love soap operas. In the NHL, we just want get pucks in deep, move our feet, control the neutral zone, stay out of the box and debate which Tom Wilson hits are clean, filthy or suspendable ... Do you get the feeling there's a baseball off-season happening, just not here in Toronto? ... Clearly, Nathan Eovaldi wanted to return to the Red Sox. The deal, for less than \$17 million a season, is the kind of money a lot of teams would have paid. And Eovaldi is only 28 ... This is what Ken Hitchcock does to teams and goaltenders. The Edmonton Oilers are 6-2-1 since Hitch took over as head coach. And both Cam Talbot and Mikko Koskinen have goals against averages under 2.00 since he took over. Remember this is a man who once coached Roman Cechmanek to a 1.83 GAA ... Comedian/political commentator Bill Maher on the great sport of hunting: "Is it really a sport if one team doesn't know the game is going on?" ... There's a possibility that former Jays bench coach DeMarlo Hale will end up with the Baltimore Orioles. If that doesn't happen, expect him to return to the Jays in a minor-league roving capacity ... Happy birthday to Donaldson (33), Dick Butkus (76), Drew Doughty (29), Philip Rivers (37), Kurt Angle (50), Mark McMorris (25), Vernon Wells (40) and Red Berenson (79) ... And hey, whatever became of Rico Fata?

LOWRY NEEDS SOMETHING OR SOMEONE TO BE MAD AT

Kyle Lowry may never stop being mad at Masai Ujiri for the trading away of his pal, DeMar DeRozan.

But at the same time, Lowry is steadfast that all that motivates him is winning a championship.

So this is the contradiction of the many Lowry contradictions: Ujiri's acquisition of Kawhi Leonard and Danny Green brings the Raptors closer than they've ever been to being a championship team. Or even a team playing for a championship, which hasn't happened before. There is hope and possibility now where there has never been before.

DeRozan had to be moved for Leonard to become a Raptor. And while Lowry isn't playing to the high level he managed when the season began — he is in something of a December slump — he has to know deep down that the opportunity to play for a title, something he has talked, has to be in his mind.

It's all right if he's mad at Ujiri. Lowry usually plays his best when he's mad about something. He needs that me-versus-the-world thing. He feeds off it. When you're undersized and often pushed aside or underrated, you have to fight to get to the place Lowry has earned in the NBA.

And that's his mentality: If being mad at his team president helps him get through the day without DeRozan, so be it. As Ujiri said: "Lowry's always mad at me, every year."

Always mad at someone.

HALLADAY BELONGS IN COOPERSTOWN

This is the late Roy Halladay's first time on the Baseball Hall of Fame ballot and I see no reason why he won't be voted in this year.

This isn't a sentimental vote because of the circumstances of his passing. He won three Cy Young Awards. He finished second twice in

the voting, third once. He pitched in eight all-star games. And the number that blows me away, he lost only 105 games in 390 major-league starts.

What will help Halladay's case this year is the ballot itself. It's not full of new sure-new-things other than Mariano Rivera. And aside from the usual and rather tiresome Barry Bonds-Roger Clemens debate, there is lots of room for Halladay's family to get the 75% voting necessary for election.

My ballot will include Halladay, Rivera, Larry Walker, Omar Vizquel, Curt Schilling, Mike Mussina, Edgar Martinez and, for the first time, Fred McGriff.

This is McGriff's 10th and final season on the ballot. In the past, I couldn't find a place for him. I think he's right on the cusp of should be/shouldn't be.

It's unlikely McGriff will be elected by the traditional method. The betting here is he'll eventually be called to the Hall by the Modern Era committee of voters, the group that rightfully voted Jack Morris in and also Alan Trammell.

THE TRAGIC TURN OF BOXER ADONIS STEVENSON

His name at birth was Steven Adonis and, after he moved from Haiti to Montreal and before he became famous, he changed his name to Adonis Stevenson. Sometimes he called himself Superman.

He spent almost four years in prison for managing prostitutes and for assault, almost all of that happening in his teenage years. He wasn't, what you'd call, a good guy. And then Stevenson started boxing and with it his life began to change. He tried to make the 2004 Canadian Olympic team and was beaten out by Jean Pascal. So, at the late age of 29, he turned pro.

Clearly, he had talent and had left his previous life behind. He was an example for those who make horrible choices early in life and find ways to overcome them. Stevenson became the light heavyweight champion of the world at 36 and last May, defended his championship in Toronto, the first big fight ever at the Scotiabank Arena.

He was 40 years old at the time, loud, brash, funny, almost caricature like, with a wife and kids and almost everything anyone would want.

Then came last Saturday night, when Stevenson was knocked out by Oleksandr Gvozdyk in the 11th round, losing his title.

Maybe losing everything He was rushed to hospital after the bout, remains in a Quebec City hospital, in critical but stable condition, his future uncertain, fighting now for what's left of his life.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120145 Toronto Maple Leafs

Nylander brushes off car accident, ready to face Bruins

Lance Hornby

BOSTON – William Nylander absorbed a few jabs from teammates, but he's "just happy everyone's okay" following a Friday afternoon fender bender in Etobicoke.

Nylander was at the wheel en route to the airport with fellow winger Kasperii Kapanen beside him for the Leafs flight here. They were apparently rear ended by a female driver.

She and her passenger were unhurt, according to Nylander.



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"A car just turned into us," Nylander said after participating in the Leafs' optional practice Saturday morning before taking on the Bruins. "It just happened from behind us. I didn't have time to react that much."

"It's just a little second that's needed to get into an accident," he added.

Nylander said the other driver knew the two young men played for the Leafs. After time to get the paperwork sorted, the players continued to the airport.

It has been quite a week for Nylander, with his return to the team coming down to a deadline signing a week ago, a cramming of practices to get re-acclimated and a not-so-stellar debut on Thursday against Detroit.

"Sounds like he did some good driving so Kappy didn't get hit," quipped head coach Mike Babcock, who went on to relate a similar story of Tomas Holmstrom and Nick Lidstrom getting into an accident in Detroit when all were Red Wings.

"They showed up late for the game, Tommy comes running in my office and says 'we had a big accident. But don't worry. When I knew we were going to get hit, I dove in front of (the MVP defenceman) so he wouldn't get touched'. Maybe it was the other way now (with Nylander just signing a \$41 million US contract, shielded by Kapanen)."

This will be a big night for Nylander, who will likely start on a line with Patrick Marleau and Nazem Kadri after being pressed perhaps too soon into his past high-profile role with Auston Matthews.

Though the Bruins are missing key pieces such as Patrice Bergeron and Zdeno Chara, Nylander will be up against David Pastrnak whose contract was a comparison through five months of negotiations and who outplayed Nylander in the seven-game playoff series last spring.

"It's my second game, time to get going," Nylander said. "I love playing here, it's lots of fun. It's a rivalry that's been going awhile."

Frederik Andersen is scheduled to start in net for Toronto. Babcock would prefer if there was not 40-plus shots against him as has been the case his last four starts before the Leafs cut that down, but still lost in OT to Detroit with Garret Sparks in goal.

Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender Frederik Andersen was the game's first star on Monday against Columbus. (VERONICA HENRI/Toronto Sun)

"I'm not worried about Freddy," Babcock insisted. "He's in a good spot. There's a lot of things you can evaluate; the shot attempts, shots on goal. What really matters is the scoring chances and how much wear and tear is on the goalie."

"I'd like Freddy to get no shots tonight, but probably not gonna happen," he added.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120146 Toronto Maple Leafs

The Leafs have struggled for a while now. So what's wrong? It's complicated.

Scott Wheeler

Dec 8, 2018

BOSTON — The Leafs weren't worried Saturday morning.

They swapped a mandatory morning skate to an optional.

They hosted a team meeting that was filled with laughter you could hear from down the hall.

Morgan Rielly opined on how this Leafs team might be the most confident he's ever played with.

"We feel good around one another. Most of us have been here for a few years now, and when the chemistry is good with the coaching staff it makes life a bit easier," Rielly said.

"Confidence is an important quality, I think. There are things that have happened over the years that are worthy of a little more confidence in that room. We've got a ways to go, but I think we're on the right path."

Mike Babcock was animated and cracked jokes about Tomas Holmstrom jumping in front of Niklas Lidstrom in a car accident.

"We've got a group that believes that we're pretty good," Babcock said when asked the same question as Rielly.

Frederik Andersen's workload?

"I'm not one bit worried about Freddy. He just had some days off, and I think he's in a good spot. There's a lot of things you can evaluate. You can evaluate the shots attempts, the shots on goal, I think what really matters are the scoring chances and how much wear and tear is on the goalie," Babcock said.

The Leafs' ability to match up with a physical, tightly gapped Bruins team, the only team to beat them by four or more goals in two years (thrice heading into Saturday)?

"There's a number of ways to create room. One is to be physically strong on the puck. You end up in a battle with two guys and then you get past that and create space for somebody else. The other is to be physical on the forecheck, cut off arms on big guys, get on the right side and own the puck and then you've got them on the wrong side. In the old days, what you used to do is you could skate around in warmup and you could growl at each other and it actually made a difference because there was someone out there who could actually whack you. It doesn't work like that now," Babcock said.

"If someone hits you hard, you're not expected to take a penalty, you're just expected to keep playing. It's different. The other thing about it is when you're coaching a team you look at your assets and create the best image of your team with them. So do you play fast, do you play heavy? Do you play physical? What do you do? Look at your group and you better coach your group to the best skillset you have."

You don't need to play like the other guys when the way you play is better. That was the idea. The Leafs, Rielly added, have a lot of players who can play that kind of game, though. "We take pride in that," he said.

And then they fought three times — the least Leafs-like occurrence of the season. And they took undisciplined penalties. And Andersen didn't play well. And they lost their second straight. Badly. Nearly by four goals — again.

And the problems aren't as simple as the last two losses. The Leafs snuck out a late comeback in Buffalo thanks to Auston Matthews. Their 5-3 win in the game before that against the Wild was ugly and they were outshot 41-22, one of the largest margins of Babcock's tenure in Toronto. It's been a couple of weeks now.

So what has gone wrong?

It's complicated.

It may be time to break the Hyman-Tavares-Marner line up

At the end of October, when the Leafs faced the Jets, I wrote about the team's trouble within its defensive zone schemes, from breakouts to structure, and highlighted Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman as problems. As the season has progressed, the one line Babcock hasn't tinkered with has begun to develop some serious problems. As Kasperi Kapanen, Patrick Marleau and Andreas Johnsson continue to bounce around, it may be time for Babcock to consider breaking up his top line.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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On Saturday, it started with the way they cheated offensively. It didn't just happen on the three goals against that resulted, either. It happened early and often and got progressively worse. By the time the game was over, they spent nearly all of their shifts hemmed in or getting burned by getting ahead of the play.

The goals are good case studies, though. There was so much wrong with the first one that it's hard to know where to start. I'll let you watch it back below, first.

So what happens there? A few things:

Tavares hangs onto the puck at his defensive zone blueline too long, rushes a play under pressure to give it away.

Tavares cheats up ice, despite likely recognizing he just turned the puck over (you'll have to watch for this closely a second time), and ends up below instead of above the puck when it goes the other way. There is no reason for him to attack the offensive zone blueline after that pass.

Marnier chases without actually applying any real pressure or attempting any real play to intercept the outlet pass, and puts himself out of position as a result.

Tavares sees Jakob Forsback Karlsson activate to create an odd-man rush and doesn't pick him up until it's too late.

All of these plays could be chalked up to poor decision-making. Blame could be placed on Travis Dermott for activating without support, or Nikita Zaitsev for the way he defended the rush. But those things matter only if the Tavares-Marnier mistakes aren't part of a broader theme.

But then there's the second goal against. And guess what? Tavares pivots in dead space without applying any real pressure and Marnier does the same (twice). Notice, too, where Marnier comes from at the very start of the sequence. While four Bruins players drive through the middle of the ice, he slides into the frame from the boards:

Outside of the old "that's his wing" excuse, there's no reason Marnier is where he is on that play other than because he wants that open space near the defensive zone blueline for an outlet pass. It's junior-hockey stuff (just because there's open space doesn't mean you have to take it). The Leafs, from Mike Babcock to Sheldon Keefe and Ryane Clowe, teach their forwards to play in this lane ("between the dots"):

Marnier knows better.

On the third goal, you'll begin to see that trend play out once more. Tavares, under pressure, turns the puck over. Neither he nor Marnier is positioned to track back. Gardiner cheats without support. You know the rest:

You'll notice Hyman wasn't much of a factor in these outcomes. Part of that was driven by his ejection from the game and penalty troubles, though. The Marnier-Tavares duo was just as hemmed in with him on the ice as without him.

It was ugly, though. By the time the game was over, Tavares and Marnier were out-chanced 7-6 (46 SCF%) and 8-5 (38 SCF%), respectively, when they were on the ice at even strength.

Babcock doesn't seem too concerned, though.

"You can look at our whole group. Some nights lines pick you up. Tonight we didn't have anyone else to pick us up," he said.

Teams are starting to figure out the Leafs' power play

Here's the thing about today's NHL: Teams adapt. They learn. Video teaches them. You've got to change your game before they figure you out.

Early on this season, the Leafs' new-look power play, which added John Tavares in James van Riemsdyk's place and finally featured Auston Matthews on the top unit, looked borderline unstoppable. Rielly made four-foot passes to Marnier, Marnier made cross-seam passes to the slot

or the far post for goals. When the pass wasn't available, he found Matthews at the faceoff left-wing faceoff dot, and Matthews rotated his feet and went shortside.

