



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 11, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes' Micheal Ferland returns from concussion but the head injury concerns remain

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes' Micheal Ferland (79) checks Colorado Avalanche's Alexander Kerfoot (13) during the third period. Chris Seward AP

Micheal Ferland doesn't remember any big hit or collision, either delivered or received.

But after the Carolina Hurricanes' 2-1 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Nov. 27, Ferland didn't feel normal and knew something was wrong.

"I think I finished the night with five hits and after the game something didn't feel right," the Canes forward said Monday. "I had concussion symptoms, feeling in a fog, things like that."

After returning to Raleigh, Ferland underwent a thorough medical evaluation. He was diagnosed with a concussion, which he said was the second of his NHL career.

The first, in November 2014, came after Ferland took a hit from Nashville Predators defenseman Anton Volchenkov and kept him out a week. This time, it was closer to two weeks, forcing him to miss the Canes' past four games.

Ferland, who leads the Canes with 11 goals, returned to practice Monday at Raleigh Center Ice and was activated from injured reserve and is expected to play Tuesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs. That's good news for Ferland but center Jordan Staal, who sustained a concussion Wednesday against the San Jose Sharks, was not at practice and remains sidelined indefinitely.

For a hockey player, getting back on the ice with the team is "back to normal" but Ferland said his concerns about concussions remain.

"I mean, you've got to be concerned," he said. "It's your life."

Ferland, like many pro athletes, is aware of the extensive research being done about the effects of sports-related concussions and prevention of concussions. Repeated hits to the head or other head trauma has been linked to chronic traumatic encephalopathy -- the neurodegenerative disease commonly known as CTE and once referred to as dementia pugilistica -- and can be debilitating in later life.

A part of Ferland's role is to be physical, a banger, an intimidator. He's going to hit and be hit. That's his job but the danger is there, an occupational hazard.

As Ferland put it, "A hundred percent, you have to be concerned. I'm very concerned."

Ferland, 26, could have decided to not mention his concussion symptoms after the game in Montreal, maybe taking a day or two off but continuing to play.

"But you're more vulnerable to getting real hurt," he said. "After the Montreal game I wasn't feeling good. If I had kept playing and I'd have taken a serious hit. ... That's where the concern is."

Ferland said he did not retreat to a dark room or quiet place in his house to help with his recovery, saying, "I think that's more old-school. Just have a normal day until you start feeling normal again."

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour had his head rattled more than a few times in 1,500 NHL games. There was little sitting out, he said, even for a shift or two in a game.

"Guys back in the day probably had a hundred of these," Brind'Amour said Monday. "We just didn't know. I don't know if I would have ever played much, to be honest, because you were always getting dinged up and having the 'fuzzies' and, I guess, the criteria that are concussion-related now."

"It was just commonplace. You are out for a couple of minutes, maybe a shift, and went back out. Now they know better. They're definitely being cautious and that's the way you've got to be."

Ferland did not go with the Canes on their West Coast trip last week, staying behind and getting in some skating at RCI.

"It's never fun watching your team play and I wished I was out there grinding with them," he said.

While Ferland often has been on a line this season with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen, on Monday he was on Clark Bishop's line with winger Brock McGinn.

"It felt good," he said. "It's just getting used to the pace again."

With Ferland and then Staal out, Brind'Amour was missing two of his most physical guys -- Ferland leads the Canes with 81 hits and Staal has 80. The Canes did win Friday, ending a three-game losing streak with a 4-1 victory over the Anaheim Ducks, and now have Ferland back.

"He's probably going to be a tad rusty but just having him in the lineup is going to be huge," Brind'Amour said. "You could tell, not having him in there had a huge impact on us, obviously scoring goals and that element that he brings was definitely missing."



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Martin Necas named CCM/AHL player of the week

Charlotte, NC — After piling up a staggering seven assists in two big road wins for the Checkers, Martin Necas has been named the CCM/AHL Player of the Week.

The rookie forward matched a franchise record with four assists and helped the Checkers erase a two-goal deficit to roll over Hartford 7-4 on Friday, then followed that up with three more helpers the next night – including setting up the overtime winner – as the Checkers pulled off a wild rally to stun the Springfield Thunderbirds.

The 19-year-old Necas, who was selected 12th overall by Carolina in 2017, is currently tied for fourth among AHL rookies with 20 points in 22 games for Charlotte this season and ranks third with 14 assists.

This marks the 10th time in franchise history that a Checkers player has been named CCM/AHL Player of the Week and the second time this season, as Nicolas Roy earned the honor for the first week of October.

Plane carrying Carolina Hurricanes makes emergency landing

TULSA, Okla. — A passenger says a Swift Air charter plane carrying the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes made an emergency landing in Oklahoma over the weekend after a noxious smell filled the cabin.

The Boeing 737 landed at Tulsa International Airport about 4 a.m. Saturday while traveling from Long Beach, California, to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. The aircraft was returning the hockey team to North Carolina after a game.

The team's vice president of communications, Mike Sundheim, was on the flight. Sundheim said Monday that passengers could smell something similar to burning plastic.

Once on the ground, Sundheim says technicians replaced a malfunctioning air data computer and took off again after a delay of about two hours.

No injuries were reported.

Phoenix-based Swift Air hasn't responded to telephone and email requests for comment.



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Preview: Maple Leafs vs. Hurricanes

Canes return home to host Toronto

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes return home from a weeklong trek through California to host the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The Hurricanes capped off their three-game trip with a 4-1 win in Anaheim against a Ducks team that had one five games in a row.

"We had a lot of guys step up," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after practice on Monday. "We had good contributions up and down the lineup and played hard."

Two Crucial Points

Heading into Friday's road trip finale in Anaheim, the Canes were winless in their previous three games and had scored just two goals in that stretch.

The 4-1 victory - against a team that had won five straight, no less - was critical for team morale before heading back east.

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

Clark Bishop netted his first NHL goal on the strangest of plays to kickstart the Canes' offense, which came alive with three goals in the third period.

"We needed a goal like that. We were struggling to score goals. You've got to get some ugly ones," Brind'Amour said. "That epitomized about as ugly as you can get, but he did a lot of good things. To get to that point, he had to carry it all the way from our end down and beat a defenseman wide."

Canes Activate Ferland from Injured Reserve

Forward has missed four games with a concussion

by Canes PR

RALEIGH, NC - Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has activated forward Micheal Ferland from injured reserve.

Ferland, 26, has missed the last four games with a concussion. The 6'1", 217-pound forward leads the

Ferland Returns

Micheal Ferland is expected to return to the Canes' lineup after missing the last four games with a concussion. The 26-year-old forward didn't travel with the Canes out west, but returned to practice on Monday and was activated from injured reserve.

"That should help us. He's probably going to be a tad rusty, but just having him in the lineup is going to be huge," Brind'Amour said. "You could tell not having him in there was a big impact on us, scoring goals and just that element he brings was definitely missing."

Ferland leads the team in goals (11) and power-play goals (5).

The Last Meeting

Victor Rask made his 2018-19 season debut the last time these two teams got together on Nov. 21 in Raleigh, as the Canes handed the Maple Leafs - then the top team in the Eastern Conference - a 5-2 defeat. Trevor van Riemsdyk and Justin Williams each tallied goals in a span of just 22 seconds in the first period to put the Canes ahead 2-0, and Curtis McElhinney made 30 saves on 32 shots against his former team.

The Opposition

After rattling off five straight wins, the Maple Leafs - now with William Nylander on their roster - have gone winless in their last two games and have surrendered a combined 11 goals. John Tavares boasts a team-high 18 goals, while Mitch Marner's 40 points (and 34 assists) pace the squad.

"They've got a great team," Brind'Amour said. "They're fully manned. It's a dangerous team. We know that."

Hurricanes with 11 goals and has posted four assists in 24 games this season. Drafted by the Flames in the fifth round, 133rd overall, of the 2010 NHL Draft, Ferland has tallied 104 points (53g, 51a) in 274 career NHL games with Carolina and Calgary. The Swan River, Man., native was from the Flames along with Dougie Hamilton and Adam Fox in exchange for Noah Hanifin and Elias Lindholm on June 23, 2018.



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PHT Power Rankings: Blackhawks hit bottom

By Adam Gretz

If you turn on any random Chicago Blackhawks game on any random night against any random opponent it is a good bet they are already going to be losing by two or three goals 10 minutes into the first period. It has been a constant trend for about two months now.

Sometimes they are able to push back a little and tie the game only to lose in backbreaking fashion, just as they have done in their most recent losses to the Vegas Golden Knights and Montreal Canadiens.

Sometimes they never push back and just get completely run out of the building.

Either way the result is the same — a loss. Those losses keep piling up at an alarming rate and are sending the Blackhawks toward what is looking to be their worst season in years.

Thanks to the seven-game losing streak they are carrying into the week the Blackhawks officially have the worst record (based on points percentage) in the entire league and are just 3-11-2 since firing Joel Quenneville.

In other words, things are bad. Really bad.

The problems are obvious. The good players that were part of the core that won three Stanley Cups in six years are older, more expensive and not as good as they once were (if they are even still on the team). Those larger contracts, combined with the salary cap, once again ripped apart the depth that always made the Blackhawks such a strong team.

The latter point is where a lot of the problems really start to show up. The Blackhawks went through salary cap purges before but were always able to find ways to restock the cupboards, often times to the point of them still being able to compete for, and even win, championships.

They have not done that over the past few years.

Just consider this question: Who is the last truly impactful and useful the Blackhawks have added to their organization through free agency or a trade? Have there been any over the past three or four years? The re-acquisition of Brandon Saad is probably the answer you could come up with because he is a fine, decent player. But when you had to give up an even better player (Artemi Panarin) to get him back that does not really help things.

Big contracts, an aging core, and no fresh talent entering the organization is a bad combination, and for this week it has

the Blackhawks at the bottom of the PHT Power Rankings. They may be there for a while, too.

On to the rest of the rankings!

The Elites

1. Tampa Bay Lightning — Quite simply the best hockey team in the NHL. Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point are early season MVP candidates, Steven Stamkos is a point-per-game player right behind them, and they are 11-3-0 since their Vezina Trophy finalist goalie has been injured. That includes the six-game winning streak they carry into the week. They also are coming off of a dominant 7-1 win against a really good Colorado Avalanche team.

2. Winnipeg Jets — The Jets are 10-4-1 in their past 15 games and are averaging more than four goals per game during that stretch. There may not be a better collection of top-line forward talent anywhere in the league.

3. Toronto Maple Leafs — Not too worried about the fact they haven't won since William Nylander returned. The biggest concern here, just like last season, is that Frederik Andersen gets worn down from the workload he is being asked to carry. His play will determine how far they go in the playoffs.

4. Nashville Predators — They have cooled off a bit in recent weeks but that has coincided with the team being crushed by injuries. When healthy this is still one of the league's best teams.

5. Washington Capitals — The champs are starting to get on a roll and Alex Ovechkin is still scoring goals at an unprecedented pace given his age.

The Surprises

6. Colorado Avalanche — Mikko Rantanen and Nathan MacKinnon are both on pace for more than 120 points this season. Doubtful they will maintain those numbers over 82 games, but the fact they have done it over even 30 games is incredible.

7. Calgary Flames — Have to be honest, did not see the Flames being the team to crawl to the top of the Pacific Division at any point this season. How long will they remain there?

8. Buffalo Sabres — When every game you play is decided by a single goal sometimes you are going to get the breaks, and sometimes you are not. Thirteen of the Sabres' past 15 games have been one-goal games, a stretch that has seen



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them win 10 games in a row and then also lose five games in a row. They are not as good as they looked during the winning streak and they are not as bad as they have looked during the losing streak. Things balance out.

Strong Playoff Teams

9. Boston Bruins — They are still going to have to find some secondary scoring if they are going to be a serious threat to win the Stanley Cup.

10. Columbus Blue Jackets — Sergei Bobrovsky picked a terrible time to have his worst season as a starter. How good would the Blue Jackets be this season if he was playing at his normal level?

The Middle Ground

11. Vegas Golden Knights — They might still be the best team in the Pacific Division and when all is said and done will probably end up winning it.

12. Dallas Stars — The rapid emergence of rookie defenseman Miro Heiskanen has helped make up for the absence of John Klingberg.

13. Anaheim Ducks — John Gibson should be a finalist for MVP at this point, while Daniel Sprong has made a nice little impact in his first few games with the team. Nice move in the shootout on Sunday night to help pick up the win.

14. Edmonton Oilers — If this team makes the playoffs Connor McDavid should be a unanimous MVP winner. He is doing even more than he did a year ago.

15. San Jose Sharks — They have won three out of their past four and they don't have a tough schedule coming up this week. Is this where it starts to turn around?

16. Montreal Canadiens — The P.K. Subban for Shea Weber trade gets ripped (and deservedly so) which makes it kind of easy to forget that Weber is still pretty good. He is just older, has a worse contract, and might be starting to break down a bit physically. Still, he can play a little. He has five points in his first six games since returning to the lineup this season.

17. Pittsburgh Penguins — Every time it looks like they are going to get everything together and go on a roll they put together a terrible showing. Still, they have picked up 13 out of a possible 20 points over their past 10 games.

18. Minnesota Wild — They have some concerns right now, with the biggest potentially being whatever is wrong with starting goalie Devan Dubnyk.

19. New York Islanders — Still not sure they have enough offense to emerge from the pack and make the playoffs this season.

20. Carolina Hurricanes — The Hurricanes can not catch a break in goal. Curtis McElhinney came out of nowhere to solidify the position for a little bit, played extremely well, and then ended up injured. Now it is back to the Scott Darling and Petr Mrazek duo that was not working earlier this season.

21. Arizona Coyotes — It is really tough to see the Coyotes hanging around in the Western Conference playoff race given the injury situation with Antti Raanta.

22. Detroit Red Wings — Dylan Larkin is on track for the best season of his career and several of their potential trade chips (Gustav Nyquist, Jimmy Howard) are having productive seasons. So they have that going for them.

23. New York Rangers — Henrik Lundqvist is still getting it done, he just doesn't have enough around him for it to really matter.

24. Philadelphia Flyers — Now that they have a new general manager in place it will be interesting to see where this team goes from here and where "bias for action" takes them.

25. Ottawa Senators — Losing Matt Duchene and Bobby Ryan to injury for the foreseeable future is really going to hurt what has been a surprisingly good offense this season.

26. Florida Panthers — With better goaltending this season they may not be needing another second half surge just to get back into playoff contention.

Lose For Hughes

27. Los Angeles Kings — The worst goal scoring team in the league by a huge margin and the third-fewest shots on goal per game. They are redefining what bad offensive hockey is in this era.

28. Vancouver Canucks — Since starting the season 10-6-2 the Canucks have managed to go only 3-10-1 over their past 14 games. Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser are still studs, though.

29. New Jersey Devils — Taylor Hall has to be having flashbacks to his Oilers days.

30. St. Louis Blues — After getting blown out on Sunday the Blues sounded like a completely broken team. They are still better than their rivals.

31. Chicago Blackhawks — Maybe Jeremy Colliton goes on to be a good NHL head coach, but right now the decision to fire Quenneville just looks comical.



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YAHOO! SPORTS

31 Takes: Tampa Bay Lightning quietly running away with the league

By: Ryan Lambert

It's been an interesting NHL season to date, with plenty of storylines to distract from the fact that the Tampa Bay Lightning are the best team in the league by a pretty wide margin.

They have the most wins and points in the league. They have the highest points percentage in the league. They have the sixth-best 5-on-5 possession numbers in the league, which is made even more impressive by the fact that they've had about 130 more minutes leading in their games than the next-closest team.

They have the best goal difference, and second-best expected-goal difference. They have an 11-4 record in the past month — and play a bad Rangers team at home tonight — while only one of those wins came in a shootout. They have the second-best power play. They have the eighth-best penalty kill.

This despite the fact that the play in a tough division, with a number of teams that got out to notably hot starts (Toronto, Buffalo, Montreal). And the fact that their All-Star goaltender and a high-end defender have both been missing for about a month, plus Victor Hedman, the reigning Norris Trophy winner, missed seven games earlier this season, while Ondrej Palat missed 16.

And yet, people don't seem to be paying a particularly large amount of attention. Perhaps because it's unsexy for a team that finished third in the league last season, then kept everybody without really needing to add much, to just be as good or better than everyone else on any given night. It really seems like a function of "everybody just goes to work and does their jobs, and because of how good the roster is, that means they win far more often than not."