But that's all they did. Everything runs through Mitch on the right-wing wall. Everything goes right to left. Those are patterns teams can figure out. And it's not working like it did. Heading into Saturday, the Leafs' 30th game of the year, the power play sat at 20 for 75, or 26.7 per cent (good for sixth in the NHL). The bulk of that, though, came early in the year. The Leafs were also riding back-to-back games where they didn't score on the man-advantage (0 for 6) and a 15-game stretch where they went 8 for 36 (22.2 per cent, or 14th in the league). That's still fine, and not as though they've completely imploded (that's impossible to do given their talent), but it's clear teams are beginning to gameplan against that right-to-left movement.

It's become predictable. Watch how Chris Wagner immediately tracks to the back door when Rielly goes laterally to Marnier:

And watch, when Matthews' shot isn't available (it's not easy being a left-handed shot on the left wing on a power play, as good as Matthews is), the way Rielly goes static when his head pivots to look for Marnier and that option is there. The end result? A low-danger shot on net that's easily saved:

It's not just a first-unit problem, either. Watch Gardiner, as Morgan Rielly, and Nylander, as Mitch Marnier, and the Bruins, as a team that has figured it out, run through the exact same play, almost to a T (even the way Gardiner attacks the centre of the zone when everyone knows he won't use it and he's just going back the other way):

It may be time for the Leafs to figure out a net set play. They went 1 for 2 on the power play against the Bruins, but it will limit them if they don't.

Trouble with the rush

The Tavares line's issues with the rush aren't unique. It's no secret the Leafs are one of the most dangerous rush teams in the league, but it comes at a price and they're giving up a lot of late.

The 4-0 goal was a good example of how and why. While there's no question Andersen has to stop it, the Leafs also need to be cognizant of the not one but two Bruins who are behind them as they exit the zone, especially when a defenceman (this time Igor Ozhiganov) is the intended recipient of the pass:

As the play develops, the Leafs don't adequately support Ozhiganov, Ozhiganov doesn't make any real effort to get to a puck that he may have been able to get to, and four Leafs collapse a second too late:

It starts, in a lot of ways, with the defencemen's decision. But it ends with the way the Leafs' forwards are reacting under pressure and the way they track the playback to stay above the puck.

Watch, on the 6-1 goal, as four Leafs start the sequence below the offensive zone hashmarks and neither Kapanen nor Matthews supports Ron Hainsey:

The Leafs' biggest problem, though, may be that their coach doesn't think they have any.

"We just had a real good run where we had five wins and an overtime loss. Every once in a while you get fed your lunch. Today was one of those days," Babcock said after the game.

But the Leafs have to figure it out.

"It's got to piss you off. We have to add a little bite to our game," Tavares said. "We talk about the importance of playing well defensively. We know the ability we have to make plays and put the puck, and it's just important we don't forget why we get those chances."

It's about more than bite, though. Boston is likely the Leafs' first-round playoff opponent. And if they're going to play their game next time, and their game is a rush game at 5-on-5 that's anchored by the Tavares line and aided by an excellent power play, they've got a lot of work to do.



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The Athletic LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120147 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs Report Cards: Game 30 at Boston

Ian Tulloch

Dec 8, 2018

Apparently, it wasn't just one "trap game" against Detroit – it's trap week.

@jtbourne is it trap week?

— James Mirtle (@mirtle) December 9, 2018

Patrice Bergeron? Injured. Zdeno Chara? Injured. Jake DeBrusk? Also injured.

Taking those injuries into account, Dom Luszczyszyn's model gave the Leafs a 57.7% to win the game tonight. They did not, and unfortunately, now we're going to talk about it.

One or two words to describe how the team looked

Boston — I don't know why, but Toronto just doesn't seem to play well at TD Garden. Even on a night when the Bruins are missing their best player, franchise defenceman, and second-leading scorer, they still found a way to beat Toronto. Now, this game was a lot closer than the scoreboard indicated, but that probably doesn't make it any less frustrating for Leafs fans.

Image from MoneyPuck.com

Gotta hear both sides

Glass half-full: The Leafs played much better at even strength than you probably realized...they just couldn't buy a call until the game was already over.

Glass half-empty: They got beat down by a rival who was missing a lot of their best players – it wasn't pretty.

Player Reports

* * *

Best players on the ice: Nazem Kadri – Actually showed up tonight

I stopped tracking zone exits and zone entries about halfway through the game (when it became clear that this game wasn't going to be very close), but Kadri was the clear leader in both categories. He was making plays in transition, and seemed to be one of the only Leafs' forwards who was generating chances at even strength. All in all, I thought he was making some pretty good decisions tonight – other than fighting 6'5 Brandon Carlo (that didn't go so well).

Morgan Rielly – Also showed up (and almost got decapitated)

Despite almost dying in the third period (when Boston's Chris Wagner took a run at him), Rielly actually looked pretty solid tonight. He was moving the puck really well, often choosing to skate the puck out himself and take it all the way to the offensive zone. The defensive side of the game didn't go as well for him tonight, but I still thought he was the team's best defenceman on the ice (which unfortunately, isn't saying much).

Connor Brown – Bizarro World

On a night where most of Toronto's best players were struggling to create offence, it was Connor Brown who stepped up to generate some

quality chances. I don't know how, I don't know why, but it happened, and I'd love to see more of it from him.

Travis Dermott – Good Travis, Bad Travis

Good Travis: Was moving the puck well in transition, and probably had the best shot of the night (beating Jaroslav Halak from 30 feet out).

Bad Travis: Lost his man in transition at 4-on-4 after a neutral zone turnover, resulting in a goal against on the ensuing two-on-one.

This is starting to become a trend, much like we've seen with another fleet-of-foot left-handed defenceman on Toronto. In a perfect world, we see Dermott learn from his mistakes and grow into the #2 defenceman he has the potential to become. Even if he doesn't learn from all of his mistakes, though, you could do a lot worse than becoming the next Jake Gardiner.

William Nylander – "Is William Nylander the problem!?"

It's easy to go with the narrative that Toronto has struggled since William Nylander rejoined the lineup, but he actually played well tonight. He didn't look like the best version of himself, but he looked a heck of a lot better than 90% of his teammates. The Leafs definitely haven't played well over their past two games, and Nylander clearly didn't look too great in his season debut, but let's try to stay rational – he was generating quite a bit of offence tonight.

* *

Kasper Kapanen – I'm not sure why the Leafs went with Marleau-Matthews-Kapanen tonight. Marleau and Matthews haven't gelled well together for whatever reason, while Johnsson and Kapanen have clearly had chemistry together. Unsurprisingly, the Matthews line didn't do much of anything tonight. A lot of that was due to the players' poor performance, but I'd argue that a Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen line would have looked much more dangerous.

Jake Gardiner – As you'd expect, he was slinging a few nice passes out of the zone tonight and, as you'd expect, he made a costly mistake leading to a 2-on-1 that was completely avoidable. I've always liked Gardiner because of his game-changing talent, but tonight was another frustrating night from him.

Ron Hainsey –

PIC.TWITTER.COM/CQUYV2MOE6

— DYLAN (@DYLANFREMLIN) DECEMBER 9, 2018

In all seriousness, though, we need to give Hainsey credit for standing up for his partner after Wagner took a run at Morgan Rielly. He's turning 38 soon and he didn't hesitate to throw himself in a dangerous situation

I'm bumping him up to two stars for that alone (because this is a highly scientific process).

Andreas Johnsson – In the NBA, we like to call the last few minutes of games that are clearly over "garbage time." Johnsson scored a goal in garbage time, which I don't want to give him too much credit for, but I thought he actually had a half-decent game relative to his peers. I know that's not saying much, but I'm trying really hard to find positives here (especially when you see some of the next players I have to talk about).

*

Tyler Ennis – I like Tyler Ennis, but the fourth line was a gong show tonight (much like it was against Detroit). Connor Brown was the only player on that line who was doing anything tonight – Connor. Brown.

Par Lindholm – Toronto had one of the best fourth lines in the NHL for the first two months of the season, and they've been an unmitigated disaster since Josh Leivo was traded. As my pal, Bear from Polka Dot Shorts would say:



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Zach Hyman – His most eventful play of the game was taking a 5-minute major in the third period when his team was down by four goals.

Frederik Andersen – He's probably been the Leafs' MVP this season, but every goaltender goes through their ups and downs over the course of a long season. This was obviously a down-night for Andersen, but if anyone on the Leafs has earned one this season, it's him.

Patrick Marleau – Once again, Patrick Marleau was a ghost at even strength for Toronto. Look on the bright side, though, at least he had plenty of company tonight.

Did they even play tonight or?

Igor Ozhiganov – Gave Boston the puck leading to a goal against, has been getting carried around by Dermott for two months, and apparently has dirt on Mike Babcock (I'm not sure how else you could justify not giving Justin Holl a look on the bottom pairing at this point).

Nikita Zaitsev – My mom taught me that if I don't have anything nice to say, I shouldn't say anything at all.

Worst player on the ice: Auston Matthews – I hate that this was such a tough award to hand out tonight (there were a lot of really good contenders), but I think when we take a player's talent and baseline into account, no one was more disappointing than Auston Matthews tonight. I know he racked up an ugly goal and assist in the 3rd period when the game was 6-1 and then 6-2, but I don't put much stock in that considering score effects had kicked in and the game was all but over. If you watched his play when the game was still competitive, he wasn't doing much of anything at even strength.

I think we need to permanently ban him from being on the ice at the same time as Patrick Marleau (even during practice, have them skate on different sheets). This just isn't working.

John Tavares – When Tavares has an incredible game, sometimes we don't notice it because of the subtle little plays he's able to make. When he has a truly bad game, we really don't notice him.

Mitch Marner – What else can we really say? When your best players don't show up, you tend not to win.

Game Score

Most important GIF of the night

#LEAFSFOREVER PIC.TWITTER.COM/ZNOIOBDTX2

— DAVID NESTICO (@DAVIDNESTICO200) DECEMBER 9, 2018

My thoughts exactly.

Questions and concerns from the game

Is this William Nylander's fault?

Stop, he actually played well tonight.

Is this Mike Babcock's fault?

I don't think so. Rough stretches happen throughout the course of a season, and Toronto didn't get drastically outshot or outchanced – they just couldn't buy a save tonight, which happens.

Is this Justin Bourne's fault?

Yes.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120148 Toronto Maple Leafs

Projecting who the Leafs will protect in the Seattle expansion draft (version 1.0)

Ian Tulloch

Dec 8, 2018

With the NHL officially announcing expansion to Seattle for the 2021-2022 season, most fanbases began scrambling to CapFriendly trying forecast which player their favourite team might be losing in the 2021 expansion draft. We're well aware of this trend at The Athletic, which is why we've been doing a company-wide series on each team's "way-too-early" protection list for 2021. I'm going to try my best to break down Toronto's with you today.

Now, let's start with the obvious: it's really hard to project NHL rosters three years down the road. So many things can happen between now and 2021 (trades, signings, prospects not panning out, others outperforming expectations), but that doesn't mean we can't try our best to look ahead and project where this team will be a few seasons from now.

If all you want to know is which player the Leafs are likely to lose in the 2021 expansion draft, you can skip to the last paragraph right now (it will save you a lot of trouble). For those of you who want to take a journey with me into the future, we can dive into this three-year projection head first.

Here we go!

Who's still on the Leafs in 2021?

Before we even think about who might make Toronto's protection list, we need to establish which players are going to be on the roster three summers from now. Let's start with the basics.

The core

Barring a major trade, it's likely that the team is going to have these players under contract for the 2021-2022 season:

Auston Matthews

John Tavares

Mitch Marner

William Nylander

Nazem Kadri

Morgan Rielly

After this, it becomes a lot trickier to forecast things. Now, we have to project future contracts, which players get re-signed, which ones walk in free agency, and who gets moved to make room for cheaper replacements, not to mention the unpredictable nature of any future acquisitions over the next three years.

To help make this exercise a little bit easier, let's break it down by position.

Goaltending

Frederik Andersen is going to be an unrestricted free agent on July 1, 2021. If he can sustain anything close to his level of play over the past few seasons, he's going to be due for a big raise. The problem is that Andersen will be turning 32 that season, and as we've seen with goaltenders around the NHL (e.g. Carey Price), your best years tend to be behind you at that point in your career.

It will be interesting to see how the tea leaves unfold in this department, but weirdly enough, I don't think it's actually going to make a drastic impact on Toronto's protection list for the expansion draft. They're going to protect the goalie they see as their starter moving forward (whether it's Andersen, Garret Sparks, or a netminder they acquire via trade or free agency), but the take-home point here is that Andersen is far from a lock



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for the 2021-2022 season – that’s just the unfortunate nature of goaltending.

Defence

Protecting your elite forwards and starting goaltender from the expansion draft is an easy decision, but it’s the uncertainty with Toronto’s blueline that makes this three-year forecast so difficult. The Leafs have to hope that Rasmus Sandin and Timothy Liljegren will be making an impact at the NHL level by 2021. I’m sure the long-term goal is for them to join Rielly and Travis Dermott in the top four at this point, but it’s hard to know if they’ll reach that potential.

If they’re unable to fill this role, my question is whether one of these defencemen will still be on the roster:

Jake Gardiner

Nikita Zaitsev

It sounds like Toronto might consider re-signing Gardiner if he’s willing to take a hometown discount, which could make things pretty interesting. It’s worth noting that the Leafs could fit him under the cap (along with the rest of the core) on a contract paying him around \$5.5-million, but the team would need to shed salary around the periphery of their roster to make room (e.g. trading Zaitsev and Connor Brown in the summer).