These guys are currently on pace for a 124-point season, and maybe it's not fair to put that on them since they haven't played any of their four scheduled games against Toronto, but it's worth noting that last year's Predators team that everyone considered a buzzsaw had 117 points with relatively little injury trouble for its best players.

The thing that makes Tampa scary is, of course, the offense. At this point, Steven Stamkos is probably their third-best forward, which is really saying something. But everyone seems to chip in pretty consistently; this isn't a one- or even two-line team. They've scored at least four goals in 16 of their last 21 games. Maybe you'd like to see them tighten up the defense (allowing two or fewer in 9 of those 21), but if you can score that much that consistently it probably doesn't matter to any significant degree.

And again, their goalies with Andrei Vasilevskiy out have been Louis Domingue (.906 in 17 appearances) and, for one game, Eddie Pasquale (.792). They won the Pasquale game

in a shootout, which maybe tells you everything you need to know.

Maybe it's the fact that we all expected them to be good. Maybe it's the fact that they haven't really ripped off any particularly big winning streaks (their current one is the longest of the season, at six games). Maybe it's the fact that in part because of the injuries, they're not speedbagging teams — like they did to Colorado on Saturday night — as often as you might expect. Maybe it's the fact that for all their high-end talent, no one is really putting Nikita Kucherov or Brayden Point in the Big Discussions for year-end awards.

But no matter the cause for the lack of national enthusiasm here, there's little reason to suspect these guys are going to slow down. Again, all the underlying numbers say this team is just punishing opponents despite the fact that they're only trailing opponents for about a quarter of every hour they play. And they've done this without one of the best goaltenders in the world — Vasilevskiy was .927 in 13 appearances before getting injured.

The Lightning are just dutifully going about the work of absolutely clobbering the NHL. Maybe people will notice in 2019. Could be a fun New Year's resolution.

31 Takes

Anaheim Ducks: How Bob Murray got an extension out of ownership with his team carrying the fourth-worst goal difference in the West is beyond me.

Arizona Coyotes: So close, and yet so far.

Boston Bruins: This was a big-time W for a team that needed it. They didn't just beat Toronto. They made Toronto look real bad.

Buffalo Sabres: When all those Sabres fans got mad at me for saying the 10-game winning streak didn't make them elite? Huh what happened there I wonder.

Calgary Flames: Five straight for these fellas, and it hasn't exactly been a soft schedule in that stretch either.

Carolina Hurricanes: You'd love to see these guys really put it together for like a month. Would be terrifying to behold.

Chicago: This team is insanely cooked. Stan Bowman's gotta be gone before the draft, no question about it. Trade everyone. Who cares.

Colorado Avalanche: Sometimes it's just that kinda night against the best team in hockey.

Columbus Blue Jackets: Man the Metro is just kinda mediocre, eh? It's like no one is allowed to look competent for more than five or six games in a row.

Dallas Stars: Hold on, the Stars don't have a regulation loss against a team from the Pacific yet this year? They're 9-0-1



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and about to play three games against teams from that division again. Man the Pacific stinks.

Detroit Red Wings: Imagine being the kind of person who thinks the Red Wings are or should be a playoff team? Yikes.

Edmonton Oilers: The Hitchcock Oilers really do look pretty good, you gotta say.

Florida Panthers: These guys just went 3-2-3 in an eight-game homestand and they're still third-bottom in the East. Should be a bigger story. Probably need a coaching change. Might get one soon given that they have five home games between now and Jan. 22.

Los Angeles Kings: Doughty should really try ripping his opponents for lack of talent.

Minnesota Wild: Yeah man seems like this team just isn't good at drafting.

Montreal Canadiens: It's really tough for me to think this team is really any good but they keep winning, so I dunno.

Nashville Predators: Nice for Eeli Tolvanen but someone's really gotta start scoring here.

New Jersey Devils: Now. Now is the time for these guys to sell. Right now. They're bad. They need to be sellers. Right this second.

New York Islanders: It's nice to be able to play Detroit. Really helps you get that ol' confidence going.

New York Rangers: "Should we have given this way-over-30 goalie an eight-year deal with a huge AAV?" Hmm yeah tough to say.

Ottawa Senators: The Sens want to re-sign Matt Duchene, but we're all in agreement that Duchene would be crazy to take that contract, right? Like the only positive outcome is that you sign for eight years instead of the seven you'd get elsewhere then hope you get traded by Year 4.

Philadelphia Flyers: Claude Giroux has 138 points in his last 109 games. Pretty good.

Pittsburgh Penguins: What I guess I would say is that if Jack Johnson is your best player on any given night, it shouldn't be a surprise if you lose.

San Jose Sharks: Fair to say Marc-Edouard Vlasic isn't exactly being put in a position to succeed this season, huh?

St. Louis Blues: Maybe the group is "fragile" because it's "bad." Just something to consider.

Tampa Bay Lightning: Oh yeah I forgot to say earlier but both Stralman and Vasilevskiy are back soon. Uh oh.

Toronto Maple Leafs: They basically have to be super-aggressive about Matthews and Marner's new deals now, yeah?

Vancouver Canucks: Are we acting like the thing the Canucks really missed in the last year was..... Derek Dorsett?

Vegas Golden Knights: Well uhhhhh, woof.

Washington Capitals: They're looking good again. One day, we'll all figure this team out.

Winnipeg Jets: Nice boys here.



Carolina Hurricanes vs. Toronto Maple Leafs: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Hurricanes take on the Toronto Maple Leafs tonight in Raleigh in Micheal Ferland's return from a concussion.

By Andrew Ahr

Carolina Hurricanes (13-11-4) at Toronto Maple Leafs (20-9-1)

The Hurricanes will try to pick up a crucial two points tonight against the high octane Toronto Maple Leafs in the second game between the two teams this season.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Maple Leafs
Record	13-11-4	20-9-1

Category	Hurricanes	Maple Leafs
Points	30	41
Division Rank	T5 Metro	2 Atlantic
Conference Rank	T10 EC	2 EC
Last 10 Games	5-4-1	6-3-1
Streak	Won 1	Lost 1
Goals/Game	2.50	3.63



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Category	Hurricanes	Maple Leafs
Goals Against/Game	2.71	2.80
Shots/Game	38.7	31.4
Shots Against/Game	27.4	33.7
Faceoff %	51.5%	52.0%
Power Play % (Rank)	15.8% (23)	27.3% (5)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	79.1% (T16)	80.0% (14)
ES Corsi For %	57.62%	49.82%
ES PDO	97.4	103.3
PIM/Game	7:27	6:42

Goaltender #1

Category	Petr Mrazek	Frederik Andersen
Record	4-4-2	16-8-0
Save %	.899	.926
GAA	2.41	2.50

Goaltender #2

Category	Scott Darling	Garret Sparks
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Category	Scott Darling	Garret Sparks
Record	2-4-1	4-1-1
Save %	0.892	.913
GAA	3.14	2.84

Game Notes

Tonight marks the second of three matchups between the Hurricanes and Leafs this season. They will meet for the final time in Toronto in April.

The teams met on November 21st in Raleigh in a game ripe with story lines. Curtis McElhinney saw 32 shots and stopped 30, while the Hurricanes set a franchise record for shots in a period with 29 in the first frame en route to a 5-2 victory on Thanksgiving eve.

Andrei Svechnikov looked dominant in that November game against the Leafs, recording eight shots on goal in 15 minutes of ice time as well as an empty net goal.

The Hurricanes activated Micheal Ferland from injured reserve yesterday and expect him to play tonight. He missed the last four games with a concussion.

Curtis McElhinney is currently on IR with a lower body injury he suffered in practice on December 6th. Although it sounded like a short term issue, he did not practice with the team yesterday.

Either Sebastian Aho or Teuvo Teravainen has earned a point on 31 of the 70 Hurricanes goals this season. That's incredible considering they've played on the same line the entire season.

Behind Enemy Lines: Previewing the Maple Leafs, Canadiens, Capitals and Coyotes

A four game week is highlighted by home meetings with the Leafs, Caps and Yotes.

By Andy House

Toronto Maple Leafs

Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. at PNC Arena

John E. Sokolowski-USA TODAY Sports

The high-powered Toronto Maple Leafs enter Raleigh for the second time this season still on an impressive offensive pace (second in the league in goals scored), and having scored at least two goals in each of their last 13 contests. For comparison, the Hurricanes have tallied two or more goals in only eight of their last 13 games. The Leafs' addition of John Tavares has done exactly what you would expect, as the

talented center leads the team with 18 goals and has propelled the team further into consideration as a favorite in the Eastern Conference.

Perhaps most importantly at this point, the Leafs have recently received some heavy reinforcements with the return of William Nylander from a contract holdout and the return of Auston Matthews from a shoulder ailment. With both of these dynamic young stars back in the fold, the Leafs are just now icing the true roster that Toronto fans hope can end the over half-century drought and bring home Lord Stanley.

In order for that to happen, the Leafs will need Frederik Andersen to continue his stellar work in net. In compiling a .926 save percentage and a solid 2.50 goals against average, Andersen has proven once again that he is capable of starter-level production in net. Assuming the Leafs



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continue their regular season trajectory, the true test for Andersen and the revamped defensive core led by Morgan Rielly (perhaps one of the most improved players in the NHL) will be winning tougher, more physical games in the playoffs. If they can do that, nothing short of a marquee place in the sports history of Toronto is theirs for the taking.

For Carolina to compete with the Leafs and replicate the victory they were able to score on November 21st, they will need another solid performance in net from Petr Mrazek, who performed exceptionally on the most recent west coast trip. With Nylander and Matthews back in the lineup on Tuesday, the Leafs will have a different look, but the same style the Canes used to scratch that 5-2 win will be the recipe for success this week.

What to Watch For

The Canes will likely continue to mix around lines as Jordan Staal and Micheal Ferland remain sidelined with injury. Expect to get more looks at Sebastian Aho at center in the coming week.

With Curtis McElhinney out for an undisclosed period, Mrazek will be asked to control the net during a busy week. How many starts will he get, and will Carolina actually turn to Scott Darling for a contest?

Montreal Canadiens

Thursday, 7:30 p.m. at Bell Centre

In a rematch of a tight, one-goal contest from just two weeks ago, the Hurricanes will venture up to Montreal for the second and final time this season to take on the Canadiens. For a deeper look at the remade Canadiens roster for this season, see the Behind Enemy Lines from two weeks ago.

Despite what some viewed as a rebuilding time for the Canadiens, they have added some pieces on the fly that has helped them be a competitive squad in front of Carey Price, even with Shea Weber missing significant time earlier this season. After last season's disastrous season that saw the bottom fall completely out, the Habs have managed to scrap together a solid 15-10-5 start, which has them in the conversation for a possible postseason bid after a one-year absence.

While still not an offensive powerhouse, the acquisitions of Max Domi, Tomas Tatar, and Jonathan Drouin - Domi and Tatar this season, Drouin last season - have invigorated at least some offensive skill that had clearly lacked for a team that believes it still has the best netminder in the NHL to play in front of.

Truthfully, the offense has carried the Habs in the early going. Scoring at the tenth best clip in the NHL, the defensive play and goaltending have been lacking through 30 contests thus far. Price has posted a pedestrian .902 save percentage in 23 starts, having allowed 2.92 goals against per contest. Since Weber returned on November 27th against Carolina, the Canadiens have only allowed three goals once in six games. The improvement is obvious, and that trend is what the Habs hope carries forward as they attempt to navigate the difficult Atlantic Division race for the playoffs.

What to Watch For

Special teams have steadily improved for the Canes after a horrific start to the season. Against the Canadiens and Price, the Canes must take advantage of any opportunities on the Power Play they might get, as traffic in front of Price is often the only way to beat him when he is going well.

Last time in Montreal, Curtis McElhinney put together a highlight reel performance to steal a win for Carolina. The Canes must put together a much more even performance to extract two points this time around.

Washington Capitals

Friday, 7:30 p.m. at PNC Arena

The defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals enter PNC Arena, as the Caps and the Canes meet for the first time this season. The Caps also will enter this week securely in first place in the Metropolitan Division, after their 4-0 whitewashing of the Blue Jackets in Columbus. Despite a slower start to the season, which must have been expected with the, um, spirited celebrations following their Cup win, the Caps have returned to familiar territory in the standings based on their high-powered offense and good enough defense and goaltending to date.

Like Carolina, the Capitals have two important forwards missing time currently due to concussions. TJ Oshie and Tom Wilson each remain out. Wilson was the recipient of a very questionable hit from Vegas Golden Knights forward Ryan Reaves, which led many Caps to feel that Wilson, who has been suspended repeatedly for blows to the head, was targeted for punishment from the bruising Reaves. Having missed a 14 games for a dirty hit in the preseason, Wilson returned with a vengeance, notching 14 points in just 11 contests before the blow from Reaves. Without Oshie or Wilson, the Caps remain a formidable foe, but defending them does become easier as the depth role-players begin to be asked to do more and more for the Caps.

The bottom line in any matchup with the Caps is that you have to be able to match their speed in the neutral zone and be willing to sacrifice on the defensive end to take away good scoring chances. On the other end, when you are given goal-scoring opportunities, you must take advantage because they don't come around as often as you would like. We shall see if the Canes can rise to the occasion on the end of back-to-back.

What to Watch For

Both teams will be on part of a back-to-back, as the Canes will be wrapping one up, while the Caps will host the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday. Will that effect the typical matchup in goal? It is possible that Pheonix Copley could see the net, as well as a possible Scott Darling sighting for the Canes.

It doesn't take much to understand that keeping the Caps off the man-advantage is a must against Alex Ovechkin and his rocket from the circle. But special teams as a whole is important, as the Caps have sunk to 22nd on the penalty kill, opening up an opportunity if the Canes can remain disciplined themselves.

Arizona Coyotes



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 11, 2018

Sunday, 1:00 p.m. at PNC Arena

Since the Hurricanes' meeting at the beginning of November in Glendale with the Arizona Coyotes, the Yotes have run up against mostly hard times as injuries have decimated the revamped roster, and - save for a four-game win streak - the harsh NHL schedule provided no rest for the weary. Now the Coyotes head out this week on a four-game east coast road trip that will culminate in a 1:00 p.m. matinee at PNC Arena on Sunday.

Obviously, it goes without saying that an east coast team hosting a western foe at such an early hour at home should be in a good position to control the action. Right at the end of a long road trip, the Coyotes might be looking ahead to the long flight back to the Valley of the Sun as the NHL schedule marathon marches on.

But Carolina will be playing their third game in four days as well. Physically and emotionally, the advantage simply may not be there. Whichever team buys in to doing the hard things it takes to win hockey games first will likely be able to come away with two points in a game that appears to be a bit of a transition game on each team's schedule.

Regarding the injuries that have beset the Yotes, the current list of injured includes their revelation in net, Antti Raanta, who is reportedly in jeopardy of missing the rest of the season with a lower-body injury. The Yotes are also without backup netminder Darcy Kuemper, who they hope will return during the road trip. Additionally, forwards Michael Grabner and Vinnie Hinostroza remain sidelined for an undetermined amount of time and veteran defenseman Jason Demers has been lost for the season with a knee injury. The retooled Coyotes, who were competitive in the softer Pacific Division earlier in the season, are now likely destined to wait yet another season before climbing back into playoff contention.

Although they currently sit atop the NHL with the fewest goals against, without Raanta or the presence of a sure-fire starting caliber replacement, it should be expected that the goal prevention skills should wane as the season progresses.

Offensively, the Coyotes do not appear to have much that can combat a drop in defensive production. Currently at 29th in goals scored, the electric Clayton Keller continues to pace the Yotes with eight goals and a total of 20 points. But outside of Keller and elite defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson, the depth of scoring has simply not been there for the Coyotes. In order to combat the injuries they have been dealt, the Yotes must receive more production from the likes of Derek Stepan, Alex Galchenyuk and Richard Panik who were each brought to the desert to provide significant secondary scoring for Arizona, but have yet to put any sort of stretch of good play together.

The bottom line for Sunday's matchup is that this game will be more about character and will than about strategy and matchups. Which team will arrive ready and willing to take up a 60 minute fight? The answer to that question will very likely determine the winner.

What to Watch For

Who will man the net for Arizona? A revolving door has been in place, but perhaps Kuemper will return. Regardless, the Canes have struggled previously against backups, so Sunday will provide another opportunity to see if the Canes can find some holes in net against a backup.

If the Ferland and/or Staal injuries extend to the end of this coming weekend, might the Canes reach down to Charlotte for some fresher legs and return Martin Necas to the Canes lineup for the first time since October 16th?

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1120316 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Micheal Ferland returns from concussion but the head injury concerns remain

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Micheal Ferland doesn't remember any big hit or collision, either delivered or received.

But after the Carolina Hurricanes' 2-1 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Nov. 27, Ferland didn't feel normal and knew something was wrong.

"I think I finished the night with five hits and after the game something didn't feel right," the Canes forward said Monday. "I had concussion symptoms, feeling in a fog, things like that."

After returning to Raleigh, Ferland underwent a thorough medical evaluation. He was diagnosed with a concussion, which he said was the second of his NHL career.

The first, in November 2014, came after Ferland took a hit from Nashville Predators defenseman Anton Volchenkov and kept him out a week. This time, it was closer to two weeks, forcing him to miss the Canes' past four games.

Ferland, who leads the Canes with 11 goals, returned to practice Monday at Raleigh Center Ice and was activated from injured reserve and is expected to play Tuesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs. That's good news for Ferland but center Jordan Staal, who sustained a concussion Wednesday against the San Jose Sharks, was not at practice and remains sidelined indefinitely.

For a hockey player, getting back on the ice with the team is "back to normal" but Ferland said his concerns about concussions remain.

"I mean, you've got to be concerned," he said. "It's your life."

Ferland, like many pro athletes, is aware of the extensive research being done about the effects of sports-related concussions and prevention of concussions. Repeated hits to the head or other head trauma has been linked to chronic traumatic encephalopathy -- the neurodegenerative disease commonly known as CTE and once referred to as dementia pugilistica -- and can be debilitating in later life.

A recent study looked at the donated brains of former football players from high school to professional. Researchers found a change in the brains of former NFL players, known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy or CTE.

A part of Ferland's role is to be physical, a banger, an intimidator. He's going to hit and be hit. That's his job but the danger is there, an occupational hazard.

As Ferland put it, "A hundred percent, you have to be concerned. I'm very concerned."

Ferland, 26, could have decided to not mention his concussion symptoms after the game in Montreal, maybe taking a day or two off but continuing to play.

"But you're more vulnerable to getting real hurt," he said. "After the Montreal game I wasn't feeling good. If I had kept playing and I'd have taken a serious hit. ... That's where the concern is."

Ferland said he did not retreat to a dark room or quiet place in his house to help with his recovery, saying, "I think that's more old-school. Just have a normal day until you start feeling normal again."

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour had his head rattled more than a few times in 1,500 NHL games. There was little sitting out, he said, even for a shift or two in a game.

"Guys back in the day probably had a hundred of these," Brind'Amour said Monday. "We just didn't know. I don't know if I would have ever played much, to be honest, because you were always getting dinged up and having the 'fuzzies' and, I guess, the criteria that are concussion-related now."

"It was just commonplace. You are out for a couple of minutes, maybe a shift, and went back out. Now they know better. They're definitely being cautious and that's the way you've got to be."

Ferland did not go with the Canes on their West Coast trip last week, staying behind and getting in some skating at RCI.

"It's never fun watching your team play and I wished I was out there grinding with them," he said.

Carolina Hurricanes center Jordan Staal missed seven games recovering from a concussion in 2016.

While Ferland often has been on a line this season with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen, on Monday he was on Clark Bishop's line with winger Brock McGinn.

"It felt good," he said. "It's just getting used to the pace again."

With Ferland and then Staal out, Brind'Amour was missing two of his most physical guys -- Ferland leads the Canes with 81 hits and Staal has 80. The Canes did win Friday, ending a three-game losing streak with a 4-1 victory over the Anaheim Ducks, and now have Ferland back.

"He's probably going to be a tad rusty but just having him in the lineup is going to be huge," Brind'Amour said. "You could tell, not having him in there had a huge impact on us, obviously scoring goals and that element that he brings was definitely missing."

News Observer LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120317 Carolina Hurricanes

An obnoxiously early look at how the 2021 Seattle expansion draft could affect the Hurricanes

By Sara Civian Dec 10, 2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • December 11, 2018

The Hurricanes were in the middle of their West Coast road trip when the NHL made it official: Seattle will be the league's 32nd city come 2021-22.

Standing outside the SAP Center dressing rooms, Rod Brind'Amour smiled at the thought of another team out west. He grew up about six hours north of Seattle in Campbell River, British Columbia.

"I love it, I think it's just great," he said. "(Growing up) it would've been nice to have a team out there. It makes sense. I'm surprised it took so long. It's a great city and I think the NHL's gonna love it."

As good as it'll be for the game — think of all the mini-Brind'Amours out west — it's bound to put some existing franchises in tricky spots. You saw what happened with the Stanley Cup finalist Golden Knights last season. The combination of unforgiving expansion draft rules, certain players defying expectations and yes, some questionable decision-making built a roster of "misfit" studs for Vegas.

The Hurricanes are one of the few teams not kicking themselves in retrospect. They only gave up a fifth-round pick and Connor Brickley, who never cracked their NHL roster and has since signed two one-year contracts with the Panthers and the Predators.

As part of The Athletic's Future of Hockey series, let's take a way-too-early look at just how screwed the Hurricanes might be this time around. First, a reminder of the expansion draft rules, the same ones that Vegas used:

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

Any player with a no-movement clause has to be protected.

First- and second-year pros along with unsigned draft picks are exempt from the process.

Teams must make at least one defenseman and two forwards available who played 40 games the previous season (or 70 combined in the previous two).

One goalie must be made available.

As you can see based on the rules alone, it is way too early to tell what will transpire for a young team like the Hurricanes with several contract signings looming. But it will be fun to look back in three years and reflect on how wrong we were, especially if a player no one was expecting to rise up ends up forcing the Hurricanes to protect him. I am actively rooting for this scenario, and I expect you all to roast me relentlessly when this happens.

Here we go, staring directly into the void of projecting things.

Exemptions

Any first- or second-year pros are exempt, so any current NCAA players who will either still be in college or maximum two years into a contract like Jack Drury (Harvard), David Cotton (Boston College), Matt Filipe (Northeastern) are a non-issue.

But what about Adam Fox?

I know, I know. What about the guy averaging just less than two points per game as a defenseman? After talking to him last week, I've never been so confident that he'll actually end up signing with the Hurricanes — more on that Tuesday. If he does sign, there's about seven possible scenarios in terms of the looming expansion draft. This hypothetical three-years-from-now draft already is hard enough, so let's just assume that somehow Boy Wonder's contract is exempt.

Same rule applies for any unsigned prospects playing Junior and in Europe. So WHL rising star Stelio Mattheos is in the clear, as is 2017 second-rounder Eetu Luostarinen in Liiga.

Again, I can't stress enough how intensely I dislike this.

THE EXPANSION DRAFT RULES HONESTLY SUCK... "HEY WE'RE JUST GONNA, UH, SELECT A GOOD PLAYER FROM YOUR TEAM TO TAKE BECAUSE WE EXIST NOW"

— SARA CIV (@SARACIVIAN) DECEMBER 9, 2018

The Hurricanes' way-too-early-roast-me-later protected list

(Using the seven forwards, three defensemen, one goalie approach)

Forwards

Jordan Staal (no-movement clause)

Sebastian Aho

Andrei Svechnikov

Teuvo Teravainen

Micheal Ferland

Martin Necas (Update: Necas' sliding contract means exemption. Hypothetical hooray! Now we have to think about who to save that isn't him, and as pointed out, it's probably a hypothetical return from the hypothetical Faulk/Pesce trades. We are very deep in this thing.)

Janne Kuokkanen

The assumptions here are palpable because they have to be. The only Hurricanes forwards signed through 2021-22 are Staal and Victor Rask. Staal's NMC means he's staying put, unless the Hurricanes ask him to change it and he complies a la Marc Andre-Flcury and the Penguins.

I don't think we need to go over Aho and Svechnikov.

However small, there's always a chance deals like Teravainen's and/or Ferland's don't get done. Assuming they do, though, they're safe.

If Justin Williams is going year-by-year, for the purpose of this way-too-early list I'll take the easy way out and assume he won't need protecting. There are more than a few I'm leaving off that could fall under the "we'll make management regret this" category — Rask, Jordan Martinook, Lucas Wallmark immediately come to mind — that's exactly why I hate these rules so much.

For me, and for a lot of NHL front offices, it comes down to giving some of the older but still prospect-y players with potentially a chance to succeed in a different atmosphere and giving the younger prospect-y players a chance to develop in the system. That's why Necas, who is developing right on track despite how some make it seem, makes the cut over Wallmark.

I'm just about ripping my hair out with saving Kuokkanen over Warren Foegele. I've changed it three times. The door remains wide open for Foegele and his potential if you ask me — he's a complete player going through a common rookie rough patch. He's going to be great. Sounds just like someone you put on one of these lists and they go tear it up elsewhere. Good for them. Too many scouts and coaches have said too many good things about Kuokkanen to give him up here, even if my heart says save Foegele.

Defensemen

Jacob Slavin

Dougie Hamilton

Calvin de Haan

First off, it's safe to assume at least somebody is traded long before this goes down. Brett Pesce's being churned through the rumor mill, as is Justin Faulk, so for the sake of this exercise let's be extreme and assume they're both traded.



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If Pesce's gone, only Slavin and de Haan are signed through 2021-22. Let's play it safe and protect them. Oh, and we're using magical forces to make right-shot Fox signed until then too with zero implication.

That leaves Dougie Hamilton, Trevor van Riemsdyk and Hayden Fleury (RFA in 2019-20) as free agents. It's no fun to risk losing van Riemsdyk or Fleury, no fun at all. But they've been fighting for the same spot in a rotation and one might sign elsewhere by 2021 anyway. Sign Hamilton and protect him.

Goaltenders

You can't make me attempt this. None of the three NHL-level goaltenders are even signed through 2021-22. There could be anything in the Hurricanes' crease by then, from a budding Henrik Lundqvist to a Chucky doll held in place with duct tape.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120394 NHL

NHL's expansion to Seattle will fuel Canadians' fury at Gary Bettman, but he has helped the game

Geoff Baker

In my hometown of Montreal, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman is about as welcome as a bout of pneumonia on a sweltering summer day. And we never got many of those hot ones.

With apologies to Toronto – well, not really – Montreal and the province of Quebec remain the historical and cultural epicenter of hockey. You know Lester Patrick, who co-founded the Seattle Metropolitans a century ago? My former city produced him. Along with four dozen or so Stanley Cup championships won by teams like the Montreal Wanderers, Maroons, Shamrocks and others besides the Canadiens they don't even bother putting up banners for.

And the locals provincewide have long been irked at Bettman for "Americanizing" their game. About as long as they've been steamed at his letting the Quebec Nordiques relocate to Colorado in 1995, then recently resisting their revival. The Nordiques played in Quebec City, home of the two-time Stanley Cup winning Bulldogs from 1912 and 1913 and where Hall of Famers such as Joe Malone, Guy Lafleur and Michel Goulet plied their trade.

It's official: History on hand as NHL awards Seattle 32nd expansion franchise

The Quebec-wide anger grew last week, when Seattle was awarded the NHL's 32nd franchise. Though the league hasn't ruled out future expansion, none is imminent and the three-year-old, taxpayer-funded Centre Videotron in Quebec City will keep hosting junior games instead of NHL. Those junior games can sometimes outdraw what the stumbling Arizona Coyotes get, so you can understand the frustration.

But having lived on this side of the Canada-U.S. border for a dozen years now, I also understand Bettman's vision. And can objectively appreciate what it has achieved.

While Bettman got plenty wrong early in his tenure, which began Feb. 1, 1993 — allowing in dubious owners and shifting franchises around left and right — he apparently learned from mistakes. Nowadays, landing an NHL franchise takes more than big talk and hockey love. It takes big bucks, a big market — at least, in terms of financial upside for the league — and a very big arena plan beyond a mere concept.

"Seattle will possess the three pillars essential to the success of any franchise — terrific and committed ownership, a thriving market and a state-of-the-art venue," Bettman said in Sea Island, Ga., the day Seattle's team was awarded. "Expansion, particularly a second expansion in three years, could only have been considered ... because our league is stronger and more stable than it's ever been."

And that stability — an elusive NHL goal over a half century of growth beyond its Original Six days — will likely be Bettman's crowning legacy.

In this NHL universe, the impressive \$3.3 billion estimated net worth of Seattle managing partner David Bonderman ranks 12th among 32 principal NHL owners. In fact, according to a study this year by Business Insider magazine, the NHL now has 23 owner billionaires.

And that's astounding, given what the league used to be. Starting with the 1967-68 expansion that doubled it from six to 12 teams, the NHL often was so busy trying to grow that it forsook quality for quantity.

By the time the 1970s ended, the California Golden Seals, Atlanta Flames and Kansas City Scouts didn't make it, while the Minnesota North Stars nearly folded as did the Pittsburgh Penguins and St. Louis Blues.

The 1979-80 "merger" with the World Hockey Association brought in the Nordiques, Edmonton Oilers, Hartford Whalers and Winnipeg Jets. Only the Oilers survived the 1990s and their owner, Peter Pocklington, had to sell off legend Wayne Gretzky in 1988 to keep them afloat. Pocklington eventually sold the Oilers, filed for bankruptcy protection and later was convicted of fraud.

That was the NHL that Bettman inherited.

It was a league that had universally feted Los Angeles Kings owner Bruce McNall, who acquired Gretzky from Pocklington and got his team to its first Stanley Cup Final the 1993 spring Bettman became commissioner. But McNall had built much of his overestimated fortune off stolen Roman antiquities. He was under federal investigation by 1994 and in 1997 was sentenced to nearly six years in prison for a \$236 million scheme to defraud banks and the league.

McNall entered the league years before Bettman, though it was under the commissioner's watch in 1997 that the Buffalo Sabres were bought by Adelphia founder John Rigas, who by 2002 would be indicted and later imprisoned for fraud.

Bettman was also in charge when con man John Spano somehow bought the New York Islanders in 1997 despite being worth only about \$5 million. Spano was later sentenced to 71 months in prison and ordered to pay nearly \$12 million in restitution to his victims, including the Islanders.

So, Bettman and the league have come a long way.

Where fraudster McNall once owned the Kings, today it's Philip Anschutz and his \$13.1 billion fortune. The Sabres formerly of Rigas now have the \$4.3 billion ownership of Terrence Pegula. The Oilers are run by Daryl Katz and his \$3 billion.

Two problem NHL franchises right now, the Coyotes and Ottawa Senators, both didn't have new arenas ready to start off in the 1990s and later built them on cheap land too far away in the suburbs. The troubled Florida Panthers and Carolina Hurricanes also didn't have new arenas ready when launched.

That's one reason the league is delaying Seattle's launch until 2021. Word is the KeyArena renovation's general contractor, Skanska Hunt, will soon be replaced by M.A. Mortenson Co. after either walking out or getting pushed out over cost and timeline squabbles. Either way, the arena's Oak View Group developer has work ahead to finalize the arena and go three-for-three in market, venue and ownership on the NHL's stability scale.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Quebec City? Great fans. Fantastic arena. But a small market with a Canadian dollar worth 75 cents U.S. And a future owner in Quebecor media chieftain Pierre Karl-Peladeau whose reputed questionable decision-making and Quebec separatist political leanings make some NHL governors nervous. Upside? In the league's eyes, the Canadiens already have much of the province's NHL market cornered, leaving limited growth potential.

Certainly, not the financial upside of Seattle, Las Vegas or Houston.

Hey, I'm not making the rules. In my world, there's a happy medium where cities that practically invented the game get another chance. The Canadiens-Nordiques rivalry was among the most riveting in sports and reviving the Jets in small-market Winnipeg has worked thus far.

But this is a demonstrably stabilized NHL from what Bettman took over in 1993. And if you surveyed anyone willing to bet money on its future, my guess is they'd take this version every time.

In this version, Seattle for now, not Quebec City, gets to prove its hockey love. And it's up to the folks running our new franchise and remodeling KeyArena not to blow the golden opportunity they've received ahead of markets that believe hockey to be their birthright.

Seattle Times LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120395 NHL

What we learned in the NHL last week: It's been quite the decline for the Blackhawks

BY HELENE ELLIOTT LOS ANGELES TIMES

What we learned from the last week of play in the NHL:

THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN FAR

An interesting change took place at the bottom of the standings last week when the Chicago Blackhawks, losers of seven straight, dropped behind the Los Angeles Kings and into last place overall. The Blackhawks (9-17-5) also rank last in goal differential (minus-31) and power-play percentage (11.6). Joel Quenneville shouldn't have been fired for coaching them to a 6-6-3 record – he should get votes for coach of the year. In some ways it's sad to see, because their ascent and 2010 Stanley Cup triumph – their first of three titles in six seasons – revitalized the franchise and made hockey relevant in Chicago again. Their fall is the inevitable product of a hard salary-cap system. Just ask the Kings, who are going through the same problems after rewarding core players on their two Cup champion teams with lucrative contracts that extend well beyond those players' productive years.