What this essentially comes down to is which defenceman Toronto decides to keep moving forward: Gardiner or Zaitsev.

A lot of fans would argue that “neither” is the right answer considering Gardiner’s age (he turns 29 this summer) and Zaitsev’s poor shot metrics throughout his tenure with the Leafs. Knowing how much Kyle Dubas relies on analytics in his process-oriented approach to roster construction, I would wager that Gardiner or “neither” is the decision here, but I’ve been wrong many times before.

Forwards

Much like the Chicago Blackhawks from the late 2000s, Toronto has a lot of young talent up front. The hard part is that when you have so many players performing well, you have to pay them and there’s only so much money to go around in a cap world. This is obviously a great problem to have (much better than not having enough good players to pay), but it leads to some tough decisions.

Chicago did an excellent job of locking up its core players to long-term deals (Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, Duncan Keith, Marian Hossa, Patrick Sharp) and recouping assets for the younger players they could no longer afford (Andrew Ladd, Dustin Byfuglien and Kris Versteeg). These weren’t easy decisions to make, but they were necessary to survive the cap crunch of 2010.

Moving on from complementary players at the right time can really help move your franchise in the right direction (e.g. trading Andrew Shaw for the pick used to select Alex Debrincat), but when you fall in love with your depth players, it can be costly (e.g. the Bryan Bickell contract). A few years later, the only way Chicago was able to move his contract was by giving Carolina one of its prized young assets, Teuvo Teravainen, who scored 64 points last season while earning less than \$3-million.

This is why asset management is so important in the salary cap era. You need to identify the right players to lock up long-term and realize when it’s time to cut bait with a role player. I know this sounds heartless, and it genuinely sucks for fans of these players (imagine having a signed Andrew Ladd Blackhawks jersey), but at the end of the day, the NHL is a business. The most successful franchises are the ones that are able to make these difficult decisions with a cold-blooded, rational approach.

With that being said, Kyle Dubas is going to be facing some tough choices over the next couple of years with Toronto’s depth forwards:

Zach Hyman (UFA in 2021)

Connor Brown (RFA in 2020)

Kasperii Kapanen (RFA in 2019)

Andreas Johnsson (RFA in 2019)

As much as Leafs fans would love to see these players in the lineup in 2021-22, I doubt that all four of them will still be on the roster by then. In fact, I’m not sure if even two of them will still be on the team. With Hyman set to hit the open market in the summer of 2021, I wouldn’t be surprised if the Leafs let him walk as a free agent or trade him prior to this. As much as Mike Babcock loves him, I think his role could easily be replaced for a fraction of the cost.

I also think it’s likely that Brown is moved prior to signing his next contract. Considering Toronto’s depth at right wing (Nylander, Marnier and Kapanen), his cap hit of \$2.1-million would be among the highest in the league for players filling a fourth-line role.

That leaves Kapanen and Johnsson. It’s pretty tough trying to forecast these two. I could see a scenario in which the Leafs find a way to squeeze both of them under the cap on bridge deals, but it also wouldn’t surprise me to see one of them moved in the next couple years simply because they’ve priced themselves out of Toronto’s cap situation.

Again, having too many productive forwards is a fantastic problem, but as we saw with the Blackhawks, sometimes sacrifices need to be made in a cap world. A 50-plus point season from one (or both) of these players might be the secondary scoring Toronto needs to push them over the top – but it also might be what forces the team to trade one of them. It’s a funny world we live in, isn’t it?

The projected roster

Taking all of this into account, here’s a projected roster for the summer of 2021.

Again, this is an extremely rough estimate considering how hard it is to forecast teams even a year or two in advance (let alone three). Will Toronto’s roster look exactly like this heading into the expansion draft? Probably not, but I think it gives us a good idea of what the team might look like.

I didn’t put names at the bottom of the lineup because fourth lines and bottom pairings are pretty much impossible to project three years in advance, while the uncertainty surrounding Gardiner and Zaitsev makes it tough to project the Leafs’ second pairing in 2021. However, when it comes to the core of this team, and barring a major trade (e.g. Nylander for a top pairing defenceman), I think it will look similar to this in 2021.

Which players are exempt?

Players are only eligible for the expansion draft if they’ve accrued three or more “professional seasons,” which refers to the NHL, AHL or any professional European hockey league. The key exception to this rule is that any player under the age of 20 (by Sept. 15 of that season) who plays fewer than 10 NHL games will not have that year count as a “professional season,” even if they play in the AHL or Europe.

It’s a weird rule that benefits teams who are able to play their teenage players in professional leagues, whether it’s in North America (AHL) or Europe (KHL, SHL, Allsvenskan, Liiga, etc.). This directly applies to Toronto’s two best prospects, Sandin and Liljegren. As long as they don’t play 10 or more games in the NHL this season, they’ll both be exempt from the 2021 expansion draft.

Even if we assume Sandin plays 10 or more NHL games next season (which I think is unlikely considering his age), that would only add up to two “professional seasons” for both him and Liljegren – you need three or more to be eligible for the expansion draft. This is huge for the Leafs since it’s likely that at least one of these players will be a key contributor in Toronto’s top four by 2021, with both of them almost certainly in the top six.

To help give you an idea of who else is exempt, here’s the full list of Leafs prospects that won’t need to be protected in 2021 (sorted



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alphabetically by first name so we don't get into a prospect rankings fight).

Dakota Joshua
Eemeli Rasanen
Fabrice Herzog
Fedor Gordeev
Filip Kral
Ian Scott
J.D. Greenway
Joseph Woll
Mac Hollowell
Martins Dzierkals
Miro Aaltonen
Nikolai Chebykin
Pontus Holmberg
Rasmus Sandin
Riley Stotts
Ryan McGregor
Ryan O'Connell
Sean Durzi
Semyon Der-Arguchintsev
Semyon Kizimov
Timothy Liljegren
Vladimir Bobylev
Vladislav Kara
Yegor Korshkov
Zachary Bouthillier

This also includes any prospects drafted in 2019, 2020 or 2021. Everyone else is fair game (if the player's name isn't on that list, it means he's eligible for the 2021 expansion draft). Since the Leafs have 68 players in their organization (45 of those under contract), I'm not going to waste your time by listing all of those players. To make life easier on you, we'll go over the notable players who might be exposed to Seattle in the next section.

Who does Toronto protect?

As a quick reminder, teams have the option of protecting seven forwards, three defencemen, and one goaltender or they can choose to protect eight skaters and one goaltender. The only reason you would opt for the latter is if you had tremendous depth on defence (e.g. Nashville) or very little eligible talent to lose up front (e.g. Arizona).

Since Sandin and Liljegren are exempt, Toronto doesn't need to worry as much about its defencemen, not to mention the fact that they have five elite forwards to protect. So, they'll almost certainly choose the 7F-3D-1G option. Taking this into account, here's our official way-too-early protection list™ for Toronto in the 2021 expansion draft.

Forwards
Matthews
Tavares
Marnier

Nylander

Kadri

Sixth-best forward (likely Kapanen)

Seventh-best forward (likely Johnsson)

Defence

Rielly

Dermott

Third-best defencemen (possibly Gardiner, Zaitsev or a player acquired via trade or free agency)

Goaltender

The starter moving forward (possibly Andersen, Sparks or player acquired via trade or free agency)

What this ultimately comes down to is which players are still on the roster in 2021. If a forward like Hyman or Brown has been given a contract extension, I'd expect him to be the player that Seattle selects (if not, the most likely candidates would be Carl Grundstrom or Trevor Moore). Keep in mind that as of right now, Hyman is an unrestricted free agent heading into 2021, so it would be unwise of Toronto to protect him. Even if they planned on re-signing him, they could pre-arrange a deal with him for after the expansion draft, which is what we saw a lot of teams do in 2017.

The other uncertainty is on the blueline. This is where I think the Leafs can get a bit creative. For fun, let's say they have either Gardiner or Zaitsev still under contract this season (as we established earlier, they can afford to keep one of them). By the time you've reached the summer of 2021, it's going to make a lot of sense for Toronto to get out of the contract (with Gardiner turning 31 and Zaitsev turning 30).

I wouldn't be shocked to see the Leafs expose either Gardiner or Zaitsev to Seattle, and maybe offer a draft pick to get them to select the player. With Zaitsev, I feel like it would be necessary considering his cap hit and poor performance (which is why I'd suggest trading him in the summer of 2019 before his limited no-trade clause kicks in). But with Gardiner, I feel like it could be a creative way to essentially sign him to a three-year contract.

The idea here is that he would essentially serve as a stop-gap until Sandin and Liljegren are ready to jump into Toronto's top four (which might take a couple years). Now, they wouldn't be able to expose Gardiner in 2021 if he had a no-movement clause in his contract. But when you look at comparable defencemen (Ryan Ellis, Ryan McDonagh, Nate Schmidt), none of them were given no-movement clauses. The precedent is there to make this happen. It probably won't, but I think it's interesting to think about.

There are other creative ways to take advantage of this third protection slot (e.g. acquiring another team's fourth-best defenceman for pennies on the dollar right before the expansion draft), so it will be interesting to see if the Leafs can use the expansion draft in their favour. I have a feeling that teams are going to be much more proactive heading into the 2021 expansion draft, and if Toronto plays their cards right, they could come away with a nice asset on the back end for well-below market value.

At the end of the day, what this probably comes down to is Toronto losing their eighth-best forward to Seattle, whether it's Hyman, Brown, Grundstrom, Moore, or someone completely off the radar like Jeremy Bracco, Dmytro Timashov or Pierre Engvall. Who knows, maybe this forward isn't even a member of the organization yet – or maybe it's someone like Johnsson because the Leafs bring in a talented forward who surpasses him.

It's tough to say, and like I've said many times, it's way too early to project things accurately. Based on the information we have right now, though, this is my best guess as to how the 2021 expansion draft could play out for Toronto.



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

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 boney 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.

"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



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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.

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.



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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 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.

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1120087 Montreal Canadiens

Habs notebook: Kotkaniemi likely to remain in Montreal for the season

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

Updated: December 8, 2018

CHICAGO — Canadiens general Marc Bergevin threw cold water on the rumour Jesperi Kotkaniemi will be loaned to Team Finland for the world junior championships later this month in Vancouver and Victoria.

Speaking after the Canadiens practised Saturday, Bergevin said there was only a "slim" chance Kotkaniemi would play for Finland. Moments earlier, he said in French there was a "95-per-cent" probability Kotkaniemi would be with the Canadiens all season.

When asked if there was a scenario in which he would change his mind about Kotkaniemi, Bergevin said he might be temporarily expendable "if somehow a centreman falls in my lap."



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Last December, the Canadiens lent defenceman Victor Mete to Team Canada. The difference this time around is Kotkaniemi has established himself as a top-nine forward who gets better with every game.

"He's been progressing," Bergevin said. "When he's had a tough night, he bounces back and that's a sign that pretty positive.

Juulsen still sitting: These was speculation Noah Juulsen would rejoin the lineup for the Chicago game Sunday, but he was the extra defenceman in practice Saturday. Juulsen, who has missed eight games with a facial fracture, was a top-four defenceman before his injury, but the return of Shea Weber and the rise of Brett Kulak dropped him to the third pair and Bergevin said that will help his development.

"He's a young defenceman and he'll get easier match-ups and that's good for his confidence," Bergevin said. "It's only his first full NHL year and it's hard to ask young kids to play in those situations. With Weber, Jeff Petry and Juulsen we're in good shape."

The Canadiens made room for Juulsen on the roster by placing Xavier Ouellet on waivers. He wasn't claimed by noon Saturday and that means he'll report to the Laval Rocket. The AHL club now has three defencemen who started the season in Montreal — Ouellet, Mete and Karl Alzner.

Bergevin has money to burn: Remember last season when there was a lot of anguish when Bergevin had \$8 million in unused cap space? Well, when Ouellet and his two-way contract moved to the end of the Orange Line, Bergevin's available cap space increased to \$9.3 million.

"I'd like to go shopping with that, but it's not going to happen," Bergevin said. "A lot of teams have cap space — I think we're fifth in the league, but what are you going to spend it on. There aren't many options open, but if we can make our team better, we'll, do it. Like the deal we did to get Joel Armia. That'd be something we'll be looking at."

The Canadiens acquired Armia from Winnipeg in a deal that saw Montreal also take overpaid goaltender Steve Mason. Montreal bought out the final two years of Mason's contract and took a \$2.7-million cap hit for this season and next.

Drouin, Domi impresses GM: Bergevin said he's happy to see the improvements in Jonathan Drouin and Max Dom, who are Montreal's leading scorers.

"Jo's been night and day for me compared to last year," Bergevin said. "Some nights, you even see him backchecking, coming back hard. In the end, he wants to make a difference and I'm proud of the way he's playing, the way he's competing this year, the way he and Max have passion."

After Alex Galchenyuk and Drouin were found lacking in their defensive play at centre, Bergrvin is pleased with Domi.

"As a centre, it's a tough job," Bergevin said. "Max down low is quick on loose pucks, he competes hard. He applies a lot of backside pressure. He wants to win. When we made the trade, we knew he was going to try harder in a hockey market. He not only said it, but he's doing it."

A surprise visit: Brian Savage, who played with the Canadiens from 1993 to 2002, visited the Canadiens' dressing room Saturday and reunited with former teammate Kirk Muller.

Savage, who now lives outside Detroit, was in Chicago with his 11-year-old son Rory, whose Compuware peewee team is playing in a tournament.

Savage settled in Arizona after he was traded from the Canadiens and later spent as a year in Austria with a junior development program sponsored by Red Bull.

"Pierre Pagé was running the program and I was recruiting North American players," Savage said. "When Pierre got fired, they stopped looking for North American players and I left. We made a family decision to find a place where the boys could play hockey."

Savage's oldest son Ryan, who was born in Montreal, is playing for the Omaha Lancers in the USHL, and next fall, he'll enrol at Miami University in Ohio, his father's alma mater. His other son, 15-year-old Redmond, is playing in the Compuware program.

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Canadiens' experiment with blueliner Brett Kulak is paying off

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

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CHICAGO — Brett Kulak has learned things can change quickly in the NHL.

Three weeks ago, Kulak was toiling for the Laval Rocket. On Sunday, Kulak will be alongside Shea Weber on the No. 1 defence pairing when the Canadiens play the Chicago Blackhawks (6 p.m. SN, SN1, RDS, TSN-690 Radio).

"You try to visualize (playing on a top pair), but when I was down in Laval, the Canadiens had nine healthy defencemen," Kulak said. "I thought at some time this season my time would come, but I didn't think it would come as quickly as it did. I've had a few good games and I'm enjoying playing alongside (Weber)."

Kulak, who will turn 25 next month, had 101 games of NHL experience prior to this season, but the Canadiens roster was set when he arrived in Montreal via a trade that sent Rinat Valiev and Matt Taormina to the Flames.

"He was playing in the NHL last year, so it was not like I got a guy from the East Coast Hockey League," said general manager Marc Bergevin. "He's an NHL defenceman. Our scouting staff liked him because of the way the game is going. He's a good skater. Spending time in Laval with Joël (Bouchard) and his staff, and watching tape from last yer and this year, you can see he's not the same player he was last year. Laval might not be in first place, but they're doing some good things and Kulak is one proof of that.

"He has more poise with the puck, he skates better with the puck," Bergevin added. "He's always been a good skater but, in the past, he'd get rid of the puck quicker and he has more patience now."

While he went from the NHL to the AHL after the trade, Kulak thinks the move was good for his career. He had been in the Calgary organization since they drafted him in the fourth round in 2012.

"Change is good for guys who are stuck," Kulak said. "There are a number of things that play into it, a fresh start, fresh eyes on you. (Calgary) liked me as a player and they thought a change would help me and now with a team that's a little quicker and that plays into my game."

Kulak has played seven games since he was called up and the past four have been with Weber. He thinks coach Claude Julien put them together as an experiment and it appears to have worked.

"He makes the games easy for me," Kulak said. "We're playing against the top lines and I don't have a ton of experience doing that. His ability to support me and and help me in our zone makes my job easier."

Kulak said there was a time when he patterned his game on the play of other defencemen, but now he concentrates on his own play and tries to



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get better every day. During Saturday's practice, he huddled with defensive coach Luke Richardson to get some pointers.

"He told me I have to pick my spots," Kulak said. "In Ottawa, I got caught a couple of times trying to overhandle the puck. This is a good league and the skilled forwards look for those chances where they can pick my pocket and get going the other way. It's part of learning."

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1120089 Montreal Canadiens

Jesper Kotkaniemi is closer to the Canadiens top-6 than the World Junior Championships

By Marc Antoine Godin

CHICAGO – Looking back at the case of Victor Mete, who was loaned to Team Canada for the World Junior Championships last year, is the best way to understand why the Canadiens are reluctant to release Jesperi Kotkaniemi to play for Finland at this year's tournament.

Mete was last year's surprise of training camp and had a good start to the season playing with Shea Weber, averaging 19:33 of ice time over his first 10 games. But that number began to drop drastically as of Oct. 28; over his final 16 games before being loaned to Team Canada, Mete's average ice time was 12:06.

Despite a struggling blue line and Weber playing on one leg at that point in the season, the Canadiens saw the world juniors as a perfect opportunity to put Mete in an environment where he could best exploit his strengths.

"Going from that level to the NHL was a little bit tougher because I wasn't ever exposed to the American League. I've only ever been to rookie camps," Mete said earlier this week after practice with the Laval Rocket. "But after the World Juniors I was kind of knowing what I was capable of doing and that I could do that in the NHL. It was good for me in the long run."

"I got to play big minutes again and kind of do my own thing: joined the rush., played PK, powerplay, I played in all key situations – which I was doing in Montreal earlier in the season, but then I was scratched some games and played forward one game. I was all over the place. Going down I was able to play in all situations like I was in London."

The decision to send Mete to play at the world juniors made sense for both the present and the future of the Canadiens. They lost a defenceman for a few weeks who was beginning to play less and less in any case and allowed Mete to experience something he will never forget, something that probably helped his long term development.

But Kotkaniemi's situation this year is not remotely similar.

When he estimated Saturday that there was a 95 percent chance Kotkaniemi would not be going to the world juniors, Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin said he was pleasantly surprised by the consistent progression of his young centreman. His game, unlike Mete a year ago, is becoming more and more solid with every game he plays.

"He progressed a lot in his draft year after Christmas and, this year, even if he has a tough night, he bounces back the next game," Bergevin said. "That's a good sign."

If Bergevin is leaving the door open to sending Kotkaniemi to the world juniors, what would it take to change his mind?

"Somehow a centreman falls down on my lap," he said.

Kotkaniemi's importance to the Canadiens continues to grow, and it has reached the point where it is far from clear who would replace him if he were to go to Vancouver and Victoria to play for Finland. Andrew Shaw? Matthew Peca? The Canadiens simply aren't equipped to handle Kotkaniemi's absence, especially since it was in part his emergence that led Bergevin to cut ties with Tomas Plekanec.

"He plays on our power play, he's a centre, he's gradually getting better in the faceoff circle, he's maturing...but most of all he deserves to be here," Bergevin said. "It's not so much that we have a lack of centres, it's more so that he's earned his spot in the lineup. He's done good work so far."

In his case, Mete wanted nothing to do with the world juniors until he was actually loaned to Team Canada. His fear was that he would lose his spot on the team while he was gone.

"It's so hard to gain your spot to begin with, and then when you're there it's even harder to keep it," Mete said. "To leave it without knowing what was going to happen after that – if I was going to go back to London or if I was to go back to Montreal – it was kind of a toss-up for me. Maybe they had their plan from Day 1, but that's what I was thinking."

Kotkaniemi doesn't appear to have the same concern. His confidence in himself jumps out when he explains why he would accept either outcome.

"There is two good options, stay here or go there," Kotkaniemi said. "It doesn't really matter that much whether I'm there playing a few games or here. I like both places so I think there is no bad options."

The thing is his absence would change something for the Canadiens. They are fighting for a spot in the playoffs in a division that is suddenly very competitive and they will need everyone at their disposal to get there. Bergevin is willing to run the risk that the youngest player in the NHL will be able to handle the more physical brand of hockey we tend to see in the second half of the season.

"Sometimes he falls in a puck battle, but that's normal, he's an 18-year-old playing against men," Bergevin said. "He'll get better. If that's his only problem, we can live with that."

"We all see his hockey sense, the passes he makes. Sometimes you say to yourself, wow...His I.Q. is really high and I don't think that will go down after Christmas."

It would be easy to argue that an experience like the world juniors would allow Kotkaniemi to come back an improved player for the second half of the season. That's what happened to Mete in January and February before a fractured finger put a premature end to his season. But would Kotkaniemi really benefit going back to a level where his teammates might have trouble adjusting to his NHL-level vision?

It is no coincidence that the question of whether Kotkaniemi would benefit from playing on a more offensive line is starting to be raised. It is not a stretch to say more of the plays he creates now would become good scoring chances if he were playing with, for example, Brendan Gallagher and Tomas Tatar.

Up until now, Claude Julien has not played that card aside from a couple of little stretches within games. If his teammates consider that Kotkaniemi has not yet earned the right to replace Phillip Danault between Gallagher and Tatar, making that move could backfire in the room. It probably isn't happening for a little while yet, but once the Canadiens go through a little scoring slump and solutions will be needed, this is an option that Julien will have in his back pocket.

Perhaps he could make up sets of situational lines, like one set that he uses when he's at home or trailing in a game and another set for games on the road or when playing with a lead.

Danault is a more complete and mature player, but having him at centre with Arturi Lehkonen and Paul Byron – who already play with him



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coming off a power play – would give the Canadiens an excellent checking line that Julien could use in any situation imaginable.

"I'm not giving up my spot that easily!" Danault said with a smile. "It's internal competition, and that's fine. But KK is 18 years old and he has a lot to learn, not just offensively but defensively too. To play on a first line, as far as I'm concerned, you need to be able to play at both ends of the rink.

"It also depends on how the organization sees things, but I'm not worried about losing my job."

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1120155 Washington Capitals

Capitals hit on all cylinders, stay atop Metro with win over Blue Jackets

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

December 8 at 10:01 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Alex Ovechkin already had claimed the NHL lead for goals earlier in the game, so as he and winger Travis Boyd barreled down the ice on a two-on-one, Ovechkin showed off a less-appreciated part of his game. With every Columbus Blue Jackets player expecting Ovechkin to shoot, he passed, setting up a wide-open Boyd for the first goal of Boyd's career.

Ovechkin raised his arms, celebrating as if he were the one who just scored. To set up that play, he had picked the puck off Columbus defenseman Ryan Murray in the neutral zone. It was fitting that one of the Washington Capitals' most resounding wins of the season came on a night the captain did a little bit of everything.

"He's really been, night in and night out, a guy that's played at both ends of the ice and really given us a chance to have success," Coach Todd Reirden said.

With first place in the Metropolitan Division at stake in the matchup between its two top teams, the Capitals extended their lead with a 4-0 win over the Blue Jackets using the same formula that helped them ascend to the top spot. There was strong goaltending from Braden Holtby, who recorded 28 saves in his second shutout of the season; there was the depth scoring from wingers Brett Connolly, Dmitrij Jaskin and Boyd; and then there was Ovechkin, who extended his point streak to 11 games, the second longest of his career, with a goal and an assist.

Washington has found ways to win without its top center, its top two right wings and even its starting goaltender, but the Capitals have yet to win a game when Ovechkin hasn't recorded at least a point. Fortunately for them, with 22 goals and 14 assists, he is on pace for his best season since 2009-10, when he was 24.

"The points are one thing, but to me, it's the leadership he's building on from last year," Reirden said. "Obviously a lot was made of his leadership with us winning the Stanley Cup and the role that he had in it, but his leadership during the regular season this year has been the best I've seen it. That says a lot about him and how he's really leading the way. He's been more vocal, and obviously his play has been exceptional."

As the Capitals have grown accustomed to playing without key cogs of their lineup — the full roster hasn't been available all season — Reirden has preached to his players that they need to take advantage of their opportunities with injuries depleting the forward corps. Washington has needed every bit of its depth of late, and perhaps no one has stepped up more than wingers Connolly and Jakub Vrana.

With right wings Tom Wilson and T.J. Oshie both sidelined with concussions, Connolly and Vrana have helped replace the missing scoring while skating on a second line with center Evgeny Kuznetsov. On that trio's first shift, Connolly and Vrana had a two-on-one, and as Connolly carried the puck into the offensive zone, he chose to keep the puck for himself. Columbus defenseman Scott Harrington started sliding to block the shot, but Connolly was patient, maneuvering around Harrington and the outstretched pad of goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky to slip the puck across the goal line for a 1-0 lead just 1:42 into the game.

That extended Connolly's point streak to four games. Vrana, who came in with three goals in his past two games, recorded the primary helper. Connolly has 18 points through 29 games, on pace to eclipse the career high he set last season with 27 points in 70 games.

"One thing we never really doubted was our depth, especially even in [American Hockey League affiliate] Hershey," Holtby said. "If need be, there are some guys there that are more than ready to make the step up. That's why we've had success in the past — we're a deep roster — and every good team has to be deep. You're going to have injuries in this game, and you have to fight through it and not use it as an excuse but grow your team and [find] different ways to win."

Washington's next goal came from its fourth line. Boyd banked a shot in off Jaskin's foot for a 2-0 lead 10:19 into the game, and Jaskin seemed to exhale as he celebrated with teammates. The Capitals claimed him off waivers before the season, and in his 23rd game he scored his first goal with the team, motioning as if he were throwing a monkey off his back as he skated over to the bench.

And while secondary scoring has been necessary with Washington especially banged up over the past month, Ovechkin has been a constant in every Capitals win. With less than 20 seconds left in the first period, he went to the front of the net, redirecting defenseman Michal Kempny's pass for his league-leading 22nd goal. When the second period started, Bobrovsky was on the bench, yanked in favor of Joonas Korpiasalo, who allowed Boyd's goal in the third period.

"Obviously a night I'll always remember," Boyd said of scoring his first goal. "It's pretty cool how it worked out for me, having my first assist be on an Ovi goal [March 18], and then he feeds me a beautiful pass and had a wide-open net for my first goal. It's pretty cool."

These two teams met in the first round of the playoffs last season, and the Blue Jackets had the Capitals on the ropes after they won the first two games of the series in Washington. But then the Capitals turned to Holtby in net after Philipp Grubauer had been named the postseason starter initially, and he backstopped the team to four straight wins en route to an eventual Stanley Cup championship.