WASHINGTON'S TOM WILSON BECAME A SYMPATHETIC FIGURE

Yes, it's possible to feel bad for Tom Wilson, one of the NHL's dirtiest players. He took a blindside hit from Vegas forward Ryan Reaves last Tuesday that knocked Wilson's helmet off and left his head bare when it hit the ice. Wilson was dazed and Reaves was ejected. Afterward, Reaves told reporters, "He ran into a lion in the jungle." Standard stuff, until Reaves inscribed that phrase while signing copies of a photo of the dazed Wilson and the photos were put up for sale online by memorabilia dealer Inscriptographs. The photos were destroyed, but evidence lives on in the form of screen shots. Wilson, recently back from a long and deserved suspension, missed the next two games because of a concussion. He's no angel – and being on the receiving end of a nasty hit might make him think twice the next time he can choose between making a clean hit or a

dirty one – but Reaves was crass to try to profit from someone's brain injury.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR: THE FLYERS NEED GOALTENDING HELP

Memo to new Philadelphia general manager Chuck Fletcher: You'll need to upgrade your goaltending if you still think the Flyers can make the playoffs this season. Michal Neuvirth, back from another injury, gave up three goals on 10 shots in a 7-1 loss to Winnipeg on Sunday, the Flyers' eighth defeat in 11 games. Prospect Carter Hart is their goalie of the future but he's only 20 and they don't want to push him. One reason Ron Hextall was fired and replaced by Fletcher is that club executives believe the Flyers can reach the playoffs this season and they disliked Hextall's long-term approach. But without consistent goaltending, the playoffs will remain a distant dream. Speaking of goaltending, the Arizona Coyotes lost Antti Raanta to a lower-body injury and surgery that might end his season. Goaltending by committee might be their solution the rest of the way.

SCORING IS ACTUALLY UP

Every season, high-scoring games are common early, until coaches figure out how to defend and smother creativity. But the average number of goals per game has stayed around 6.10 (excluding shootout goals) since the third week this season, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The average at the same point last season was 5.93. "It seems we may be going through another era like the '80s when there's going to be lots of goals," Anaheim Ducks general manager Bob Murray said. After years of decline this feels like a goalfest, but it's far from the 8-6 and 7-5 games common in the old Smythe Division. Again, per Elias, from 1980-81 through 1989-90 the goals-per-game average ranged from 7.34 to 8.03. Murray contributed 72 goals to that total while playing for the Blackhawks.

SEATTLE WORTH WAITING AN EXTRA YEAR

The decision to have Seattle join the Original 31 in the 2021-22 season instead of a year earlier makes sense for all involved. It allows extra time for extensive renovations to Key Arena and avoids the marketing mistake of launching a team in time for its debut to be delayed by a lockout that could be imposed by the league in September of 2020. A ceremonial groundbreaking took place last week and according to the Seattle Times, estimated renovation costs have exceeded \$800 million, creating the possibility a new general contractor will be brought in. Switching contractors wouldn't delay the scheduled opening early in 2021.

News Tribune LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120432 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs sign defenceman Calle Rosen to one-way, two-year extension

THE CANADIAN PRESS

The Toronto Maple Leafs have signed defenceman Calle Rosen to a two-year, one-way contract extension worth an annual average value of US\$750,000.

The 24-year-old Swede has 19 points (two goals, 17 assists) in 24 games with the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies.

Rosen played in four regular-season games with the Maple Leafs last season, registering an assist.

He had four goals and 18 assists in 62 regular-season games with the Marlies in 2017-18, then added five goals and six assists in 16 playoff games as Toronto captured the 2018 Calder Cup.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Rosen was originally signed to a two-year, entry-level contract by the Maple Leafs on May 16, 2017.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120433 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs soldier on without suspended Hyman

David Shoalts

There was a near-unanimous opinion in the Toronto Maple Leafs dressing room about Zach Hyman's two-game suspension: It is what it is.

"He's not a dirty player. He's honest, he plays hard. It is what it is," defenceman Morgan Rielly said.

Rielly added this about a high hit he took in the same game last Saturday from Boston Bruins forward Chris Wagner shortly after Hyman levelled Bruins defenceman Charlie McAvoy to draw the suspension: "It is what it is. Move on and worry about the game tomorrow night."

Hyman really gave that useless cliché a workout, citing both his teammates and the man who gave him the suspension, NHL disciplinarian George Parros. "I was suspended for two games and that's what it is. Everybody's trying to do their job. I'm trying to do my job, George is doing his job. It is what it is. I'm just trying to get ready for Saturday."

Then there was the hit itself, a clean one but a bit late in the eyes of Parros. "I think the play is out there," Hyman said. "Everybody can interpret it the way they want to. And it is what it is, I guess."

The only thing missing was a sound track from Doris Day – Que Sera Sera.

'It is what it is' also gave certain Toronto media members another day to ensure a dead horse was truly lifeless: the tiresome notion that maybe the Leafs are a soft team because they no longer have any leg-breakers on skates in their employ.

In the meantime, the Leafs have to figure out how to get ready for a showdown with their biggest problem, the Tampa Bay Lightning. In their past two games, against the Detroit Red Wings and the Bruins, the Leafs played their worst hockey of the season and lost both.

At least the Leafs should be able to ease into Thursday's game in Tampa. They start their road trip on Tuesday in Raleigh, N.C., against the Carolina Hurricanes, a team in transition from mediocre to decent, but one with some holes, notably in goal now that ex-Leaf Curtis McElhinney is injured.

Each of the two most recent losses saw the Leafs stretch a running bad habit to perilous lengths, namely their penchant for taking some shifts off. Now they face two games without Hyman, their most tireless worker and forechecker when it comes to chasing the puck. The Leafs will also miss Hyman on the penalty-killing unit. It is not a disaster, given Hyman's modest scoring production and the length of the suspension, but it still hurts. Head coach Mike Babcock tried to put the best face on it.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120434 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs sign Calle Rosen, get defenceman Steven Oleksy in trade with Ducks

By The Canadian Press

The Maple Leafs have signed defenceman Calle Rosen to a two-year, one-way contract extension worth an annual average value of \$750,000.

The 24-year-old Swede has 19 points (two goals, 17 assists) in 24 games with the AHL's Marlies. Rosen played in four regular-season games with the Maple Leafs last season, registering an assist.

The Maple Leafs signed defenceman Calle Rosen to a two-year, one-way contract extension on Monday.

He had four goals and 18 assists in 62 regular-season games with the Marlies in 2017-18, then added five goals and six assists in 16 playoff games as Toronto won the 2018 Calder Cup.

Rosen was originally signed to a two-year entry-level contract by the Leafs on May 16, 2017.

In other Leaf news, the club acquired defenceman Steven Oleksy on Monday in a trade with the Anaheim Ducks.

Forward Adam Cracknell was sent to Anaheim. Both players have played exclusively in the American Hockey League this season.

The 32-year-old Oleksy collected two assists in 15 games with the San Diego Gulls this year. He signed with Anaheim as a free agent on July 1, 2017.

Oleksy has 109 points in 388 career AHL games, including 20 with the Marlies during the 2016-17 season. He also has three goals and 17 assists in 73 career NHL games with Washington (2012-2015) and Pittsburgh (2016-17).

Cracknell was selected by Calgary in the ninth round (279th overall) of the 2004 NHL draft. He has three goals in 14 games with the Marlies this season.

The 33-year-old has 21 goals and 22 assists in 208 career NHL games with St. Louis, Columbus, Vancouver, Edmonton, Dallas and the New York Rangers and has one goal in 10 career Stanley Cup playoff games with the Blues.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120435 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs will succeed on the basis of skill, not truculence

By BRUCE ARTHUR

It was just five years ago that the Toronto Maple Leafs pushed out not one, but two enforcers on their fourth line. That was five years after Brian Burke infamously promised pugnacity, testosterone, truculence and belligerence. It was like watching a living museum, more than anything. It didn't go great.

On Saturday night the Leafs were getting drilled by the Boston Bruins who, when they're going, make their rink feel like a gladiatorial thing, and Zach Hyman made a mistake. He was late forechecking, his legs unusually slow. Bruins defenceman Charlie McAvoy moved the puck behind the Bruins net, and only then did Hyman take an extra stride and rise up to hit an unsuspecting



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McAvoy in the chest. He flattened him. McAvoy was in his second game back after missing 19 with a concussion.

The Maple Leafs' Zach Hyman was suspended two games for a late hit on the Bruins' Charlie McAvoy in Saturday's game. The Leafs would be wise to stick to their skill game and not worry about proving their toughness.

The Maple Leafs' Zach Hyman was suspended two games for a late hit on the Bruins' Charlie McAvoy in Saturday's game. The Leafs would be wise to stick to their skill game and not worry about proving their toughness. (STEVE RUSSELL / TORONTO STAR)

Hyman was suspended for two games, which is fine. He didn't target the head but it was a predatory hit, and deserved supplemental discipline. Maybe it was frustration. Maybe he was trying to send a message to a physical division rival. Hyman wasn't willing to say, either way.

"I mean, listen, everybody's trying to do their job. I'm trying to do my job," said Hyman Monday. "I think that the play's out there, I think everybody can interpret it the way they want to. I mean, divisional rival, and we play hard against them and they play hard against us. It's hockey."

"I just think he finished his check, unless you talked to him and he said he was frustrated," said Leafs head coach Mike Babcock. "He finished his check, obviously according to the league he was late, and we move on."

Except it was a lesson. Hyman's hit prompted an outbreak of good old-fashioned bad hits and retaliation: a guy named Chris Wagner took a predatory run at Morgan Rielly and just missed a suspendable headshot. (David Backes ran around a little too, but he'd have to catch somebody.) There were fights. It could have gotten ugly.

"We're a type of team that will push back," said Leafs centre Nazem Kadri. "I mean, we're not going to go beat every single person up on the ice, but we're definitely going to show that bite-back. And I think we've done a good job this year showing teams that we won't be pushed around, no matter how hard you try, on the road or at home."

As the Leafs figure out their upside, and the league tries to muck them up, the idea that this team can be pushed around surfaces now and again, and not always in good faith. Kadri is the Leaf most comfortable on the edge of physicality and instigation, though sometimes he spills over that edge.

But the rest of the roster is not built for that. Hyman is counted by Babcock as a Leaf who plays a heavy game, but he's not a masher; he's a wrestler whose job is to chase the puck like it owes him money. Some guys play the piano; some guys carry the piano.

Even then, Hyman isn't as physical as the departed Roman Polak, or Leo Komarov, who were Babcock favourites for their work ethic and their veteran grit, and who were among the first bodies thrown over the side when general manager Kyle Dubas got handed the keys to the car. In Sault Ste. Marie and with the Toronto Marlies, Dubas and coach Sheldon Keefe emphasized skill, and identified smaller players with skill as a historically undervalued.

So yes, some teams will try to intimidate Toronto, or draw them into stupid stuff. And the Leafs can't just stand there and take it, because, hockey. But it's not about being tough in the old way for Toronto. Auston Matthews isn't going to start running people over. Neither is Rielly, or John Tavares, or just about anybody. Hyman showed that if the Leafs start messing around with extra junk, they're not practiced enough to be good at it, and next thing you know it's a two-game suspension.

If the Leafs want to be tough, if they want what Tavares called "bite," it's going to come by competing. The Leafs came out flat against Detroit Thursday, and didn't hold up under the pressure Saturday. This team is skilled as hell, and sometimes it looks like they know it.

Some nights they're not great, and get by because they can create goals from nothing, and have a goaltender.

But as the season goes on, they're just going to have to compete at a higher level on a consistent basis. In San Jose the Sharks were running after Kadri in retaliation for last year's Joe Thornton beard harvesting, and once the Leafs settled down and just started skating, they were faster, and won.

"Grit comes in a lot of forms," said winger Connor Brown, who will move up and play with Tavares and Mitch Marner in Hyman's absence. "I think for us, it's important to work hard, put our work before our skill, and obviously we've got a lot of guys in here who can score, and you don't want your work to take a back seat."

Exactly. Fight for the puck, so you can do something with it. If the Leafs want to be tough, they will need to play like a team that isn't as skilled as they are. Because that's most of them, and they know it.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120436 Toronto Maple Leafs

Tuesday NHL preview: Toronto Maple Leafs at Carolina Hurricanes

By KEVIN MCGRAN

PNC ARENA

FACEOFF: 7 p.m.

The Leafs won't have to face former teammate Curtis McElhinney on Tuesday night; after winning the No. 1 job in Carolina, the netminder suffered a lower body injury and was placed on the IR on Sunday.

TV: TSN4

RADIO: Sportsnet 590 The Fan

KEY PLAYERS

Justin Williams/John Tavares

Hurricanes captain Williams has 11 goals and 16 assists in 42 career games against Toronto, including a goal in Carolina's 5-2 win over the Maple Leafs on Nov. 21 ... Leafs centre John Tavares has 23 goals and 19 assists in 35 career game against the Hurricanes, including a goal in that November loss.

NEED TO KNOW

The Leafs won't have Curtis McElhinney to contend with; after winning the No. 1 job in Carolina, the netminder got hurt and was placed on injured reserve on Sunday. Scott Darling has been recalled from the minors, but Petr Mrazek (4-4-2, 2.41, .899) will likely get the start ... Teuvo Teravainen had gone five games without a point until picking up a goal and an assist in Carolina's last game, a 4-1 win over Anaheim on Friday ... Sebastien Aho has been moved back to centre with Jordan Staal out with a concussion ... Carolina's power play is rated 23rd in the NHL (15.8 per cent); the penalty kill is 17th (79.1 per cent) ... At 2.5 goals-for per game, Carolina is third-lowest in the league.

UP NEXT

Saturday in Tampa, 7 p.m., CBC

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Nylander needs more work

Lance Hornby

William Nylander is still under a grace period to get his game together.

A somewhat slow start was expected after he didn't have an NHL training camp or exhibition action and missed the first 28 games, while trying to stay engaged practicing with European teams. After two Leaf losses with no scoring points, but ice time up to 16 minutes on Saturday against Boston, coach Mike Babcock is looking for more as the next four games on this road trip unfold.

"His biggest thing is just working every single day and over time, his game will come back," Babcock predicted. "No sense pressing or doing anything like that. Make sure you're not straight-legged, make sure you're competing in practice."

GOAT TRACKS

With Zach Hyman's absence, Frederik Gauthier is not only back in the lineup, he was being used in penalty kill drills on Monday. That has been seen as a natural job for the big centre who did it so well with the Marlies. But he's down the line for such a role with the Leafs.

"We'll see what happens," Babcock said. "I keep telling him he's going to get a chance. It's like anything, when something happens (the Hyman suspension) if you can grab hold, it works good for you.

"It's like a brief injury. It's an opportunity. But the other thing about Zach is that he's a forechecker, a heavy guy, he's at the net. There are lots of things he does that don't suddenly (stand out). Everybody talks about his line and the two guys on it (John Tavares and Mitch Marner). They forget the guy who gets the puck back. We're going to miss him, we don't have a ton of guys who do that, maybe even moreso on the PK."

RON IN RIELLY'S CORNER

Veteran Ron Hainsey has given defence partner Morgan Rielly invaluable lessons in the past couple of years, but Saturday's tutorial was backing up a teammate. When Rielly was nearly conked by Chris Wagner of the Bruins, in retaliation for Hyman's hit on Charlie McAvoy, the 37-year-old Hainsey quickly dropped his gloves.

"He got in there pretty quick," Rielly agreed. "I said thanks. "(Wagner's shot) is what it is. I have nothing to say, it's all good, we move on."

That hit followed a series of exchanges that went back to the opening shift. Nazem Kadri had gone after Brandon Carlo in the second period after claiming he was crosschecked too aggressively.

"It was great when Naz was kind of the first one to get in there and get dirty," Rielly said. "You would expect your team to respond and we did, but it didn't translate on the (scoreboard) as we would've wanted.

"That was not a game we were really happy with. So it was important that we came in today, went over some video, talked about a few things, had a good practice and get back on the road."

OLESKY JOINS LEAFS

The Leafs made two minor league deals with the Anaheim Ducks on Monday. Forward Adam Cracknell, who hoped to challenge for a fourth line job with the Leafs, is going to the San Diego Gulls for defenceman Steve Olesky, who played for the Marlies in 2016-17.