Holtby has again looked strong and steady. He struggled some in the first month of the season, but he entered Saturday's game with a .919 save percentage and a 2.74 goals against average since Nov. 1. When the Capitals had breakdowns against Columbus, he made up for them, stopping 17 shots through the first two periods. He turned away 11 more in the third period, and as blue-clad fans exited Nationwide Arena, they booed, frustrated with a Columbus team that was again bested by Washington.

"It was a strong game from our full group tonight, from top to bottom," Reirden said. "Obviously Holtby played exceptional, as well, and it was a strong team effort from us tonight."

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1120156 Washington Capitals

Capitals' Tom Wilson to miss second straight game with concussion



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By Isabelle Khurshudyan

December 8 at 1:29 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Washington Capitals will be without forward Tom Wilson for a second straight game after he suffered a concussion in Tuesday night's game against the Vegas Golden Knights, and in a Saturday matchup between the top two teams in the Metropolitan Division, the Capitals also may be down another forward against the Columbus Blue Jackets. Washington recalled Riley Barber from the American Hockey League on Friday because "more than one guy" is under the weather and considered questionable, Coach Todd Reirden said.

Other than Wilson, who hasn't skated since his bare head hit the ice in Las Vegas, the Capitals had a full attendance at Saturday's morning skate.

"That's just protecting ourselves," Reirden said of Barber's recall. "Hopefully everyone will continue to be healthy as we get closer to the game tonight. But if not, Riley's played really well and deserves the opportunity."

Before getting hurt, Wilson had eight goals and six assists in 11 games. Forward Andre Burakovsky will again skate in Wilson's top-line right wing spot Saturday night.

To make roster room for Barber's recall, the Capitals placed forward T.J. Oshie, who also has a concussion, on injured reserve. The move is retroactive, and because Oshie already has missed 10 games, he can be activated at any time.

Oshie didn't join the team on this three-game trip, but he's been skating back in Washington, and he could participate in practice Monday. It's unclear if he would be ready to play his first game in a month Tuesday against the Detroit Red Wings.

"We're going to continue to evaluate, but he's making progressions," Reirden said.

Barring last-minute lineup changes because of illness, Barber and defenseman Christian Djoos are expected to be the healthy scratches against the Blue Jackets, meaning rookie Jonas Siegenthaler will play in a second straight game for the first time all season.

"I wanted to see him in back-to-back situations, especially against an opponent like this, a team that comes hard on the forecheck," Reirden said. "He's played them already, so sometimes a little more familiarity for a guy like him gives him a better chance to succeed. We wanted to get him back in there again. I think he's been fairly poised out there, and to me, he adds some size to our blue line and we look to try to use him a little bit more on the penalty kill actually, if we are in that situation tonight."

"That's just kind of where we see him down the road in his future in our blue line. For me, with the injuries and suspensions we've had to go through this year, it's about opportunity and guys taking advantage of it."

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1120157 Washington Capitals

Holtby, Capitals shut out Blue Jackets

By Mitch Stacy - Associated Press

Saturday, December 8, 2018

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Alex Ovechkin scored his NHL-leading 22nd goal and Braden Holtby got his 34th career shutout as the Washington Capitals beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 on Saturday night.

Travis Boyd had a goal and an assist, and Brett Connolly and Dmitrij Jaskin also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions, who stayed atop the Metropolitan Division, moving three points ahead of Columbus.

Holtby finished with 28 saves.

Ovechkin extended his points streak to 11 straight games, with 10 goals and six assists during the stretch. He also picked up an assist on Boyd's third-period goal.

The Capitals, whose three-goal first period overpowered the Blue Jackets, have won two in a row and eight of their last 11.

Connolly started it 1:42 into the game when he skated in on a rush and poked the puck around the back of lunging goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

Jaskin got credit for a lucky tally halfway through the period when a shot from Travis Boyd hit Jaskin's left skate and popped over Bobrovsky's shoulder. It was the first goal of the year for the Washington fourth-liner.

Ovechkin's goal in the closing seconds of the first period was anything but lucky. He was left wide open in front of the net to tap in a pass from Michal Kempny.

After that, Columbus coach John Tortorella had seen enough and replaced Bobrovsky with Joonas Korpisalo to start the second period, which seemed to help.

After a scoreless second period, Boyd got his first goal of the season late in the third to cap the scoring.

Bobrovsky had 10 saves in the first period for Columbus, and Korpisalo recorded 14 the rest of the way.

NOTES: Columbus F Cam Atkinson had his points streak stopped at 12 games. ... Tortorella split up his first defensive pair, Seth Jones and Zach Werenski, who hasn't made the coach happy lately with his play. Werenski skated in the third pair with Scott Harrington. ... Columbus F Anthony Duclair was back in the lineup after being a healthy scratch the past four games. He replaced Lukas Sedlak. ... Washington F Tom Wilson missed a second straight game due to an upper-body injury from a crushing hit by Vegas' Ryan Reaves on Tuesday. ... The Capitals called up Riley Barber from the AHL Hershey Bears on Friday to replace T.J. Oshie, who was put on injured reserve with a concussion. ... Connolly has five points in the last four games. ... Capitals F Evgeny Kuznetsov has six points in his last five games.

Washington Times LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120158 Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin takes over NHL goals lead in 4-0 win at Columbus

By Brian McNally

December 08, 2018 11:14 PM

Alex Ovechkin is taking over.

With a goal and an assist in Saturday's decisive 4-0 shutout win against the Columbus Blue Jackets, Ovechkin continued one of the hottest streaks of his career.



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At 11 games, this is Ovechkin's second-longest point streak in his brilliant career. He has 10 goals and six assists during that stretch, and has taken over the NHL goal lead with 22 through 29 games.

This outburst has helped make up for a stretch where Washington missed center Evgeny Kuznetsov for six games, and they still don't have forward T.J. Oshie (concussion). He's missed 11 games in a row.

The power play has dried up with the personnel on the top unit in and out due to injury. Tom Wilson, who replaced Oshie in the "bumper" role in the slot on the power play, has missed two straight games. That hasn't hurt Ovechkin at all. He has 16 points during the stretch – but 15 of those are at even strength or with the opposing goalie pulled (two goals, two assists) and a chance to put the game away.

That's a big deal. Washington's power play during that stretch is 6-for-32, yet Ovechkin is still producing. Dating to Nov. 11 the power play is actually 6-for-39 (15.4 percent). He isn't feasting in that area, which is normally a lock.

Ovechkin leads the NHL with 22 goals. He's on pace for 62. That probably isn't happening, and he will cool off at some point. But he's put himself in legitimate contention for an eighth 50-goal season. Ovechkin just missed at 49 goals last year.

A lot of Ovechkin's work has come with center Nicklas Backstrom by his side. But he's become a playmaker, too, lately. He showed that unselfish side again on a 2-on-1 with Travis Boyd against Columbus.

Last year Boyd earned his first NHL point when he was pushed into emergency duty on the top line in a March game at Philadelphia. He had a sweet spin-o-rama pass to Ovechkin for a goal. On Saturday, Ovechkin pushed a pass to Boyd, who scored his first NHL goal.

It's been that kind of month. Ovechkin goes for 12 in a row Tuesday against Detroit due for both a power-play goal and a multi-goal game, which he has done just once during the streak (Nov. 19 vs. Montreal).

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1120159 Washington Capitals

5 reasons the Capitals beat the Blue Jackets

By J.J. Regan

December 08, 2018 9:38 PM

In a battle for first place of the Metropolitan Division on Saturday, the Capitals earned a statement win with a dominating 4-0 effort against the Columbus Blue Jackets. The Caps took a 3-0 lead in the first period to chase Sergey Bobrovsky making the last 40 minutes of the game largely academic.

Here are five reasons the Caps won.

Brett Connolly's Evgeny Kuznetsov impression

Connolly and Jakub Vrana broke out of the defensive zone on a two-on-one rush. Connolly entered the offensive zone with the puck, showed great patience and made Sergei Bobrovsky commit so he would stickhandle around him and then tuck the puck into the net behind the helpless netminder. It's a move we have seen from Kuznetsov before.

Connolly was also helped by the fact that defenseman Scott Harrington played the two-on-one about as poorly as a defenseman can. In that situation, a defenseman's job is to get into the passing lane leaving the goalie responsible for defending the shot. Harrington decided to go down

way too early and he did it in front of the play, not cutting off the pass at all. Connolly still had the option of either passing or shooting so Bobrovsky still had to account for both. To top it off, Harrington then slid into Bobrovsky and the puck Connolly banked it off him into the net.

Dmitrij Jaskin's first goal as a Cap

Jaskin has come very close to scoring in recent weeks with his solid play. It felt like only a matter of time before he scored. That goal finally came on Saturday.

One thing that Jaskin has always done well is he always goes to the net. Travis Boyd had the puck high in the offensive zone and drew both Columbus Blue Jackets to him. Jaskin was headed in on net and found himself behind the defense. Boyd looked for him on the pass, but it hit off of Jaskin skate and directly into the top shelf behind a shocked Bobrovsky.

Considering how hard it was for him to score through the first few months of the season, it seemed very fitting that Jaskin's first goal for Washington was an unintentional one.

A first period exclamation point

Washington completely dominated the first period of the game Saturday and had they gone to the locker room with a 2-0 lead, they could have felt pretty darn good about the way they had played in a big game against a division rival. The Caps, however, were not satisfied.

After some slick passing, Michal Kempny was charging the net and passed it right to the tape of Alex Ovechkin who was right on the doorstep for the easy tip-in. He now leads the NHL with 22 goals.

That made the score 3-0 with 19 seconds left in the first period.

A suffocating defense

Columbus averaged 32.4 shots per game heading into Saturday's game, but they were completely suffocated by the Caps' defense. The Blue Jackets managed only 28 shots on goal for the game and 11 of them came in the third period when the game was already well in hand.

Washington's penalty kill was also dominant as the Caps were able to kill off all four of Columbus' opportunities on the night.

The defense was so dominant that I haven't even mentioned Braden Holtby yet who earned his 34th career shutout.

A first for Travis Boyd

Boyd got NHL goal No. 1 and it came off the stick of Ovechkin who set him up with a beautiful pass.

Ovechkin and Boyd entered the offensive zone on a two-on-one and Ovechkin looked like he was ready to wrist it, but instead passed it to Boyd. Jonas Korpisalo, who came on in relief of Bobrovsky after the first period, of course expected Ovechkin to shoot giving Boyd plenty of open net to shoot on.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120160 Washington Capitals

Tom Wilson again out as Capitals play at Columbus Blue Jackets in playoff rematch

By Brian McNally

December 08, 2018 12:48 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

The Capitals play the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday night with first place in the Metropolitan Division on the line (7 p.m., NBC Sports Washington).

Washington (16-9-3) leads with 35 points, Columbus (16-10-2) has 34. The Capitals are concluding a three-game road trip.

Here are four things to WATCH:

No Wilson

Washington will be without Tom Wilson (upper body injury) for the second game in a row. He took a hard hit from Vegas Golden Knights forward Ryan Reaves in a 5-3 loss Tuesday.

The Capitals recalled forward Riley Barber from AHL Hershey and have placed forward T.J. Oshie on injured reserve.

Streaking Ovechkin

Alex Ovechkin has at least one point in 10 straight games. It is the sixth time in his career Ovechkin has had a streak this long. His career best is 13 games from Dec. 30, 2006 to Feb. 1, 2007.

Ovechkin has 34 points (21 goals, 13 assists), which is tied for ninth in the NHL with teammate Nicklas Backstrom (10 goals, 24 assists) and two others.

What about Bob?

Columbus goes with Sergei Bobrovsky in goal. It is his sixth consecutive start. He made 33 saves in a Nov. 9 win at Washington.

The Capitals have always played well against Bobrovsky. He has a .904 save percentage and a 2.93 goals-against average in 23 games against Washington.

Lineup changes

Todd Reirden will keep Andre Burakovsky on the top line in place of Wilson. He scored the go-ahead goal late in the 4-2 win against the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday.

The only other change is defenseman Madison Bowey back in the lineup to play with Jonas Siegenthaler on the third pair. Christian Djoos sits for just the second time this season. Barber could fill in if any forward is a late scratch because of illness.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120161 Washington Capitals

The goal against Columbus that saved the Capitals' 2017-18 season

By J.J. Regan

December 08, 2018 10:01 AM

What was your favorite moment from the Capitals' Stanley Cup run last season? There certainly are plenty to choose from.

There was Evgeny Kuznetsov's overtime winner in Game 6 that eliminated the Pittsburgh Penguins, there was the Caps' dominant performance in Game 6 and 7 to defeat the Tampa Bay Lightning in the conference final, "The Save" that clinched the Caps' first ever Stanley Cup Final win and of course the Game 5 clincher which ended with the team hoisting the Cup.

Think about all of those moments. They almost didn't happen.

Despite all the success the team had, Washington very nearly saw its playoff run end in the first round at the hands of the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Columbus stunned the Caps in both Games 1 and 2 in Washington to take a 2-0 series lead and put the Caps' backs against the ropes. Game 3 in Columbus suddenly was a must-win for the Caps or they would fall to a 3-0 hole in which they would not have been able to crawl out of.

Twice the Caps took the lead in that game and twice the Blue Jackets responded. By the end of 60 minutes, the score was tied at 2 and Washington's playoff fate would be decided by the next goal.

John Carlson was called for tripping Zach Werenski late in the first overtime. Columbus managed two great scoring opportunities, and Cam Atkinson beat Braden Holtby with the shot...but the puck hit off the post.

Soon after, it was Washington's turn.

In the second overtime, the Caps carried the puck into the offensive zone on a three-on-two rush. Brett Connolly fired a shot on net that was saved by goalie Sergei Bobrovsky. Werenski tried to clear the puck out from in front of the net, but hit it off a charging Lars Eller. The puck bounced off him, then off Werenski, back off Eller again and slowly trickled in as both players locked sticks battling for the puck.

Game over.

The trajectory of both franchises changed in an instant.

Only four times in NHL history has a team ever come back from a 3-0 series deficit. Considering all the struggles Washington has had in the playoffs, it's hard to imagine the Caps overcoming that deficit.

Columbus would have won a playoff series for the first time in franchise history, and who knows how far they could have gone after that.

Instead, Washington would go on to win four straight to defeat Columbus and continue on their run to the Stanley Cup. The Blue Jackets, meanwhile, now stand to lose possibly both Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovski in the offseason without even so much as a series win in the playoffs to show for it.

To win a Stanley Cup, a team has to win 16 games in the playoffs. Everyone remembers that 16th win, but it all starts with win No. 1. The Capitals return to the city and the building in which they earned that first win on Saturday (7 p.m., NBC Sports Washington) to play a team that they will now be forever linked to by history.

This is where the Caps started their Cup run, and this is where they left the Blue Jackets wondering what could have been.

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1120105 NHL

Days after groundbreaking, KeyArena could be getting a new contractor as renovation costs soar

Originally published December 8, 2018 at 5:07 pm Updated December 8, 2018 at 6:38 PM

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

An announcement is expected within days on whether the general contractor for the rapidly escalating, \$800-million KeyArena renovation project is to continue on or be replaced.

But officials from the Los Angeles-based Oak View Group and NHL Seattle said Saturday that any change in contractors would not delay the arena's completion by early 2021. The NHL last week awarded a Seattle expansion team to begin play in October 2021 while the WNBA Seattle Storm also hope to open at a remodeled KeyArena that spring.

"The big timeline for us is to make sure that we're on time for the Storm," NHL Seattle CEO Tod Leiweke said Saturday.

OVG construction executive Ken Johnsen, brought on in early November to review progress on the renovation plans, has spoken with general contractor Skanska Hunt to see whether it is indeed confident it can meet what's still an aggressive completion timeline. If not, OVG would opt to go with Kirkland-based M.A. Mortenson Co. once hard construction begins as scheduled next month.

"One of the really good things is both of these firms are ready to go," Johnsen said Saturday, adding that a final decision has yet to be made.

Mortenson did pre-construction work around the KeyArena site in the first part of the year before Skanska Hunt – a joint venture between the Swedish-based Skanska construction giant and the AECOM Hunt architectural and engineering firm – was named general contractor in July. For now, preliminary work at the site – launched by a groundbreaking ceremony last Wednesday — is being handled by project developer OVG but will shift to harder construction come January.

Rumors have swirled that Skanska Hunt is leaving the project ever since the NHL last week delayed the expected October 2020 launch of the new hockey team by 12 months. In citing the need for a delay, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman expressed doubts the project would finish on time so the team could open the first part of the 2020-21 season at home.

Originally forecast to come in at \$600 million a year ago, the KeyArena project had ballooned to \$700 million by mid-summer and then \$800 million by the time the NHL franchise was awarded. Now, that cost could climb closer to \$825 million or even \$850 million as OVG prepares some added initiatives within the building.

OVG in its KeyArena partnership agreement with the City of Seattle has pledged to cover the entire renovation as well as any additional overruns.

A political source said Saturday that OVG wanted Skanska to sign a Guaranteed Maximum Price document promising the total project cost wouldn't exceed a certain amount. The company is said to have refused.

Skanska's Seattle-based executive vice president and general manager Kevin McCain could not immediately be reached Saturday, nor could officials in the company's New York office.

Johnsen and Leiweke reiterated that no final decision had been made. Both said it's been clear for some time the KeyArena renovation likely wouldn't be completed until at least November 2020.

"I think we all knew that it was a really aggressive schedule and that it meant spilling it in to a month or so on the road," Johnsen said of any October 2020 launch by the new NHL team. "So, it was going to be tight. I think the idea of shifting it was a good one."

Johnsen added that putting the launch off by a year bought OVG an extra three months of cushion to have the arena ready for the Storm's early 2021 opener. As a result, he said: "We're feeling emboldened to ask some good questions (of Skanska Hunt) and get this thing right."

One of those questions has been whether to stick with a joint venture of two companies or change to one that is based locally, has vast experience within the market and all services under its one roof.

Some of the Seattle NHL team owners have cited the inflated cost of steel due to increased tariffs as one of the reasons behind the higher

project costs. There have also been numerous upgrades to the building Leiweke said were approved by majority owner David Bonderman to make it "the best facility possible."

But both Leiweke and Johnsen said the local construction market has also played a huge role in driving up costs.

"The construction market in Seattle is a busy one," Johnsen said. "There aren't many projects that aren't having any problems from a budget standpoint."

That said, he added, OVG has yet to scale back on anything and keeps adding to the bottom line even as costs grow.

Seattle Times LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120167 Websites

The Athletic / A genetic disorder ended Cody Hodgson's NHL career, but pointed him toward a new purpose

Adam Vingan

Dec 8, 2018

On an early November evening, 60 or so kids and their parents are gathered inside an upstairs party room at Ford Ice Center. It's graduation day for the participants of the "Little Preds" program, and the ceremony is about to begin.

One by one, the children are called to the front of the room, where they receive a certificate and an autograph.

"I used to play for the Nashville Predators," Cody Hodgson, wearing an updated version of his former No. 11 jersey, says sheepishly to no one in particular.

These days, you'll find Hodgson here at this suburban Nashville rink or, depending on the day, one in Knoxville, Tenn., Marietta, Ga., or Huntsville, Ala. He's been an instructor for the Predators' youth hockey program for the past two years, traveling around the South teaching kids to play the sport he loves.

"I've acquired quite a bit of knowledge over the years from different coaches that have been influential in my life, and hopefully I can be that for other kids now," Hodgson said. "I had a lot of heroes growing up that spent a lot of time with me helping me to get to where I was and the level that I got to. I'm happy to be able to try to give back."

It's fulfilling work, but not what Hodgson expected to be doing at 28. His NHL career, which started with such promise, ended unceremoniously. Hodgson, a top-10 draft pick in 2008, has been reticent to discuss the circumstances surrounding his sudden retirement, but is sharing his story now because he wants to help others.

In 2016, Hodgson was diagnosed with malignant hyperthermia, a rare muscle disorder caused by a mutation of the RYR-1 gene.

"The doctors basically told me it was too dangerous for me to play," Hodgson said. "It wasn't really a choice to stop playing. It really wasn't anything that I could control."

Along with his work for the Predators, Hodgson has teamed with the RYR-1 Foundation to spread awareness of his and other diseases brought on by mutations of that particular gene. On Saturday evening, a documentary, simply titled "Hodgson," will premiere in Markham, Ontario, detailing his life with malignant hyperthermia.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

Given the potential severity of the condition, Hodgson is fortunate to have played in the NHL at all.

"Quite frankly," he said, "if we knew that it was so dangerous as a child, I wouldn't have been able to play regular hockey."

Hodgson arrived in Nashville at a crossroads.

The Buffalo Sabres decided to buy out the remaining four years on Hodgson's six-year, \$25.5 million contract in June 2015, so the Predators signed the former hotshot prospect to a modest one-year deal with the hope that he could resuscitate his career.

It was during that season that Hodgson began to experience severe symptoms associated with his then-unknown condition. For years, he just chalked up any discomfort to the rigors of being a professional athlete.

"That's hockey," Hodgson would tell himself. But this felt serious.

"It just got to a point where I wasn't able to do anything that I really wanted to do," Hodgson said. "It affected everything. My coordination, my ability to do things that normally would've been easy growing up. Just everything seemed off. My body was extremely tight. I was hot. I was shaking, having trouble breathing. Had some blood in my urine. There was a lot of things you kind of just push away and keep trying to do until you get to a point where you just can't do it anymore."

"I think he was aware of, maybe not the whole condition, but he was aware he had some health issues," Predators defenseman Ryan Ellis said. "He shared it with the guys and let us know. He couldn't do certain things here and there. ... He was smart about it."

Hodgson underwent a battery of tests to pinpoint the problem, including for lung, liver, kidney and brain cancers. Sleepless nights became the norm.

"No doctors knew what it was," Hodgson said. "I was seeing some of the best doctors in the world. I was prescribed blood pressure pills because my blood pressure was super low. I was given heavy-duty painkillers. I was given heavy-duty muscle relaxers. I was given Xanax and some anxiety pills. I knew that wasn't the issue. Nothing was working."

"I was having heart arrhythmias and I was hooked up to all these wires and devices and contraptions and stuff. They were just saying that I was stressed out because of the hockey. I was like, 'I've got to know what's going on with my body. That's what stressing me out.'"

The Predators, who waived Hodgson in January 2016, gave him permission to see a specialist back in Ontario. He was referred to Dr. Sheila Riazi, a Toronto-based anesthesiologist and authority on malignant hyperthermia.

Hodgson learned that his condition was hereditary, passed down through his father's side.

"My symptoms were nothing like what my relatives' were, where they would have muscle tightness or severe cramping," Hodgson said. "Mine affected my heart and my lungs and other aspects that were all still soft tissue, but it didn't show up in the same way, so we never associated it with something that could've been in my family."

Riazi performed a muscle biopsy after the season, removing a section of Hodgson's inner thigh and subjecting it to what's called the caffeine-halothane contracture test, the most accurate method of diagnosing malignant hyperthermia.

The results were positive. Riazi recommended that Hodgson stop playing immediately.

"If you go back to the professional playing," Riazi recalled telling Hodgson, "I cannot guarantee you're not going to get another massive (muscle) breakdown or organ dysfunction and even death."

"I got basically a sheet after it was confirmed that says this is what you're supposed to avoid, and it was any prolonged, physical, strenuous activity, any high-stress environments," Hodgson said. "It was just like a

list of things that was basically professional hockey. And they're potentially life-threatening."

"He was quite brave about it," Riazi said. "I think it was a mixed feeling, also, because he got some answers to his problems. All this time that he had all these problems, no one could diagnose him with anything. ... It was very difficult for him, but I think he took it pretty well."

Cody Hodgson, right, is the subject of a documentary produced in conjunction with the RYR-1 Foundation. It premieres Saturday. (Courtesy of RYR-1 Foundation.)

As president of the RYR-1 Foundation, Michael Goldberg's mission is to bring awareness to disorders that affect approximately 1 in 90,000 Americans. (Goldberg actually believes it's more common than that when factoring in the potential for misdiagnosed or undiagnosed cases.)

Goldberg was looking for someone to help spread the message. Through Riazi, he learned of an NHL player who was forced to retire because of an RYR-1-related illness. But the player wasn't ready to go public.

Hodgson eventually called Goldberg, offering to help any way he could. Goldberg suggested a documentary.

"I very much wanted to tell the story of Cody," Goldberg said. "It's such a compelling story, and I thought it would be a very effective means to bring some attention to the condition, bring some attention to the foundation, raise awareness, fundraising, all that stuff."

Production began July 12 in Pittsburgh, where the RYR-1 Foundation was hosting a conference. It shifted to Nashville earlier this fall, highlighting Hodgson's work with the Predators and in the community.

"There's no cure for it right now," Hodgson said. "That's what the documentary is trying to hopefully get towards, finding a cure so that no one else has to deal with it and also raise money for some of the families that are more severely affected than I am."

Cody Hodgson is an instructor for the "Little Preds" youth hockey program, which he joined in 2016. (Adam Vingan / The Athletic)

Pint-sized skaters buzzing around his knees, Hodgson roves from station to station, offering instruction and high fives. As the on-ice session ends, he stands by the exit.

"Great job out there," Hodgson says to a boy. "You have fun?" He nods. They pose for a picture.

"He went through a lot just to get the diagnosis and find out what was actually wrong with him," Ellis said. "There were a lot of highs and lows for Cody, especially early on. ... You never want to see that for anyone in any sport or in any walk of life, losing their passion and their love (because of) health. It's tough to see, especially to a friend. But he's been a very positive person. He seems to really go out of his way to make a difference where he can't on the ice now."

The malignant hyperthermia is under control now. Once in a while, Hodgson will do something to trigger it. When that happens, he'll rest until the symptoms pass.

Hodgson says he gets recognized from time to time by parents who remember his days playing for the Predators, Sabres and Vancouver Canucks. Of course he misses that part of his life. But he's found a new purpose.

"I'm very, very fortunate to have played six years in the National Hockey League," Hodgson said. "I made so many great memories and friends. People ask me, 'Is it disappointing that you had to stop after six years?' Well obviously I'd like to keep playing. Obviously I'd like to be out there, but I'm also thankful for the time I did have."

The Athletic LOADED: 12.09.2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

1120168 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs struggle again to provide 60-minute effort against Bruins

Damien Cox | @damospin

December 8, 2018, 10:10 PM

BOSTON — Hockey seasons go in peaks and valleys, ups and downs. One day you're unbeatable, the next day you can't imagine winning another game.

The Buffalo Sabres are a great example right now. They won 10 straight. Now they've lost five straight.

The Toronto Maple Leafs, meanwhile, seem to be in a mode where they've decided a full 60 minutes of focused hockey is for the other teams. You know, the teams without all the fancy young forwards. Along with that, they've also decided defending is for the less skilled. Competing hard, too.