Goalie Jeff Glass is also headed to San Diego for future considerations.

LOOSE LEAFS

Tuesday will be Tavares's 700th NHL game ... Swedish defenceman Calle Rosen signed a two-year contract extension with the Leafs on Monday. Currently with the AHL Marlies, Rosen's deal has an AAV of \$750,000 for each year. He signed an ELC in 2017 ... Defenceman Timothy Liljegren is out of the Marlie lineup a few weeks with a high ankle sprain ... Jake Gardiner and Kadri will both pass Dan Daoust on the franchise games played chart this week, now at 520 and 519 respectively and are coming up on Bryan McCabe (523) for 33rd overall.

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KOSHAN GAMEDAY: Maple Leafs at Hurricanes

Terry Koshan

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

KOSHAN GAMEDAY: Maple Leafs at Hurricanes

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS at CAROLINA HURRICANES

7 p.m., PNC Arena, TSN, The Fan 590

BIG MATCHUP

Patrick Marleau vs. Justin Williams

Who insists the NHL is just a young man's game now? Patrick Marleau, at 39, and Justin Williams, at 37, might have something to say about that. Despite the greybeard status of each in his respective dressing room, Marleau (17 points in 30 games) and Williams (15 points in 28 games) maintain the ability to influence the outcome. Marleau is averaging 17 minutes, 25 seconds of ice time, while Williams comes in at 16 minutes, 42 seconds. Neither is playing out the string.

FIVE KEYS TO THE GAME

Bizarre reminder

Recall the Maple Leafs' most recent visit, on Nov. 21: The trigger-happy Hurricanes peppered Frederik Andersen with 29 shots on goal in the first period, but managed just 16 the rest of the way, winning 5-2 as they were bolstered by a couple of empty-net goals. Considering the Leafs have had time to regroup after losing in Boston on Saturday, there won't be any reason for a flat start, no matter how determined Carolina will be. The Hurricanes have not played since Friday.

Half-Auston, half-amazing

As much as Auston Matthews says that it takes some time to get re-adjusted after missing a span because of an injury, we're having a hard time believing it, and so are opponents. In five games since returning from his shoulder injury, Matthews has at least one point in each, scoring six goals and recording four assists. In five career games against the Hurricanes, Matthews has two goals and two assists. The Hurricanes will be in tough, especially with veteran Jordan Staal not available to keep an eye on Matthews.

Simple math



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Despite the Hurricanes' propensity for putting the puck on net — they were second in the NHL before Monday with 827 shots on goal during five-on-five play — they have not had much luck actually putting the puck in the net, netting just 44 goals at five-on-five, tied for second-fewest in the NHL. Their power play is suspect, and they don't come back, winning just four times in 16 games they have gone down 1-0. The Leafs are 14-0-1 when scoring first. Do it on Tuesday and a win is almost guaranteed.

Lack of Zach factor

Not to take anything away from the other Toronto players, but the Leafs lose their most diligent forward, and top penalty killer, with the two-game suspension to Zach Hyman. Since becoming a Leafs regular to start the 2016-17 season, Hyman has not missed a game, his work ethic setting an example each time he goes over the boards. With Hyman — among the more honest, cleanest players you will find — cooling his heels, Connor Brown and his high motor will get an opportunity on the left side with John Tavares and Mitch Marner.

White sweaters rule

Even with the loss to the Bruins, the Leafs' first of five consecutive away games, Toronto is one of the best road teams in the NHL with a record of 11-4-0, the 11 wins tying them with Colorado for the most in the league. Carolina is middling on home ice, compiling a 7-4-3 mark. The Leafs largely have been successful on the road because they start on time, are opportunistic and get solid goaltending from Andersen. The same will have to apply on Tuesday and later in the week.

MAPLE LEAFS LINES

LW-C-RW

Andreas Johnsson-Auston Matthews-Kasper Kapanen

Connor Brown-John Tavares-Mitch Marner

Patrick Marleau-Nazem Kadri-William Nylander

Par Lindholm-Frederik Gauthier-Tyler Ennis

Defence pairs

Morgan Rielly-Ron Hainsey

Jake Gardiner-Nikita Zaitsev

Travis Dermott-Igor Ozhiganov

Goaltenders

Frederik Andersen

Garret Sparks

HURRICANES LINES

LW-C-RW

Jordan Martinook-Sebastian Aho-Teuvo Teravainen

Andrei Svechnikov-Lucas Wallmark-Justin Williams

Warren Foegele-Victor Rask-Phil Di Giuseppe

Micheal Ferland-Clark Bishop-Brock McGinn

Defence pairs

Jacob Slavin-Doug Hamilton

Calvin de Haan-Justin Faulk

Trevor van Riemsdyk-Brett Pesce

Goaltenders

Petr Mrazek

Scott Darling

INJURIES

Hurricanes — C Jordan Staal (concussion), G Curtis McElhinney (lower body)

Maple Leafs — LW Zach Hyman (suspended).

SPECIAL TEAMS

Power play

Hurricanes: 15.8% (23rd)

Maple Leafs: 27.3% (5th)

Penalty kill

Hurricanes: 79.1% (17th)

Maple Leafs: 80% (14th)

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120439 Toronto Maple Leafs

Zach Hyman, Maple Leafs hold tongues after suspension

Lance Hornby

Zach Hyman is rarely called to the main stage of the Maple Leafs dressing room, the backdrop with the club logo usually reserved for the multimedia needs of stars Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner or coach Mike Babcock.

That's because he had never been called on the NHL carpet before being assessed a two-game suspension for Saturday's late hit on Boston's Charlie McAvoy, deemed "predatory" by Director Of Player Safety George Parros. It's the last place Hyman wanted to be standing Monday as his teammates prepared for games in Carolina on Tuesday and a vital first-place conference tussle Thursday in Tampa Bay.

Whether he thought he was sentenced unfairly for a first offence or other factors in the chippy contest should have been considered, Hyman was in no mood to rehash how Sunday's hearing unfolded.

"The play is out there, everybody can interpret it the way they want," Hyman said. "First time I've went through that process, hopefully I never have to again. That's what it is, I'm just getting ready for Saturday (returning against Florida)."

In Parros's video message, he noted how long after McAvoy moved the puck to the left that Hyman skated into him from the right. It seemed strange to hear the word predatory used in association with a player respected throughout the league for his puck pursuit — never missing a game the past three years — and blue collar work on behalf of John Tavares and Marner. But Hyman was trying not to be drawn into public comments he might regret.

"Listen, everyone is trying to do their job. I'm trying to do mine, George is trying to do his."

Hyman, whose off-ice pursuits include writing childrens' books, was adamant this incident won't change his style.

"I play hard, I play the way I play, going out there and doing my job," he said.

Babcock had a little more latitude for opinion, but was also measured in his response to the suspension.



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"Obviously disappointed," the coach said. "Zach's an important player for us. It was a game that could've got under control real easy, just put up your hand, blow the whistle and you get that looked after. It wasn't like that.

"He finished his check. According to the league, it was late. In the end, we move on."

Nazem Kadri, who was in one of three fights in the 6-3 loss that preceded Hyman's hit and attempted payback by Chris Wagner on Morgan Rielly, has served a few suspensions and was at least glad Hyman's clean rap sheet mitigated the length.

"Hymie plays a pretty honest game," Kadri said. "I'm sure he realizes he made a mistake."

Coming a few days after Niklas Kronwall's heavy hit shook up Matthews, the Boston aftermath reignited debate as to whether the Leafs are tough enough for the playoffs after that factored into their past two spring defeats.

"We're the type of team that will push back," Kadri said. "We won't go beat up every single person on the ice, but we're definitely going to show that bite-back. We've done a good job showing we won't be pushed around, no matter how hard you try, road or at home. It's about sticking up for one another and I think we have the quality guys in the room to do that.

"You don't want that (soft) reputation. That's kind of offensive to most teams I'd say. You don't need the physicality, you don't need the line brawls of today, but you need a little push back when somebody hits you."

Leafs' Hyman suspended two games by NHL for 'predatory' hit
Bruins maul Leafs in Boston again

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

Short-term, the Leafs are going to move Connor Brown from fourth-line right wing to the left side with Tavares and Marner, keep Matthews with Andreas Johnsson and Kasper Kapanen and continue letting William Nylander find his game with centre Kadri and Patrick Marleau. Brown's old spot will be taken by Tyler Ennis, while Frederik Gauthier is activated to go between Ennis and Par Lindholm.

"We've all played with each other for a number of years now," Kadri said. "Typically, if you have some (chemistry), you'll know right away."

Brown, Tavares and Marner are already being dubbed the GTA Line for their local connections.

"Two extremely skilled players who work hard," Brown praised. "It's important for me to be working with confidence and getting pucks back."

Brown is without a goal since Nov. 9.

"I had a couple of chances last game and they didn't fall. But it's important to stay with it, don't forget the little details in the game while trying to score. You don't want your work (ethic) to take a back seat."

MOM'S THE WORD

Mom's the word for the Leafs during this week's road trip.

After a few years of bringing their fathers along to experience life in the NHL, the team is hosting the better halves for games in Tampa Bay and Florida. The moms (or in a couple of cases, women who've had a positive influence in the players' lives) were to gather in Toronto for a team viewing party of the Carolina game on Tuesday night and then taken a private plane to Tampa Bay. They'll be at team meals and other social functions. A few even made it from

Europe for this. Often, the dads' presence elevated game performance.

Goalie Garret Sparks' mother Lisa is coming from Chicago.

"It doesn't happen without her," Garret said. "That could be said for a lot of guys in this room. Your parents are your support system when all else fails. A lot of her evenings were sacrificed.

"She made a lot of good friends through hockey, but being a hockey mom is a full-time job. You can't have a paying job if you're hopping on the road. We were in the car every Thursday night it seemed and the rest of the nights of the week were practices. We wouldn't be home until 11:30 p.m. and she had to get us out of bed for school in the morning. It's a full shift."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120440 Toronto Maple Leafs

Bourne: Mike Babcock's biggest challenge is convincing the Leafs that they can't win on talent alone

By Justin Bourne Dec 10, 2018

Listening to Mike Babcock talk after the Leafs loss to the Bruins on Saturday night, I found myself left with a single takeaway: this is a man who knows he has a good hockey team and isn't all that panicked by two mediocre-to-bad performances.

He made comments like: "Sometimes you get fed your lunch and tonight was one of those nights," which is the verbal equivalent of the emoticon shrug guy `¯_(ツ)_/¯`.

He followed that up with, "You'd like to win every game on the schedule, but you and I both know, we've been around long enough to know, you don't do that. So you want your ups to be longer than your downs, and ... sometimes you don't play as good. It's a good message that we have to be a lot better. I think we have to be a lot more competitive than we have the last two (games), so it's great that we had a nice little run there, now we have to regroup and have another one."

You really only see the good teams move on so casually after getting thumped on a big stage. When your team plays like dog's breath, only those that truly believe they're the real deal get to pull the emoticon-shrug. When teams don't believe? You get stuff like this, as a recent example, from a few St. Louis Blues players after their Sunday drubbing at the hands of the Vancouver Canucks – a team that was just a few points up on them in the standings prior to the game:

TARASENKO: "I APOLOGIZE TO ALL OUR FANS. WE CAN'T PLAY AT HOME LIKE THIS. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO FIX IT. WE WORK ON IT BUT IT DOESN'T WORK FOR NOW."

STEEN: "RIGHT NOW WE'RE NOT COMMITTED ENOUGH TO WHAT WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH"

SCHENN: "WE'RE A FRAGILE GROUP. IT COMES WITH LOSING"

— JEREMY RUTHERFORD (@JPRUTHERFORD) DECEMBER 9, 2018

"We don't know how to fix it." "We aren't committed." "We're fragile." Guys get damn near existential with their panic when they can feel the season slipping away. If they believed in what they have going on over there, those would not be the post-game soundbites. Some teams outside the playoffs looking in feel they've been unlucky, or



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that the schedule's been cruel, or that once they get healthy, they'll be good. That ain't the Blues.

Which brings us back to the Leafs and their poor showing in Boston (at least until the third period, with the game out of reach and the animosity out of control).

Before we go deeper into my confidence-based, armchair psychology theory on the Leafs last couple games, I'd be remiss not to acknowledge one of the most obvious reasons Thursday and Saturday were such disappointments.

They kinda got rubbish goaltending, which isn't a sentence that's been uttered many times this season.

Particularly in the case of Freddie Andersen, I think it's fair to say, "That's OK." He's been excellent all year and nobody plays up to their expectations 100 percent of the games they play. Over Andersen's last 11 starts, he's posted a .927 or higher save percentage 10 times. The Leafs shot attempt numbers in both games saw them on the right side of ledger, even before accounting for the desperation, third-period pushes. So, yes, goaltending was a big part of the overall outcome.

But let me pack my corn cob pipe and don some intellectual-looking flatcap here (that's how psychologists dress, right?) and dissect the confidence angle.

Prior to the Leafs game against the Detroit Red Wings, I wrote this: Why getting a star back into the lineup is often a "trap game". The "too-long; didn't read" version of that post is that sometimes other players will subconsciously sit back, feeling that the pressure is no longer on them to produce results. They no longer have to drive the bus. Clearly, I'm talking about William Nylander here, who returned to Toronto's lineup on Thursday.

Sure enough, the Wings ran out to a 4-1 lead when the worst possible thing that could've happened (injuries not included) to the Leafs happened. They turned it up a notch in the third, pounded the seemingly overwhelmed Wings, scored three and took the game to overtime.

I say "worst possible thing," because the Leafs were already an extremely confident group going into the Red Wings game, and surely the confidence was starting to bleed into over-confidence, whether they realized it or not. They rolled into that game after reeling off five straight wins and nine of their previous 11.

Being able to simply flip the switch and catch up in a single period when down three certainly couldn't have done much to dampen their confidence or inspire a "Gotta play the full 60" mentality. As a coach you'd almost rather take the "L" to prove playing 20 good minutes isn't going to cut it. The reality is, you know that when you're a good team you don't have to play your best to win, so it's tough to drum up that William Wallace charge-into-the-battlefield style passion 82 times per season, plus playoffs.

On its face, their next contest in Boston should've been an easy one to get up for. They were facing their division rival Bruins, a team who eliminated them in seven games this past postseason, on a Saturday night, on Hockey Night in Canada, after not taking two points from the 20th-place Wings. That's a game you'd think would scream "pedal down."

But if you looked at that Bruins roster before puck drop, combined with the seemingly swelling self-assuredness of the Leafs, you can see why it's possible they thought they were going to walk all over the Bruins. Boston was without Patrice Bergeron, Zdeno Chara and Jake DeBrusk. If you follow hockey, you're probably aware those are somewhat significant losses.

When you see that your opponent doesn't have a multitude of the players you've generally feared, it's not so much that players decide not to try, as they tend to come up short on desperation. Some nights the more laid back mindset of, "we should win this game

handily" benefits talented teams, as it leads to additional poise and patience. But on others, it plays right into the old NO FEAR t-shirt style axiom – hard work beats talent if talent doesn't work hard.

I've written before about how, during my time with the Toronto Marlies, we'd occasionally get caught off-guard by the success we'd have with makeshift lineups. We were often fortunate enough to be atop our division by a wide enough margin later in the year that we could bring in some college and junior and ECHL kids for a few games each to get a first-hand look at what they could do, looking towards the future. I distinctly remember looking at our roster one of those nights and joking about how bad we were going to get run over before playing a very good hockey club.

But lo, those young kids worked their bags off trying to impress, and frustrated the hell out of an opponent that likely felt they'd be walking all over a bunch of never-was players. As you'd expect, given that I brought this up, we surprised ourselves with a pretty convincing victory that night.

Along the same vein, the centers the Bruins ran out against the Leafs on Saturday consisted of David Krejci, Colby Cave, Sean Kuraly and Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson. The Leafs countered with Auston Matthews, John Tavares, Nazem Kadri and Par Lindholm.

Despite what should have been matchup nightmares all over the ice for the B's, the Leafs skill got outworked by not-exactly-household-names. Somehow Chris Wagner made himself relevant (albeit by attempted murder on Morgan Rielly). Waiver-wire pick-up Gemel Smith made his Bruins debut. Ryan Donato played just 10 minutes, yet scored.

Back to Mike Babcock and the two main points that he delivered during his post-game comments. The first was to say that his team wasn't competitive enough, which came from coach Babcock. The second comes from emoticon-shrug Babs, who despite likely being disappointed in the result doesn't see some fractured dressing room, or some deeply-flawed roster, or any reason to panic.