The Leafs got away with such a laissez-faire performance at home Thursday against lowly Detroit, at least partially. They were so shoddy over 40 minutes they deserved to lose. They got a point out of it with a third-period comeback before losing in overtime.

Saturday night in the Massachusetts capital, they didn't get away with a nearly identical effect.

"Some games you get your lunch handed to you, and that's what happened," that is how Leaf head coach Mike Babcock described an ugly 6-3 loss to the Boston Bruins.

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Against a low-scoring Bruins team that was missing Zdeno Chara, Patrice Bergeron and Jake DeBrusk, the Leafs delivered a second straight half-effort, again falling behind by three goals in the opening two periods.

The Bruins, battered as they are, aren't the Red Wings. They made a lot out of a little to build that 3-0 lead, got a fourth goal early in the third from Danton Heinen and went on to win this one easily. They were determined and disciplined all night, cutting off Toronto's long passing game and jumping on Leaf mistakes, of which there were plenty.

"That game's got to piss you off," said centre John Tavares. "We've got to get a little bite to our game.

"We talked about the importance of defending... but it's a matter of going out and executing. We know we can put the puck in the net. But its important we don't forget why we get those chances."

The Leafs, winners of 20 of their first 28, have now lost two straight. More tellingly, they've now given up three goals or more in five straight games, and 11 goals in two games, a sure sign the talent is looking more towards putting up offensive numbers than defending.

That seems to happen in Boston more than anywhere else including last spring's Game 7 loss at the TD Garden. The Leafs have now coughed up 18 goals in their last three visits and in all of those games, they started well but seemed to collapse from the net out once the competition got heated.

"You go into the second period down 1-0 on the road, it's not the worst position to be in," said centre Auston Matthews. "Then we just started

taking penalties. They started out-working us big time, and we weren't able to climb out of the hole we dug ourselves."

This one got a little rough, with some nasty hits and three fights, a significant total for the NHL these days. Boston defenceman Charlie McAvoy sent Mitch Marner headfirst into the boards with a dangerous hit on the first shift of the game, and Marner went on to play his least effective game of the season.

The Bruins were later left steaming after Zach Hyman levelled McAvoy with the score 6-1 for the home side in the third period. McAvoy, in only his second game back after missing 20 games with a concussion, looked like he was dazed and skated straight to the Boston dressing room.

Bruins defenceman Matt Grzelcyk, who admitted he didn't actually see the Hyman hit, crosschecked the Leaf forward in the neck and the two fought. Hyman got an interference major for the check that looked clean but perhaps a half-steamboat late. He could face the ire of league disciplinarian George Parros, although few know what Parros judges as worthy of supplementary discipline these days.

Hyman bolted for the team bus without commenting on his hit, which was, at the very least, unwise at that point in the hockey game. It got Bruins forward Chris Wagner so wound up he immediately ran at Morgan Rielly and delivered a high hit, creating a fight with 37-year-old Ron Hainsey. Hyman made the hit, and Rielly and Hainsey had to deal with the fallout.

So what did all this mean? Both teams claimed afterwards they'd stood their ground, David Backes seemed to call for the return of enforcers to "police" the game and no doubt some commentators will once again suggest the Leafs lack the toughness to be a top team.

"I didn't think we got pushed around," said Nazem Kadri, who objected to a blatant, uncalled crosscheck from Brandon Carlo in the second period and fought the much bigger Bruin.

For Boston, the six goals were a godsend, particularly with both Bergeron and DeBrusk out of the lineup. For the Leafs, the offence came too late, and Freddie Andersen didn't stop much, giving up six goals on 27 shots before being yanked.

"I'm sure there's a couple (Andersen) would like back, but at the same time, we were giving up two-on-ones and three-on-ones," said Matthews, who certainly didn't shine but still emerged with a goal and an assist. "They were getting around our net and getting free whacks at him, so that's on us, too."

William Nylander again went pointless in his second game since returning from a contract dispute. He played 16:30, managed three shots and had one very good scoring chance.

So far, he's looked good in the open ice, but in traffic and along the boards, he looks like a player who's been taking it easy in Sweden while the rest of the NHL has been playing hard for 10 weeks. So far, albeit with one practice under his belt, he's done little to justify his new contract, and it could be a while before he catches up to the rest of the NHL.

This was the first game of a five-game road trip for the Leafs, who play the Hurricanes in Raleigh on Tuesday before a collision with the league-leading Lightning in Tampa Bay two nights later.

Job No. 1 before those games for Babcock will be convincing his stars to compete a harder, organizing more disciplined defensive play.

"I just think we haven't competed well enough the last two games," said Babcock.

With five wins and an overtime loss preceding Saturday night's desultory effort, it would be hard to portray Toronto's defeat as a trend. At the same time, to really be a top team like they've been most of the season, the Leafs need to find a consistent level of play and deliver it, particularly in challenging situations on the road.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120169 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Stockton grads come up big as streaking Flames remain hot

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

December 9, 2018, 1:55 AM

CALGARY – Most Flames fans likely didn't know Alan Quine's name rhymed with twine until he tickled it late Saturday in a telling night at the Dome.

Oh, and Oliver Kylington's last name starts with a "shhh" – the same sound used to describe what the Calgary Flames just did to the top team in the West.

Actually, make that the second-best team in the West, as a 5-2 Flames win over Nashville put the Flames at the top of the tables while answering several questions about a team the league is finally starting to pay attention to.

The idea going in, was that the hockey world would learn plenty about the Flames this weekend.

Having lost the services of captain Mark Giordano Friday to a two-game suspension, not to mention the team's best shutdown forward in Mikael Backlund to injury, all the talk the previous 48 hours revolved around who wouldn't be in the Flames lineup.

However, the story of the game revolved around the depth-charges employed to fill in the gaps in a season of tremendous exchanges between Stockton and Cowtown.

At the tail end of a first-place showdown, there was Quine taking a bow as a game star, being interviewed by Scott Oake on Hockey Night in Canada and getting a pat on the pants by GM Brad Treliving less than 24 hours after he was summoned from the minors.

Although he'd previously played 85 games with the Islanders, the 25-year-old admitted this was the stuff dreams are made of following a dandy insurance marker he scored with eight minutes left in a 3-2 game.

"I made a little fake and snuck her in on the backhand," said Quine of his slick deke to beat Juuse Saros in alone, kick-starting a raucous celebration witnessed live by his father, Sean, who made the trip in after learning late last night his son would make his Flames debut.

"As soon as it went in I kind of panicked a little bit. I don't usually celebrate like that but I was pretty excited – just tons of emotion. A crazy 24 hours."

The assist on Quine's goal was a piece of art by pinching defenceman Rasmus Andersson, who started the season in Stockton but played Saturday in Giordano's spot, alongside T.J. Brodie.

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Both played 22 minutes to pace the Flames.

Kylington, who was the next blueliner to get the promotion from California, scored his first NHL goal, added his first assist and was named the game's first star and dressing room hero.

Not bad for his seventh NHL contest.

"I hope I look good," beamed the 21-year-old, admitting the coveted Calgary Police service hat handed to him by teammates was the first cowboy hat he'd ever worn.

"Amazing feeling. When it came off my stick I had a good feeling and I saw it in the back of the net ... I was just happy to score there."

It was a big-league snipe too, converting an Elias Lindholm pass from behind the net to the high slot where he cleanly beat Saros with a roof job.

"I just feel comfortable," said Kylington, who left Sweden as a teen to play more than three years in Stockton to date.

"We just showed a good push from guys that haven't been playing much. A lot of guys I played with in Stockton stepped up and it showed we have good players coming up from underneath."

Make no mistake – the effort was another sublime performance from Johnny Gaudreau, whose excellence and creativity is so routine now it's in danger of being taken for granted.

His line led the way with a Sean Monahan goal, followed by an Elias Lindholm empty-netter Gaudreau set up for his second assist of the night.

But the kids were the story – again – including Garnet Hathaway who scored the game-winner on a nifty deflection of a Matthew Tkachuk point blast.

He too is another Stockton grad.

Derek Ryan was moved up into second-line duty for Backlund, who is in the midst of concussion protocol and will certainly miss Sunday's game in Edmonton.

And that's where we'll learn even more about the Flames.

On this night the battered Predators (missing P.K. Subban, Viktor Arvidsson, Kyle Turris and Filip Forsberg) didn't have a viable top unit that required significant shutdown assignments.

All that changes Sunday when Ryan, Tkachuk and Sam Bennett will be tasked with trying to slow down Connor McDavid without the aid of Giordano at the back end.

However, this win by committee sure did the trick on its first test.

Actually, all year they've done it, as this team has surged at the West with a run that has seen it claim 19 of its last 22 possible points.

Mike Smith's attempt to continue his hot streak seemed in question one minute into the third when a sharp angle shot by Craig Smith from far out somehow trickled into the net to tie the game 2-2.

It was eerily similar to the game-winner he gave up against Montreal that saw him lose his starting gig for four games while he regained confidence.

Now he's brimming with it, winning his sixth straight start by rebounding from the miscue with a huge kick-save on Roman Josi and a save with his mask that preserved the Flames win.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 12.09.2018

1120170 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ben Harpur latest big defenceman looking to stick with Senators

Wayne Scanlan



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

December 8, 2018, 8:17 AM

It's not easy to hide a 6-foot-7 hockey player, but the Ottawa Senators have managed to do it with Ben Harpur.

Harpur, who technically stands six-feet, 6.5 inches in bare feet, has been an up and comer for so long in Ottawa, he's been forgotten as often as he's been regarded as a prospect. That he scored his first NHL goal last weekend against San Jose, five-and-a-half years after joining the Senators organization, brought such a mixture of relief and joy to this 23-year-old, he says he "blacked out" after scoring, and didn't even realize he'd thrust both arms in the air in celebration.

"I definitely didn't act like I'd been there before," Harpur says, grinning. "That was my dad's thing when I was growing up, play it cool when you score. But you only have one first goal in the National Hockey League so I was pretty excited.

"It felt unbelievable. I don't jump into the rush too often but off that draw, I saw a ton of ice. Smitty (Zack Smith) made a great play to draw that right defenceman, and I just looked up and thought (goaltender Martin Jones) was shifting a bit left, so I aimed right and once I saw it hit the post and go in I kind of blacked out from pure excitement. I just lost it."

Drafted with Ottawa's second fourth-round pick in 2013, 108th overall, Harpur is the latest in a long line of big defencemen aiming to fill a gap left by the departure of Zdeno Chara in 2006. Those who cast a tall shadow but couldn't stick included Jared Cowen, Eric Gryba and Patrick Wiercioch.

In 2018, the question arises – does a team even need a big man on defence when the keys to the game have been handed over to players who bring speed and skill, at forward and defence?

"The game has definitely changed," Harpur says. "It's pretty obvious now you can't just get by with your size. It's such a fast game. You see the other big guys in the league who are successful, they're really good skaters."

In particular, Harpur has patterned his game after Chara and Tyler Myers, a defenceman Harpur saw a lot of during his formative years in southwestern Ontario when Myers was breaking into the NHL with the nearby Buffalo Sabres.

Harpur owes much of his modest successes – 62 NHL games and four professional seasons – to Rick Ferrone, Harpur's minor hockey coach in Niagara-On-The-Lake, Ont. It was Ferrone who moved Harpur to defence from forward in minor midget, Harpur's OHL draft year. Harpur played three-plus seasons with the Guelph Storm, helping them to an OHL title in 2013-14, before finishing his junior career with the Barrie Colts.

While he was hardly an offensive force – five goals and 26 points in 2014-15 represented his best season – Harpur was given a chance because of his imposing presence. From the age of 15, he recognized he needed to work on his footwork and mobility if he was going to be an NHL player, and he spends every summer doing power skating and edge drills with Ferrone, who now works out of Hamilton and Stoney Creek, Ont.

Harpur believes there is a place for big defencemen, but only if they can move and move the puck.

"If you can kind of match that speed and play that style of game – the size is an advantage because of my reach," Harpur says. "I really enjoy playing on the penalty kill because it's somewhere I can use my reach effectively."

While Harpur's possession and zone starts aren't great, he is plus-3 and is relied on heavily by head coach Guy Boucher to kill penalties and provide some stay-at-home defence on a very young blue line. Harpur is usually paired with Cody Ceci, the veteran of the corps with 391 games played, though he is not yet 25.

Harpur is playing an average of 18:31 per night in the second pairing. Still, he can be seen looking over his shoulder.

"You're never comfortable in this job," he says. "As much as you want to be. It would be really nice to be, but you've got to have it in your mind that you have to get better every day because there is always someone coming for your job.

"It's kind of been up and down for a while now. I played in that playoff run a couple of years ago (the 2017 playoffs) and still didn't have that spot when I came back to camp."

True enough, Harpur spent 19 games with Belleville last season, and 41 with Ottawa. The depth of prospects in the organization pushes him to improve, he says, providing a lot of "internal motivation."

Opportunity knocks for Harpur, even when he's sitting around the house. Last summer, Niagara neighbour Steve Ludzik, the colourful former player, coach and hockey analyst, came to Harpur's door and asked if he'd like to be in a hockey movie. Harpur's younger brother was all over it.

So, for about \$500 each, the brothers were extras in Toronto promoter Frank D'Angelo's epic production of *The Last Big Save*. The movie is produced and directed by D'Angelo, and stars D'Angelo as the hockey goalie who comes out of a 15-year retirement to play Game 7 of a playoff series. Solid plot.