Every time a team loses, particularly the Maple Leafs, there's a rush from fans and media alike to ascribe deeper meaning to the team's failing than is actually present. And when you have confidence in your team, you don't need to over-correct to things that aren't really there. I don't know if anyone's had the chutzpah to put this in print yet, but I've already heard comments about William Nylander and his effect on the team being a negative one, based on the past two games. My point here is it's more likely the opposite. His teammates know he's so good that it probably pushed their confidence from a healthy level to one where they assume they can walk over lesser teams or injury depleted teams.

To be clear, I'm not saying Nylander's return is the sole reason for the Leafs lackluster showings the past two games, but rather a contributing factor to a team so confident they almost seem to be testing what's the bare minimum effort they can put in and still win.

That's going to be the biggest test for this Maple Leafs coaching staff. How do you coax the maximum effort possible out of your group each night when they know they have the talent to have success, even if they don't play like it's Game 7 of the Final? How do you keep your group from playing down to the level of inferior opponents? How do you stay on your guys without over-selling every opponent, which leads guys to not believe you when you're actually trying to sell an underrated opponent (the Boy Who Cried Wolf conundrum of coaching), which leads to them tuning out your voice?

The past few seasons in Toronto Mike Babcock has made less than subtle remarks about him simply not having the tools (players) to compete with the best in the league, particularly at the center position. While the current roster certainly isn't perfect, I don't think that's a card he gets to play anymore. Having enough skill on your roster to win, and win often, creates its own challenges, a variety of which Maple Leafs fans haven't seen much of over the past 50 years or so.



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This group knows they're good, which is great. But to be great, Babs biggest task might be convincing them they're just good.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120441 Toronto Maple Leafs

Inside the Maple Leafs' secret jam band

By Joshua Kloke Dec 10, 2018

Andreas Johnsson walked into Travis Dermott's apartment with a goal. He had learned a song on his acoustic guitar last year and had been repeatedly playing it. Now, in the company of his Maple Leafs teammates, he wanted to bring that song to life.

"OK, play it," said Justin Holl, seated at a keyboard nearby.

Slowly, Johnsson began strumming the chords to Justin Bieber's "Love Yourself" before his teammates could not contain their laughter any longer.

"We just thought it was hilarious that was the one song he wanted to learn," Holl said.

That was the scene at a regular session of the Maple Leafs secret jam band, a revolving door of up to six different players who all congregate, or plan to, at Dermott's apartment for some much needed time away from the rink.

Holl, on keyboards and vocals, and Dermott, on acoustic guitar, are the de facto band leaders and have lofty expectations for anyone who enters the apartment. Johnsson plays acoustic guitar. The unnamed band is also slowly working goaltender Garret Sparks into the mix. Sparks mixes his own music on his computer with Virtual DJ.

Now that the Leafs best player has returned from a shoulder injury, the band will begin auditioning Auston Matthews to tie the whole thing together as their drummer. Matthews recently acquired a drum set for the express purpose of joining this band.

"I can't wait. I hope I'm good enough," Matthews said.

Matthews was impressed when Holl performed his rendition of The Weeknd's "Reminder" on his mini-piano on a recent road trip.

"It's actually really good," said Matthews, raising his eyelids in approval. "I didn't know he was that far advanced."

Still, the undisputed face of the franchise is nervous about his chances in making the band, as it were.

"I might not last," said Matthews.

Holl is optimistic.

"We've got our band now," said Holl, nodding his head and narrowing his eyes with the look of a man who could have served as an extra on Dazed and Confused.

The band welcomes the camaraderie that music making brings, as well as the opportunity to roast their teammates.

Johnsson, after all, barely survived the audition. Soon afterwards, his appearances at jam sessions have become less and less frequent as he complained that playing the guitar hurt his fingers. And given his recent hot streak — 10 points in his last seven games — it's hard to blame him for wanting to take care of those hands.

"We're going to find a new instrument for Johnny," said Dermott.

"I've been searching around to find something that fits for my personality," said Johnsson, who would still like to play with the band on a more regular basis.

"We were thinking, with his personality, we might get the triangle going," said Dermott, as both players double over with laughter. "Something really simple."

Each band member brings a specific element to Holl and Dermott's musical approach. They'll meet as often as they can, which, depending on road trips, can be up to once a week.

For three hours, they'll focus on mastering a single song. Their set list is tremendously varied: They've got a stranglehold on Jefferson Starship's 1979 classic rock banger "Jane," ("It's got a nice keyboard riff," said Holl) and can also stake a Top 40 claim as well, recently learning the moody, atmospheric hip-hop track "Falling Down," by rappers Lil Peep and XXXTentacion.

After a few times playing together, their musical vision is starting to come into focus.

"We'll take faster-paced songs and slow them down completely to give them a completely different feel," Dermott said.

While he's personally drawn to country music, Dermott's tastes aren't limited. There's a common interest in electronic music, despite the fact that many songs don't easily lend themselves to being played on an acoustic guitar.

The next song they're trying to master is the pulsating deadmau5 track, "Strobe."

But instead of painting by numbers, the group has found that in trying to slow things down, they've gained confidence as to what they could eventually sound like.

"We're starting to put our own twists on songs," Dermott said. "We push each other, which is cool, to get stuff going."

The respective members' introduction to music is varied.

Holl took piano lessons when he was a child. But when so many of his friends began only playing hockey, he gave up his piano lessons as well.

"Because I was an idiot," said Holl. "I was playing sports with all my friends and all we thought about was sports."

Dermott took guitar lessons for a few months when he was 13, but never pursued playing seriously until Holl approached him about playing together. He now plays his guitar after practices and games to unwind.

Johnsson played the guitar from time to time growing up, but only began playing it more seriously over the last few years in Toronto because he felt "under stimulated" in his downtime.

Matthews messed around on a drum kit in Arizona when his musically-inclined neighbours had a house full of instruments.

"But I was no good," said Matthews with a smile.

And Sparks has a deep-seated passion for not only making music, but living the life of a musician. He openly admits that were he not a hockey player, he'd gladly welcome the life of a starving artist.

"You don't want to be a starving artist until your one true passion becomes your only way to make money," said Sparks. "There's something kind of appealing then, about being a starving artist."

In a time when more and more NHL players are becoming comfortable breaking from tradition and providing insight into their personalities by sharing their interests outside of hockey, this Leafs band could become something of an example throughout the league.



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Holl, Dermott, Matthews and Johnsson's eyes all lit up when asked about the importance of finding, and pursuing, a passion outside of hockey.

"All of a sudden I'm 26 years old and I'm having a slight mid-life crisis," said Holl. "I realized, 'I've gotta do something.'"

The NHL has had its share of solo musicians in the past.

Former Leaf and noted rock music aficionado Joffrey Lupul has said he began playing the guitar during his rookie season with the Anaheim Mighty Ducks because of the amount of spare time he found himself with.

New York Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist is no stranger to the acoustic guitar either.

And recently departed Leaf Leo Komarov wasn't shy about showing off his skills on the piano during a 2014 visit to Sick Kids Hospital.

These Leafs might be able to make a claim as being one of the few groups of players to have formed a band in-season among teammates.

And it's unlikely many within the organization would mind.

Since Kyle Dubas took over as GM of the Leafs in May, he has encouraged players to express themselves, whether that be growing out their facial hair, asking for opinions on team matters or, in this case, considering life after hockey by honing musical skills during the season.

"We want them to have interests outside of hockey, to be able to express themselves as individuals," Dubas said in September. "My philosophy has been if a person feels they're at their best as an individual, they're going to have their most to give to the team."

And as one of the band leaders, Holl isn't just in charge of the musical direction, but also ensuring potential bandmates feel comfortable enough to play along. He doesn't find any benefit in players being consumed strictly by hockey.

"It feels good to do something constructive. When you feel like you're actually learning something and valuable," said Holl. "We have so much free time, it'd be a waste not to use it and learn something that you want to do for the rest of your life. That's the big takeaway for me: the more you play, the more you want to learn, because you feel like you're doing something useful."

Dermott agrees.

"You can drown yourself in the game," said Dermott. "That'll hurt you more than help you. You love the game, and you do everything you can to be successful, but it's not a 24-hour job. You've got to get your mind off it somehow."

Many of the Leafs are admitted video game fanatics, but Dermott considers those in the band to be the renaissance men on the Leafs.

"You get sick of Fortnite eventually," he said, grinning.

While the band has yet to perform in front of the rest of the team, curiosity has been piqued among the rest of the Leafs.

Forward Connor Brown said he's seen photos of them playing on Snapchat and would welcome a performance at an upcoming team event.

"It would be really interesting to hear...one song," Brown said, laughing. "I'd give them a chance. And then if they're any good, I'd give them an encore."

Brown has never heard Holl sing, but isn't surprised that he'd be the one to take the microphone.

"Well he's a confident guy," said Brown. "He's got some swagger. He's comfortable in his own skin."

It's no surprise then that Holl isn't shying away from the opportunity to, along with the rest of the band, perform in front of his teammates. Perhaps their first gig could come at the team's upcoming Christmas party?

"If there's a keyboard present," said Holl, "and enough drinks, then yea, probably."

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1120367 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens' Andrew Shaw found it fun playing against former teammate and friend Jonathan Toews

Andrew Shaw still has a soft spot for Chicago, the city where he began his NHL career.

PAT HICKEY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Andrew Shaw still has a soft spot for Chicago, the city where he began his NHL career.

He counts some of his former teammates among his circle of friends, but he's all business when the puck drops and that's why you could find him in a shoving match with Blackhawks' captain Jonathan Toews during Sunday's game at the United Center.

"Once you get out there, it's talky," Shaw said after the Canadiens escaped with a 3-2 win. "He probably hates playing against me as much as I hate playing against him. But off the ice, we're still friends, we still talk, we still keep in touch and see how each other is doing. But it was fun playing against him."

Shaw picked up an assist earlier in the game and he goes into Tuesday's game against the Minnesota Wild (8 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio) with a four-game point streak.

Shaw was hampered by injuries last season. There was a concussion or two and a knee injury that required surgery in the off-season. The surgery was delayed while he dealt with the concussion issue and there was some concern that he would miss the start of the season.

Shaw was in the lineup for the season opener and, after a slow start, he has become a key in the Canadiens' success to date. His assist Sunday gave him 17 points (eight goals, nine assists) and he is on pace for his best season as a Canadien. Two seasons ago, he had 29 points in 68 games and last year, he had 20 points in 51 games. He is currently sixth in team scoring and only four Canadiens have scored more goals.

Claude Julien has used Shaw in a variety of roles. He has played right wing with Max Domi and Jonathan Drouin and Julien has also used him with rookie Jesperi Kotkanen and Arturi Lehkonen and he has contributed to both lines. He also sees action on the penalty kill and the second power-play unit.

"There was a little rust in the beginning of the season, but Shawzy has played well," said general manager Marc Bergevin, who scouted Shaw and recommended him to the Blackhawks, who drafted him in the fifth round in 2011. Bergevin traded for him in 2016, giving up two second-round picks.

"I was 20 when I moved here alone, no money, no car, nothing, and had a lot of success, a lot of fun, a lot of good memories," said Shaw. "Obviously I'm going to miss it here, but I got a great group of guys (in Montreal). We have a lot of fun, we all love each other, it's great. We're playing in a great city, a great hockey market. I miss (Chicago) but it's fun in Montreal."



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While Shaw has moved on, he still has sympathy for the Blackhawks, who have the worst record in the NHL.

"We know what it feels like," Shaw told reporters after the game. "We went through it last year. It's tough but it'll make you a better person, make you work harder, make you dig a little deeper, make you more mentally strong for the year, I think.

"Things aren't going well for them right now, but they've still got a lot of great hockey players over there that can do a lot of great things, just have to stick to their guns and keep competing," added Shaw.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120368 Montreal Canadiens

What the Puck: Canadiens reaching playoffs might not be a good omen

If the Habs reach the post-season in the spring, you can say goodbye to any notion of a proper rebuild.

BRENDAN KELLY, MONTREAL GAZETTE

I have some bad news for you today. The Montreal Canadiens are going to make the playoffs.

Of course I'm partly trying to get a rise out of you, but there's also some truth to the notion that there is, in fact, a downside to the Habs squeezing into the NHL post-season this year. As of Monday morning, our heroes have a pretty solid grip on the second and last wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. Montreal has 35 points, a full four points ahead of their closest rival, the New York Rangers, though the blueshirts have a game in hand.

We are only 30 games into this 82-game marathon, so it goes without saying that there's no guarantee Montreal will hang on to a wild-card spot. But given that Christmas is only two weeks away, they are in a good position to make the playoffs. And let's face it, that's not something most of us thought would happen this season.

It's always nice to have a playoff series to watch, but the possibility of making the post-season ensures that, yet again, Montreal will not undergo anything like a proper rebuild. For the millionth time, Habs management is going for short-term gain over long-term gain.

Is that a good idea? It sure is if you're general manager Marc Bergevin and your goal is to hang on to your job. But if you are really looking at the medium-term future of the team, it's not. Let's say the Canadiens slip into the playoffs. Anything can happen in the postseason, as Bergevin has said, but in all likelihood they'll lose in the first round, just as they did in spring 2017 (a 4-2 series loss to the Rangers), the last time they made the post-season.

The other possibility is that they'll narrowly miss the playoffs, which has happened so many times since their last Stanley Cup win in 1993. Remember all those seasons that came down to the last game — almost inevitably a Montreal-Toronto matchup — to decide the Habs' fate? That's what I like to call the cycle of mediocrity. Never really contending, never really tanking, rarely getting high draft picks.

I admit I'm in glass-half-empty mode. Maybe it's because I watched the Canadiens-Blackhawks game Sunday night and it eerily reminded me of so many Habs games prior to this season. In other words, it wasn't won with the speed, skill and grit of the youngsters, but rather those undeserved two points came courtesy of a stellar effort from Carey Price, who looked like the Price of old. His stats this season are still downright awful, but he looks like a changed man since his buddy Shea Weber has shown up on the scene.

Weber has also looked terrific since returning from a year lost to injuries. He scored another one of those rocket-from-the-point goals Sunday, shots that seemingly cannot be stopped by any human goalie. The Man Mountain is indeed a force of nature, which I've always said, despite all the Bergevinites who continually claim that I'm a Weber hater. (Note to the social-media trolls: It is possible to believe that Weber and P.K. Subban are both superb hockey players.)

So as the season deepens and the games tighten and toughen up, it'll be Price and Weber who win them for the Habs. And I predict a lot of those wins will be like Sunday's 3-2 snoozer — close one-goal games decided by goaltending. I'm also predicting head coach Claude Julien will tighten things up and slowly move back to the conservative style that's always been his bread and butter. And one more prediction: Bergevin, seeing that playoff goal in sight, will make some trades to try to make that dream a reality, which is short-term gain over long-term planning.

One last thing. The Habs power play sucks eggs. I understand that you already know this, but please explain to me why no one is calling out Kirk Muller for this? Kirk Is Work is loved in this town for his gritty leadership as a player, but he is responsible for the third-worst power play in the NHL and, from the cheap seats, it looks like he's not even trying to improve it.

The power-play strategy can be summed up in one word — Weber. That is not much of a strategy.

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1120369 Montreal Canadiens

How the Seattle expansion draft could impact the Canadiens in 2021

By Marc Antoine Godin Dec 10, 2018

A lot will change between now and the summer of 2021. There will be three more Stanley Cup champions, future members of the Hockey Hall of Fame will have retired and the Edmonton Oilers will hit Year 14 of their rebuild.

A lot of water will flow under the bridge before then, but starting right now, NHL general managers will begin planning for the expansion draft to come and define which of their current players are truly members of their core group.

The fact Seattle will enter the NHL in 2021 instead of 2020 changes things considerably for the Canadiens because a number of significant players — Brendan Gallagher, Tomas Tatar, Phillip Danault and Jeff Petry — could become unrestricted free agents a few days after the expansion draft is held. Marc Bergevin will therefore need to decide which of those players he will want to keep and sign to new contracts well before July 1.

The expansion draft rules will be the same for Seattle as they were for the Vegas Golden Knights: every team can protect seven forwards, three defencemen and a goalie, or eight skaters and a goalie. Players with a no movement clause must be protected. Having already spoken to him about it, Bergevin feels the main impact of Seattle's arrival will be handing out those clauses to free agents he is trying to attract to Montreal.

Gary Bettman announced at the last NHL Board of Governors meeting that an \$83-million salary cap is projected for next season and, barring a work stoppage, there's little reason to believe it will stop rising in the near future. Over the next two summers, the Canadiens will not have any important contracts that will need to be



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either renewed or taken off the books and could therefore remain far below the salary ceiling. But Bergevin will also have a lot of money to spend on free agents if he so chooses. Without knowing the inevitable trades that will take place between now and then, we can safely assume some of that cap space will be used to sign at least one player who could find himself on the Canadiens' protected list in June of 2021.

Seattle's arrival in 2021 instead of 2020 also means anyone playing in the NHL right now will not be exempt from the expansion draft, and therefore would have to take up another spot on the protected list. Only players with two years of professional experience or less are exempt, which means by then Jesperi Kotkaniemi would need to be protected, whereas if Seattle had arrived in 2020, he wouldn't be eligible to be picked. Only players who have yet to begin their NHL career – like Ryan Poehling, Nick Suzuki and Josh Brook – will be exempt in 2021.

We are well aware that the roster will change and that new players could warrant a spot on this list. For their sake, we hope so. But we will go through this exercise using the existing roster. (Player's age at the start of the 2021-22 season is in parentheses).

Forwards

Locks

Jesperi Kotkaniemi (21) – After three professional seasons he will no longer be exempt. After three professional seasons he will have also shown just how crucial he is to the success of the Canadiens.

Jonathan Drouin (26) – He is a cornerstone of the Canadiens offence, most notably on the power play. His best years are ahead of him and his level of engagement is starting to get more consistent. His production should be sufficient that the \$5.5-million he earns annually will be seen as very good value in 2021.

Max Domi (26) – A very pleasant surprise at his new position, by the time we reach 2021 he will have already signed a long-term contract to stay in Montreal the summer before and we can expect to see him centering one of the top two lines for several more years.

Brendan Gallagher (29) – The pulse of the Canadiens will be eligible to negotiate a new contract a year before the expansion draft. Bergevin will then be faced with the dilemma of paying Gallagher for what he's already done, paying him for what he will do, or a bit of both. But barring some kind of drastic change in his play, Gallagher should be in a Canadiens uniform for years after the expansion draft.

Strong candidates

Paul Byron (32) – Signing him to a four-year contract extension just before this season began showed the level of confidence Bergevin has in Byron's ability to avoid the decline that usually hits at age 30 thanks to his speed. Byron will have two years left on that contract when the expansion draft hits. Assuming he doesn't slow down or get hit with injuries or lose his ability to score 20 goals a year by then, he should still be worth the \$3.4-million a year he will be paid. If any of those things happen, the Canadiens might be tempted to leave Byron exposed in the expansion draft, but that doesn't seem likely as far as we're concerned.

Artturi Lehkonen (26) – An exercise such as this one requires a big picture point of view, one that is not unduly prejudiced by what is going on right now. Even the most fervent supporter of Lehkonen, such as Claude Julien, have been waiting to see more production. But it's also difficult to see Lehkonen running in place for much longer. He has enough desirable attributes to make him an attractive commodity; notwithstanding the goals he'll score, his well-rounded game means he will contribute in several aspects of the game. His offensive potential might be worth questioning right now, but his usefulness to the Canadiens should not be.

Potential candidates

Tomas Tatar (30) – He has found a niche in Montreal and there is little doubt he is currently one of the seven most important forwards on the team. But how important will he be when his contract expires in the summer of 2021? Tatar will be 30 by then and, assuming the Canadiens have progressed, he won't have quite as important of a role. So many factors come into play while trying to read the tea leaves, so much so that it is impossible to even say whether or not Tatar will still be on the team by then.

Phillip Danault (28) – His contract worth a little more than \$3-million a year will be up in the summer of 2021. Danault has taken over from Tomas Plekanec as the Canadiens' do-it-all centre and he is filling the role admirably. But his importance to the team will probably never be greater than it is this season. The continued progression of Domi and Kotkaniemi could, in the very near future, see Danault relegated to centering the third line. In the longer term, Danault's importance could be lessened further by the arrival of Ryan Poehling. Put all that together and you get a scenario where it's possible Danault and the Canadiens could be at a crossroads by the time of the expansion draft. If Danault wants to play in Montreal his whole career — there is little doubt the Canadiens would love to have him — he might need to accept a lesser role — and salary. In the months leading up to the decision of who to protect, Bergevin will have a good idea of Danault's demands for a new contract. If he wants a bigger role, and more importantly wants to be paid that way, the Canadiens might decide to let him walk.

Joel Armia (28) – The Canadiens' front office has seen something in Armia since his arrival in Montreal. The sample size remains very small and his role on the team is yet to be clearly defined. But if Armia, with his big body presence, his skilled hands and his defensive responsibility, continues to show his value over the coming months he has a chance to become a core member of the team. Personally, I'm not convinced — he's not a great skater and he lacks touch around the net — but before his injury Armia was bringing things that are not in great supply on this team. We'll see if the evaluation remains the same next year. Armia's contract is up at the end of this season and he might have already earned a new one with his play this season. But barring an unexpected offensive explosion, we hope the Canadiens have better options for their protected list.

They should be available

Andrew Shaw (30) – He's had a very good run playing with Drouin and Domi recently and, generally, has reaffirmed his importance to the team this season. But every season adds more wear and tear and his \$3.9-million cap hit could be problematic in 2021. Being left off the protected list won't mean he's no longer useful to the Canadiens, it's just difficult seeing him being one of the seven most useful forwards on the team at that point.

Charles Hudon (27) – Will he still be with the Canadiens in three years? Or at the end of the month?

Kenny Agostino (29), Matthew Peca (28), Nicolas Deslauriers (30) and Michael Chaput (29) – Each of these players will have become unrestricted free agents well before the expansion draft; those still on the team at that point will be made available.

Jake Evans (25) and Lukas Vejdemo (25) – The two Laval Rocket prospects will be made available as well. Ideally, at least one of the two will have found a role on the Canadiens by then.

Defence

Locks

Shea Weber (36) – Even at 36, it is difficult to see how the Canadiens would turn their back on their captain, best defenceman and most respected player just because he is getting older and will not be worth his \$7.857-million cap hit at that point. In fact, Weber seems to have every element of a defenceman who, even if he lacks mobility, could find a way to be effective until he is 40.



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Strong candidates

Noah Juulsen (24) – There appears to be a certain amount of untapped offensive potential here, perhaps we'll see it in the next two years. For now, Juulsen lacks some consistency, but when projecting three years from now he looks like the type of defenceman who could be solid in every area. There is little risk in investing in him as a future top-4 defenceman.

Victor Mete (23) – He won't get any bigger between now and 2021 and his shot probably won't become that much more fearsome, but Mete is still too young to make definitive conclusions about his ability to produce offensively at the NHL level. His ceiling might not be that high, but until Josh Brook arrives, he and Juulsen are the best young talents the Canadiens have on the blueline. It's precious. His development curve may have leveled a bit this season, but things would need to go seriously sideways for the Canadiens to be ready to lose him for nothing to Seattle.

Potential candidate

Cale Fleury (22) – This is an interesting case. Haydn's younger brother joined the Laval Rocket this season at age 20 because he played four years in junior and he's a late birthday. Like Kotkaniemi, Fleury would have been exempt if the expansion draft was held in 2020, but now the Canadiens will be forced to make an important decision on a defenceman who will be only 22 when Seattle makes its picks. It's very possible that Fleury might not have established himself in the NHL by then, but the Canadiens like him and see him as a good prospect.

They should be available

Jeff Petry (33) – If the expansion draft had taken place in 2020, Petry would have likely been the most difficult decision for the Canadiens. He would have been on the verge of beginning the final year of his contract, one where he has the right to submit a list of 15 teams he can refuse to be traded to. In 2020, the Canadiens would have been faced with one of three scenarios: protect Petry instead of one of Mete or Juulsen, protect four defencemen and four forwards or trade Petry to one of the teams that is not on his list of 15. Because the expansion draft is in 2021, Petry will become a free agent at age 33 and could be reaching the end of his time with the Canadiens regardless of expansion. Ironically, the one-year delay in the expansion draft might have extended Petry's time in Montreal by a year.

Brett Kulak (27) – Kulak, who was exposed by the Calgary Flames for the 2017 expansion draft, is the flavour of the month on the Canadiens blueline. But what are the chances that a player who began the season with the Laval Rocket will become so vital that he would need to be protected? Bergevin already managed to strike gold by claiming Byron off waivers from the Flames, but lightning rarely strikes twice in the same place. We'll see. There is one technicality to keep in mind here; if the Canadiens decide to protect Weber, Mete and Juulsen, the expansion draft rules dictate they will need to make a defenceman available who is under contract for the 2021-22 season who played 40 games the previous season or 70 games the two previous seasons. If either Kulak or Mike Reilly are signed to a contract next summer, that obligation should be filled. The Canadiens could also sign a free agent defenceman specifically to meet this requirement. It's happened elsewhere.

Mike Reilly (28) – Like Kulak and Xavier Ouellet, Reilly will have arbitration rights this summer and his status on the team might change as a result. He and Ouellet might be unrestricted free agents by the time the expansion draft hits. The Minnesota native was not protected by the Wild for the last expansion draft and it's hard to see him being protected this time. He still has time to turn things around and force the Canadiens' hand, when it comes to both the lineup, and eventually, the protected list. But his as it stands right now, that's not likely to happen.

Xavier Ouellet (28) – The lesson learned from the Golden Knights expansion is that there are many decent defencemen available in an exercise like this. Will Ouellet, who just cleared waivers on his way to Laval, be considered one of them? Not likely.

Karl Alzner (33) – If his contract is not bought out by then, he will obviously be available for Seattle. Aside from Weber, he is the only current Canadiens defenceman signed past the summer of 2021.

Jordie Benn (34) and David Schlemko (34) – Benn will be an unrestricted free agent this summer and Schlemko the summer after that, so both of these defencemen are unlikely to be with the Canadiens in 2021. And if they are, they will clearly be exposed in the expansion draft.

Goalies

Locks

Carey Price (34) – He has an iron-clad no movement clause and will be protected.

They should be available

Antti Niemi (38) – Niemi is year-to-year at this point in his career, but we don't like his chances of still being in the NHL in 2021.

Charlie Lindgren (27) – Another player who will be an unrestricted free agent in the summer of 2021, if he hasn't grabbed the job as Price's backup by then and decided to continue his career elsewhere, the Canadiens will need to find a goalie to make available to Seattle, which wouldn't be a huge problem. Two years ago, Al Montoya signed a two-year deal so he could serve that purpose for the Canadiens in the Vegas expansion. It's too early to tell if Lindgren will be that goaltender this time around, but he's in the pole position.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, it would come as no surprise if the Canadiens used their available cap space over the next two years to add a forward or defenceman who would make his way onto their protected list in 2021. But until that happens, with what they have on the roster currently, it seems clear for now that the Canadiens would go with a protected list of seven forwards, three defencemen and a goalie:

Forwards

Jesper Kotkaniemi

Jonathan Drouin

Max Domi

Brendan Gallagher

Paul Byron

Artturi Lehkonen

Phillip Danault

Defence

Shea Weber

Noah Juulsen

Victor Mete

Goalie

Carey Price

Right now, with a number of contracts to be signed in the interim, it would appear that the best player available for Seattle from the Canadiens would be one of their blueliners.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.11.2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1120447 Washington Capitals

Capitals T.J. Oshie 'hoping' to play Tuesday after missing past 11 games due to concussion

By Samantha Pell December 10

Washington Capitals forward T.J. Oshie stepped onto the ice at the team's practice facility Monday in a familiar red practice jersey that signaled he had been cleared for contact. As he skated with his teammates for the first time since suffering a concussion on Nov. 14, the 11-year NHL veteran had a recurring thought: The ice was too crowded.

Oshie had been getting used to skating by himself, embracing the empty sheet as he went through cone drills, trying to gain clearance to play in his first game in just under a month.

"[I] felt pretty good out there," Oshie said after Monday's practice. "At times felt like there was too many men on the ice, not enough space compared to when it's just me by myself out there, but felt pretty good."

Oshie said he is "hoping" to play Tuesday against the Detroit Red Wings after going through Monday's full practice. Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said there is a "possibility" Oshie plays against Detroit after missing 11 games, but the plan was for him to go through practice Monday and then see how he did in the afternoon.

The team will reevaluate Oshie's playing status Tuesday morning.

"Today was a full one," Oshie said. "I passed all the tests I got to pass. I was in a red jersey, not a baby blue today or a soft blue as I like to call it. I'm hoping to [play]. I got a good relationship with [head athletic trainer Jason Serbus] back there. . . . I put my trust in him and see what he says and go from there."

[The Capitals wanted more offense from the fourth line. They're starting to get it.]

The Capitals have gone 9-2 without Oshie, as well as several other injured players. Defenseman Brooks Orpik, who had arthroscopic surgery on his right knee Nov. 20, is still recovering and was not at Monday's practice. Reirden said there is no timetable for Orpik's return.

Capitals forward Tom Wilson also has missed the past two games because of his own concussion suffered against Vegas last Tuesday. Wilson was not at Monday's practice, but Reirden said he participated in an off-ice workout and is hoping he skates this week. Before getting hurt, Wilson had eight goals and six assists in 11 games.

Forward Andre Burakovsky had skated in Wilson's top-line right wing spot Saturday night against Columbus, but Oshie was taking line rushes as the top right wing alongside captain Alex Ovechkin and center Nicklas Backstrom on Monday.

Oshie also was practicing Monday with the first-team power-play unit, which has sin his absence.erson," Reirden said of Oshie. ". . . We are very fortunate to have him here in Washington."

Oshie also was practicing Monday with the first-team power-play unit, which has struggled in his absence.

"He's a special player in all aspects of the game, but certainly on the power play for us and in that diamond spot he does a really good job on the entries in terms of controlled entries," Reirden said. "When we do have to dump pucks in, he is good at recoveries. His work ethic and instincts to be able to win puck battles, I just think it increases our whole intensity of how our power play recovers pucks."

While it is seemingly likely that Oshie plays Tuesday, he is recovering from the fifth reported concussion of his career. Before getting hurt, Oshie had scored nine goals with five assists in 18 games.

"It's frustrating," Oshie said of the concussions. "Feel like each time it gets more and more frustrating. But no, I stuck with it. Had some good workouts and skates. . . . Brooks was here all week so I had some company, but you know I had a lot of support from the guys behind me, supporting me, texting me, seeing how I am doing. Those kind of things kind of get you through, and plus the holidays from family in town, spending time with the girls at home, with my wife, it was a good little break."

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

Last year, Oshie missed six games because of a concussion. He was injured against San Jose on Dec. 4, 2017, after San Jose's Joe Thornton crunched Oshie's head against the glass with his backside. Oshie struggled to return from that concussion, his fourth, but said he learned from those lessons last year. He said the hardest part is just trying to get his game back to where it was before the head injury.

"It's my fifth time around so, you know, you expect the game to feel a little fast when you get back," Oshie said. "You expect your game shape to not be there, the reads, the maximal effort you get in battles in backchecking situations or even forechecking situations. It is just hard to simulate that when you are out there skating around cones and stuff."

As far as his long-term health, or even imminent health, Oshie said he isn't scared of the possibilities.

"I feel like when I go out there, if I get concerned with what is going to happen to me, I am not going to play at the top of my game, so it doesn't really concern me," Oshie said. "I just kind of roll with the punches every day and, you know, if it does, it does. Hopefully it doesn't."

Washington Post LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120448 Washington Capitals

For former Capitals coach Barry Trotz, no regrets, only memories

By Brian McNally December 10, 2018 7:05 PM

NEW YORK — Barry Trotz's voice wavered, but it did not break.

In four years with the Capitals he had addressed his players as a group thousands of times just like this one, including in the champagne-soaked, jubilant aftermath of the organization's first Stanley Cup on June 7 in Las Vegas.

In the visiting locker room at Barclays Center in Brooklyn last month, no longer their coach but a competitor, Trotz accepted his championship ring from Washington captain Alex Ovechkin and gave an emotional speech that addressed the crushing pressure his former team had worked under until they finally broke through together. It was all worth it.

"I'll die a happy man," Trotz told them.

If there was any lingering resentment about how Trotz's time in Washington ended this past summer, it wasn't on display in the dressing room before the Capitals played the New York Islanders on Nov. 26.



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The defending champions are almost intact. Forward Jay Beagle signed as a free agent in Vancouver, backup goalie Philipp Grubauer was traded to Colorado and Trotz, with assistant coaches Lane Lambert and Mitch Korn, was hired by New York.