The movie has not been released, but none other than former Senators captain Alexei Yashin features prominently in the trailer. The coaches included Ludzik, Dennis Hull and Marcel Dionne. According to Harpur, everyone was on the ice ready to play, and D'Angelo was still in his suit, directing camera crews. Finally, he threw on his hockey gear and played goal.

Actor Dan Baldwin plays one of the coaches. On his Twitter account, Baldwin shows a clip of what he says is a pre-game speech (though not likely part of the film), directed at Yashin.

"Yash, you get paid a lot of money, you better effing score," Baldwin says.

Yashin, sitting in full uniform and wearing the 'C,' smiles.

"It was an experience, that's for sure," Harpur says.

Minor league productions are familiar to Harpur. Since 2015, he's spent 129 games in the AHL with Belleville and Binghamton and a handful with ECHL Evansville. He did earn a one-way contract, and earns a modest \$650,000 in 2018-19 and \$800,000 next season. Hey, it beats his Canadian acting salary.

In a rare, late-November stretch in which Ottawa won three straight games and gave up just five goals against, Boucher singled out Harpur, who had just returned from a back injury that kept him out a month.

"Just one guy on defence makes a gigantic difference because he's there 20-some odd minutes on the ice, and opponents have to deal with a six-foot-seven guy that hits, that fights," Boucher said. "And (he) has the reach and the experience."

Kiss of death. Thereafter, the Senators gave up ten goals in a pair of 5-2 losses to Montreal, and no one on defence looked any good. Around we go.

After No. 67 Harpur scored his landmark goal in his 60th NHL game, his hometown paper, the *Niagara-On-The-Lake Advance* pieced together a story on him, with a photo of his first goal puck. The story included a tweet from Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates: "Local talent making us proud. Keep on grinding, Ben."

Grind he will.



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 9, 2018

1120171 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Blues' Alex Pietrangelo potentially available; Leafs a possible fit

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

December 8, 2018, 9:37 PM

The St. Louis Blues aren't shopping Alex Pietrangelo, but it doesn't sound as if the star defenceman is completely untouchable either.

Pietrangelo has this year and next on a contract that carries a \$6.5-million cap hit, and hasn't had the strongest season so far.

The 28-year-old had four goals and 11 points in 24 games before being put on injured reserve with a hand injury on Dec. 3.

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The Blues entered play on Saturday in second-last place in the Central Division, and fired their coach in November.

"St. Louis is in a position where they're going to have to make some tough decisions, and what's happening now is the separation between playoff teams and non-playoff teams, which means the vultures are out right now," said Nick Kypreos on Saturday's Headlines on Hockey Night in Canada. "And Pietrangelo, despite a poor start to the season and a hand injury, one general manager told me he still may be the best all-around defenceman available by the trade deadline."

One team that could be a trade partner for Blues general manager Doug Armstrong? The Toronto Maple Leafs.

"I don't think that Armstrong is shopping Pietrangelo, but that doesn't keep teams from calling ... and asking about him," said Kypreos. "I believe one of those teams is the Toronto Maple Leafs. I think where that would have to start is if Toronto and (GM) Kyle Dubas get St. Louis to possibly bite on (Nikita) Zaitsev's contract – which is owed another five years at \$4.5 million.

"If they can exchange right-handed defencemen, then there's a chance you could put a package together maybe with a draft pick, a prospect, and then the likes of a young, fast player for St. Louis in the likes of (Kasperi) Kapanen or (Andreas) Johnsson."

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1120172 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs under pressure to get Auston Matthews signed by July 1

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

December 8, 2018, 10:14 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs are not going to want to wait until December of next season to sign Auston Matthews.

The star centre will be a restricted free agent this coming summer, and Matthews is a high enough calibre of player to make the threat of an offer sheet seem possible.

The Leafs were OK (if not completely comfortable) with letting restricted free agent William Nylander sit out without a contract until December this year. They eventually signed the Swedish winger minutes before the Dec. 1, 5 p.m., deadline that would have made him ineligible to play in 2018-19.

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"When it comes to Auston Matthews, we're looking at a different deadline, and that would be this coming July 1," said Chris Johnston on Saturday's Headlines on Hockey Night in Canada. "There is widespread feeling within the industry that Auston Matthews would be the rare player who would be targeted by an offer sheet."

The last player to sign an offer sheet was Ryan O'Reilly, then property of Colorado, back in 2013. The Avalanche matched, though they traded the centre to Buffalo less than two years later. You have to go all the way back to Dustin Penner in 2007 to find a player who was signed to an offer sheet that wasn't matched.

Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas still has several months before Matthews can be poached by another club, though it doesn't sound as if contract negotiations are currently underway between the 21-year-old's camp and Toronto.

"There was some thought as well that Kyle Dubas will be anxious to work on a Matthews extension after that Nylander contract," said Johnston. "Those talks did not pick up at all this week."

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1120173 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Some NHL owners still have interest in expanded playoffs

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

December 8, 2018, 9:53 PM

The idea of an expanded playoffs in the NHL just isn't going away.

Despite commissioner Gary Bettman's reluctance to move away from the 16-team format currently in use, there remains an appetite to change things up, at least from some owners.

Chris Johnston was at the Board of Governors meetings this past week in Sea Island, Ga., and reported what he heard on Saturday's Headlines on Hockey Night in Canada.

"A number of governors are still interested in seeing an expanded playoff format," said Johnston. "And as we've talked about in previous weeks, it's not something that commissioner Gary Bettman is in favour of, but these owners don't seem to want to go away on this idea."

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The NHL has used its current format since the 2013-14 season, when it switched to a four-division setup. But the league has seen 16 teams make the playoffs ever since its merger with the WHA in 1979-80. Among



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the new proposals would see two more teams added to the post-season in each conference, and have them play the seventh- and eighth-seeded teams in a short series (or just one game) in order to advance to the next round.

The added playoff games would bring in more revenue for the league.

"(There's) some talk there about a 7-10, 8-9 (play-in game/series)," said Johnston, before adding, "we even had one governor saying he'd like to see 24 teams in the playoffs, which is pie-in-the-sky, of course."

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1120174 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Most NHL trade talk going through 8 teams

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

December 8, 2018, 10:31 PM

We're just under three months away from the NHL trade deadline, and the hotstove is at least starting to get into shape.

Many eyes had been fixed on William Nylander's contract standoff with the Toronto Maple Leafs through the early part of the season, but with that situation resolved, trade talks are beginning to pick up around the league.

And, according to Elliott Friedman, these are the eight teams most eager to make a move.

"Just asking around, the teams that seem to be at the centre of a lot of these conversations: L.A., Philly, Minnesota, Boston, Pittsburgh, Florida, St. Louis, and Chicago," said Friedman during Saturday's Headlines on Hockey Night in Canada. "All for different reasons, but those seem to be the most active teams and anything that's kind of happening around the league is kind of flowing through them."

It's still early enough for any team to believe it can make a push to the post-season, but the Kings, Blackhawks, and Blues make up the three worst teams in the Western Conference by record, making them likely sellers. The Wild are on the fringe of the playoff picture, along with the Penguins, while the Bruins are contenders for the Stanley Cup this season. The Panthers and Flyers have some work to do to gain ground in the standings, and could go either way as far as buying and selling is concerned.

Friedman reported in 31 Thoughts on Wednesday that the Penguins had "tested the market" on winger Phil Kessel.

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1120175 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs under pressure to get Auston Matthews signed by July 1

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

December 8, 2018, 10:14 PM

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1120176 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs still searching for their best as they face Bruins

Kristen Shilton

TSN's Kristen Shilton checks in with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team held a 10:30 a.m. morning skate at TD Garden. Boston skated at 11 a.m. at Warrior Ice.

The question itself seems simple enough: Over the last calendar year, just how much has this Maple Leafs' team changed?

But the answer goes beyond just dissecting their position in the standings (second overall, four points back of the Tampa Bay Lightning) or encouraging statistics (Toronto has the NHL's second-best goal differential at plus-28).

"We haven't had our team together all year," said Mike Babcock after the Leafs' optional morning skate on Saturday, referencing the recent return of William Nylander to the lineup. "I think any time we've changed our roster, we haven't been quite as good right away for a bit."



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"We're trying to find the best image of ourselves for 60 minutes that we can turn into a blueprint and do it over and over again. I think we have to get everyone on deck first, and then I think we can find that."

Toronto's third meeting of the season against Boston will be Nylander's second game back since reconciling his contract stalemate. He played only 12:29 in Thursday's debut, but felt his mental game was more lacking than anything physically.

On Saturday, he's slated to play with Nazem Kadri and Patrick Marleau, a bump down from Auston Matthews' group, but a place Nylander hopes to start feeling back to normal.

Helping that cause could be his career success so far against the Bruins. Nylander scored his first NHL hat trick in Boston on Feb. 4, 2017, and has seven points in nine meetings.

"I'm just trying to focus on the game tonight," he said. "It's a rivalry that's been there for a while. It's a fun game and a great atmosphere."

"Just being back and getting playing and being part of the team is important," added Babcock. "The amount of jokes and amount of abuse you take, and then just getting in...[but] it's going to take him time...when you haven't been here every day. It's going to take him time, but he's an important part our team and we have to get him up and running."

Nylander's teammates have kept things as routine as possible for him since he got back, and have been clear no one is worried that it might be a few weeks before he looks like the Nylander of old.

"I talked to him a little bit yesterday, he said he felt good," said Morgan Rielly. "I think with each game that goes by he'll be more and more comfortable, and so we're looking forward to just watching him get into his groove."

Having gone through lengthy absences of his own in the past, most notably when he rehabbed a knee injury while playing for the WHL's Moose Jaw Warriors in 2011, Rielly can appreciate the daunting prospect Nylander faces entering a season midway through.

"For him to jump right back in 28 games in, you're playing against guys who have been at it for a while and it's a bit more difficult," he said. "I think he's done a great job. He came back and worked hard and he's a great player and has a great deal of skill, so he'll be fine."

The Leafs are confident in themselves as a group, too, that they will eventually play more cohesively once everyone settles in.

"We have a group that believes we're pretty good," said Babcock. "To be really good and to be a champion, you have to do it every day and you have to do it with detail and you have to do it hard, you have to have people to step up. So we have a long way to go."

Nylander never saw the hit coming.

He and fellow winger Kasper Kapanen were driving from the Leafs' practice facility in Etobicoke on Friday to the airport when a car struck their passenger side. The collision badly damaged Nylander's vehicle, but fortunately didn't injure anyone involved.

"The car just turned into us," Nylander shared. "It just takes a little second there to get into an accident. I'm just happy everyone was okay, me and Kappy are okay, and we can move forward from that."

The teammates weren't much delayed reaching the team plane that would take off for Boston, after sorting out all the car and insurance related issues. The incident did provoke a related memory from Babcock of a time when two of his Detroit Red Wings' players – Tomas Holmstrom and Nik Lidstrom – were late for a game, and no one knew why.

"[Then] Tommy comes running into my office and says, 'we had a big accident, we had a big accident,'" Babcock recalled, "but don't worry; when I knew we were going to get hit I dove in front of Nik so he didn't get touched!"

Babcock joked that Nylander had also done "some good driving, so Kappy didn't hit" but Nylander wasn't sure how much he helped minimize the impact.

"I don't even know [if I did], it just happened from behind us," he said. "I didn't really have time to react that much. I'm just happy [the driver] was okay and the passenger in that car is okay."

And yes, the driver of the other vehicle did immediately recognize Nylander.

The ghosts of games past against Boston still haunt the Leafs to some degree, given how heartbreaking they've been in nature. Their Game 7 playoff losses, in 2013 and 2018, are well-documented, but the Leafs are determined not to let those outcomes effect how they see themselves going forward.

"There's been a lot of changes over the years, new faces, new players, you name it," said Rielly. "We're more worried about the future than the past. Most guys have been here a few years. I think the chemistry is good when you've been around the coaching staff and the things you have going on within the team, it makes life a bit easier. It's important we build and grow together and keep trying to get better."

Given how well the season has gone for Toronto so far, and the way they've navigated missing key pieces like Matthews (who was sidelined 14 games with a shoulder injury) and Nylander, it would seem like the team's confidence is sky-high. But Rielly sees room for growth there, too.

"We're getting there. I think [confidence is] an important quality," he said. "I think we have work to do, we have to earn a little bit more of that when it comes to winning in the post season. We have some work to do in that respect, but there's things that have happened over the years that have been worthy of a little bit of confidence in that room. We're on the right path."

To that end, the Leafs say they won't miss an opportunity to improve by taking a banged-up Bruins' team lightly. While Toronto is coming in on a 5-0-1 run in their last six games, Boston has lost three straight and are 2-4-0 over their last six games. Plus, they're missing key players – Patrice Bergeron and Zdeno Chara are dealing with long-term injuries, and it was revealed on Saturday that Jake DeBrusk is concussed and is out until further notice.

"Boston is a good team; they have been for a long time," Rielly insisted. "We know that, and it's a good challenge for us tonight. It's important for us to be ready."

The Bruins play a heavier game than the Leafs in general, and especially defensively Toronto is preparing to combat tight checking and tight gaps.

"There's a number of ways to create room – be physically strong on the puck, you end up in a battle with two guys and you get it past that guy and you've created space for someone else," said Babcock. "The other way is to be physical on the forecheck, cut off arms on big guys, get on the right side and own the puck and then you have them on the wrong side."

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