Trotz left Washington a champion, unable to accept the terms of a contract clause that kicked in for winning the title. He resigned instead and quickly accepted the challenge of coaching the Islanders, a franchise in transition after losing star center Jonathan Tavares in free agency over the summer.

"I want to do the same thing with this group, hopefully build something and share the same moments and the bond that happens when you win a championship," Trotz said. "But it is closure. I'm a New York Islander. I'm not a Washington Capital."

That's a jarring statement from the man who holds the second-most victories in franchise history (205) behind only Bryan Murray (343). Washington won two Presidents' Trophies under Trotz for the NHL's best record and finally broke through with a Cup after three devastating second-round playoff exits.

But the Capitals had a coach-in-waiting in assistant Todd Reirden, who had been on staff with Trotz for four years. And the writing was on the wall when Trotz didn't receive a contract extension in the summer of 2017. He would have to earn a new deal by going further in the playoffs than he ever had in 18 years as an NHL head coach, further than his players ever had.

They responded by winning a title, and there was money to be made elsewhere. If the relationship at times was rocky, there were no hard feelings at the end. There is the sport of hockey, which Trotz loves, and there is the business, and the two mingled together too often during a memorable but trying season.

"I knew that was an important year for myself, it was an important year for the whole franchise, it was an important year for the key players," Trotz said. "I saw the pressures that were put on those young men. And there is. It was real."

"When I first got to Washington you could feel it a little bit. By year three and four you could feel that. It was real. There was a tremendous amount of pressure. You get 16, 17,000 people and they're all thinking 'Okay here we go again.' That's the wrong energy. And I think I stated that. I said 'I need your help. We need your help. Think positive. Help us out.' Those guys battled through it. That's the thing that I admire about them."

But just six days after the parade down Constitution Avenue, Trotz quit. He planned to head to his cabin in British Columbia, but first met with Islanders team president Lou Lamoriello to hear his vision for the future there. Trotz then flew to Seattle and on to his cabin, where he talked to his wife, Kim, and family – daughters Shalan and Tiana, sons Nolan and Tyson - about the new opportunity. On June 21 he agreed to terms with New York.

That started a whirlwind summer for Trotz, which he called "the most hectic of my life." He accepted the job with the Islanders, he moved Kim and Nolan, who is special needs, to New York, hired a coaching staff, Shalan had a destination wedding in Maui and Trotz had his day with the Stanley Cup in his hometown of Dauphin, Manitoba.

"I thought I'd put my feet up at my cabin for a few months and ended up back working days after that," Trotz said. "It's been good. I was a little worried that it would get to me at some point, but it hasn't. I think I'm in a good spot, fortunate to be back on the island and hopefully we're starting to grow something here."

That remains to be seen without Tavares, who signed with the Toronto Maple Leafs and ranked ninth in the NHL in goals (18) entering play Monday. Yet Trotz has kept New York believing. To the shock of everyone, the Islanders began Monday in third place in the Metropolitan Division and in a playoff spot through 28 games. That

could change quickly, but if he gets them there Trotz will be a heavy favorite for the Jack Adams Award as coach of the year.

The day of the ring presentation – Washington won the game that night 4-1 – Trotz took to the ice at the Islanders' practice rink in East Meadow, New York in his distinctive orange-and-blue warmups for the morning skate. He looped around shouting instructions at players as he always did in Washington. The color scheme has changed. The man has not.

"We've learned a lot already," Islanders forward Matt Martin said. "There's a lot of things to take from Barry and from his staff that they've come in and done with us. We've tried to soak everything in because his resume speaks for itself, his experience, his success."

There's a long way to go with 54 games left until the playoffs, so reality of life without Tavares might intrude. But it's been a good start. Meanwhile, Trotz's old team keeps chugging along. The Capitals are in first place again in the Metro, a division they've won three years in a row. Trotz told them he believes they can win another Cup – though drew smiles when he said they'd have to go through the Islanders first.

"I know it was tough for him to leave our team, but he did such a great job of bringing everyone together and really molding this group," Washington defenseman Madison Bowey said. "It's probably been the best team in the league for four years and he gave it his all to make sure we had that success. You can tell through his voice how emotional he was about that, how much he cared about us. That's the coolest thing. He deserves this more than anyone - a true leader, a true coach."

Trotz held the box with his ring inside and tapped it for emphasis as he gave his former players a speech from the heart. He said "Toddy, give me a hug, bud" and embraced Reirden – a moment that could have turned awkward given how things ended and Reirden's status as the obvious successor.

Trotz touched on the memories made, the friendships forged. He told the players and staff he couldn't wait for reunions in future years, where all the old stories will be told. There will never be any regrets for Barry Trotz.

"A really good chapter in my life and the relationships," Trotz said. "What we went through the last four years was pretty incredible. The wins and losses and some of the hard times and some of the good times. We all shared that together. And that's why that bond will be there forever with that group of young men."

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1120449 Washington Capitals

All signs point to T.J. Oshie returning to Capitals lineup vs. Red Wings, not official yet

By J.J. Regan December 10, 2018 2:44 PM

ARLINGTON, Va. -- As the Washington Capitals took to the ice Monday at MedStar Capitals Iceplex for the first time since returning from a three-game road trip, T.J. Oshie joined them, but he did so wearing a red jersey. The color Oshie was wearing is significant not because of his fashion but because of what it means for his status.

A light blue jersey indicates a player is a non-contact participant in practice. The fact that Oshie was in his regular red means that he was full-go on Monday, and it is a good sign that he could be able to return for Tuesday's game against the Detroit Red Wings.



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Oshie has missed 11 games after suffering a concussion after a takedown by Winnipeg Jets defenseman Josh Morrissey on Nov. 14. It was the fifth concussion of Oshie's career.

"I feel like each time it gets more and more frustrating," Oshie said to reporters after practice. "But I stuck with it. Some good workouts and skates with [strength and conditioning coach Mark Nemish] and [Brooks Orpik] was here all week, so I had some company. I had a lot of support from the guys behind me asking me, texting me seeing how I'm doing, so those kind of things kind of get you through it. Plus, the holidays, family in town, I spent time with the girls at home and [my] wife. It was a good little break."

When an injury keeps a player from skating, their typical progression starts goes from off-ice workouts, to on-ice workouts, to being a limited participant in practice, to a full participant and then to returning to the game lineup. Oshie had been skating with Nemish during the team's road trip and has evidently progressed to the point that he was able to step right into practice on Monday without the need for the non-contact jersey.

Not only was Oshie a full-participant, but head coach Todd Reirden was seemingly not concerned about easing him back in. Oshie skated on the top line alongside Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom. He also took part in drills on the team's first power-play unit.

"He's a special player in all aspects of the game, but certainly in the power play for us in that diamond spot," Reirden said. "He does a really good job on the entries in terms of controlled entries. When we do have to dump pucks in, he's great on recoveries. His work ethic and instincts to be able to win puck battles, I just think it increases our whole intensity of the way our power play recovers pucks."

Everything that happened on the ice Monday was a positive sign for Oshie's recovery, but both he and Reirden said only that he was a "possibility" to play in Tuesday's game.

"I've been hoping to play for a week," Oshie said. "I'm hoping to play [Tuesday]. We'll see, see what the training staff says, see what the doctors say, see what the coaches say."

Reirden added: "The plan was for him to go through practice today, and we'll see how he does later this afternoon and re-evaluate [Tuesday] morning as he continues to get closer to getting cleared to play."

Based on how Oshie progressed directly to full practice and by how much he was utilized during practice, every indication is that Oshie will be back in the lineup Tuesday at Capital One Arena.

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1120450 Washington Capitals

Capitals vs. Red Wings: Time, TV Channel, Live Stream, How to Watch

By Caroline Brandt December 10, 2018 7:00 PM

The Washington Capitals (17-9-3) are coming off of two straight road wins and return home to host the Detroit Red Wings (13-13-4) for their second matchup of the season, Tuesday, Dec. 11 at 7:30 p.m.

Despite recent injuries to top wingers Tom Wilson and T.J. Oshie, the Caps have shown no signs of slowing down and are playing some of their best hockey. The team ruffled off seven straight wins before dropping back-to-back games to the Ducks and Golden

Knights. But The Caps regained their form on the road, beating the Coyotes and Blue Jackets.

Alex Ovechkin now sits atop of the NHL lead scorers chart and the young guys are getting in on the action too, with Travis Boyd scoring his first NHL goal and Dmitrij Jaskin scoring his first as a Cap in the Caps' 4-0 win over Columbus Saturday.

The Red Wings enter the Tuesday content having lost three of their last four games. But Detroit will be a tough out. Eight of their last 12 games have been decided by just a single goal, including their 3-2 loss to Barry Trotz's Islanders on Saturday night.

WASHINGTON CAPITALS vs. DETROIT RED WINGS: HOW TO WATCH

What: Washington Capitals vs. Detroit Red Wings, Game 30 of the 2018-19 NHL Regular Season

Where: Capital One Arena, Washington, D.C.

When: Tuesday, December 11, 7:30 p.m. ET

TV Channel: Capitals vs. Red Wings will be broadcast on NBC Sports Washington. (NBC Sports Washington channel Finder)

Live Stream: You can watch the Capitals take on the Red Wings on the new MyTeams by NBC Sports App.

Radio: Caps Radio 24/7, 106.7 The Fan

CAPITALS vs. RED WINGS TV SCHEDULE

6:30 PM: Caps FaceOff Live

7:00 PM: Caps Pregame Live

7:30 PM: Capitals vs. Red Wings (LIVE)

10:00 PM: Caps Postgame Live

10:30 PM: Caps Overtime Live

CAPITALS vs. RED WINGS INJURY REPORT

Capitals: Tom Wilson (RW): Upper body, TBD; T.J. Oshie (RW): Upper body, TBD; Brooks Orpik (D): Lower body, LTIR;

Red Wings: Danny DeKeyser (D): Hand, Indefinitely; Anthony Mantha (W): Hand, Indefinitely; Trevor Daley (D): Lower body, Day-to-Day; Darren Helm (W): Shoulder, Day-to-Day; Henrik Zetterberg (C): Back, Indefinitely; Evgeny Svechnikov (W): Knee, Day-to-Day; Johan Franzen (W): Concussion, Day-to-Day.

CAPITALS vs. RED WINGS PLAYERS TO WATCH

Alex Ovechkin, LW, Capitals: Alex Ovechkin has had an amazing year and continues to top the charts in his older age. During the Caps' 4-0 win over the Blue Jackets Saturday, Ovi got his 22nd goal of the season, now sitting atop of the NHL lead goalscorers chart. He's on a roll, with 10 goals and six assists through the past 11 games.

Niklas Kronwall, D, Red Wings: The 37-year-old veteran Kronwall is nearing the end of his hockey career, but has shown no signs of slowing down. Kronwall made a huge, clean hit during the Wings' 3-2 loss to the Islanders Saturday and scored despite the loss. Caps wingers will need to watch out for this defenseman.

CAPITALS vs. RED WINGS SERIES HISTORY

Number of all-time Meetings: 117

All-time record: Capitals lead 51-45-5 (16 ties)

Last Meeting: Capitals won 3-1 at home on November 23, 2018.

Last 10 Regular Season Games: Capitals lead 8-1-2

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1120451 Washington Capitals

NHL Power Rankings: Capitals remain the class of the division

By J.J. Regan December 10, 2018 10:00 AM

Saturday's game between the Washington Capitals and Columbus Blue Jackets was built up as a battle for first place. It didn't take long for Washington show that they remain the class of the division as the Caps walked away with an emphatic 4-0 win.

The Metropolitan Division is just plain bad this year. New Jersey and Philadelphia are surprisingly atrocious, Carolina is still a player or two (and a goalie) away from being a playoff team, the Rangers will go only as far as Henrik Lundqvist can carry them, the Islanders have made great strides under Barry Trotz but are nowhere close to contending and this looks like Pittsburgh's weakest team since the Mike Johnston era.

At this point, the only two teams that look like clear playoff teams are Washington and Columbus and even that may be a stretch depending on how the Artemi Panarin, Sergei Bobrovsky situation pans out for the Blue Jackets.

There's still a lot of hockey left to play this season, but the Caps made an early statement on Saturday that they remain the team to beat in the Metro and no one looks anywhere close to challenging them at this point.

Here are a few observations from the past week:

- Tom Wilson provided one heck of a spark when he returned from suspension. The way the Caps responded to his injury with two wins on the road is impressive and says a lot about this team's mental makeup and resiliency, even more so than how they rallied after Evgeny Kuznetsov and T.J. Oshie both came out of the lineup.
- Is Kuznetsov all the way back? He just does not seem like the same player who dazzled us in the first month of the season. Yes, he has a five-game point streak, but he is not dominating the game the same way. Earlier in the season, his talent was evident every time he stepped onto the ice. Whenever Connor McDavid is on the ice, you notice him. Whenever Nathan MacKinnon is on the ice, you notice him. That was true of Kuznetsov early on, but has not been true since he returned to the lineup.
- Oshie is skating which means he is making progress, but the team should take a slow approach to his return. After he suffered a concussion last year from a hit by Joe Thornton, he did not play well when he returned for quite a while. The Caps are winning and are in first place, there's no reason to really rush him back.
- The power play is starting to become a major concern. The loss of Oshie certainly hurts, but that unit was starting to struggle even before the game in Winnipeg in which he was injured. When watching the Columbus game on Friday, someone asked Alan May what he thought the problem was and he said zone entries. There's definitely something to that. The power play still looks as deadly as ever when the team sets it up, but it seems like they are having a real tough time just getting to that point. They just cannot get the puck into the offensive zone and keep possession.

Even with Wilson, Oshie and Orpik out, the Caps keep finding ways to win and that has them climbing up the rankings.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120452 Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin: Once a stranger in a strange land, now a champion

By Chris Kuc

It was late in the summer of 2005 when Alex Ovechkin arrived in Washington, D.C., eager to prove he was deserving of the Capitals making him the No. 1 overall selection in the NHL Draft a year earlier.

Fresh off the plane from Russia, where at a young age he flashed the kind of talent and desire that convinced the Capitals hierarchy he could be the centerpiece of a team rebuild, Ovechkin was a stranger in a strange land.

The team put him up in a downtown hotel, and it didn't take long for the then-19-year-old to discover the difficulties of establishing a new life in North America. Ovechkin didn't know anyone or speak the language, so the first days in town consisted of trips from the hotel to the Capitals' practice rink and back.

What exactly did he do at the hotel all by himself?

"Nothing," Ovechkin, 33, said with a fleeting smile. "I didn't do anything. It was a hard time for me. Nobody said it would be easy coming over here — you have to earn respect from the players and the fans and the city."

Since that humble beginning, Ovechkin made it his mission to earn that respect and in the process transformed himself from a promising prospect to a generational talent that led the Capitals to their first Stanley Cup championship in franchise history in 2018. As the NHL's most prolific goal scorer of his time, Ovechkin's on-ice exploits are unparalleled. Off the ice, his personality, generosity and drive made him the face of the Capitals franchise and a valued member of the community.

For those reasons, Ovechkin has been selected as The Athletic Washington D.C.'s 2018 Person of the Year and also the NHL Person of the Year.

Fortunes changed for a struggling franchise when Lady Luck stepped in and helped the Capitals leap past the Blackhawks and Penguins to win the 2004 draft lottery.

The Capitals were coming off their worst season in 26 years, and management — including a front office that at the time was made up of general manager George McPhee, director of player personnel Brian MacLellan and director of amateur scouting Ross Mahoney — needed a home run to revive the franchise.

They had already seen the future in previous scouting trips, including Mahoney's first look at Ovechkin during the 2002 World Under-18 Championships in Slovakia. Mahoney watched the 16-year-old Russian dominate against opponents a year older; Ovechkin led the tournament in scoring with 14 goals and four assists in eight games.

"The combination of skill, power and strength jumped out at you right away," Mahoney said. "He looked more like a 19-year-old than a 16-year-old. And his shot was elite. It was scary."

"Plus, he had this love of the game. He loved to play. He was just as happy when his teammates scored as when he scored. Though he was the one who was usually doing the scoring."

McPhee got his first look at Ovechkin during the 2003 World Junior Championships in Nova Scotia and was immediately impressed.

"He stood out in that he played with so much intensity and he's a big guy and he went to the net so hard," McPhee said. "The game I



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recall seeing, his team was getting blown out and some appeared to have thrown in the towel but he just kept going right until the very end.”

It wasn't long after when fate gave the Capitals the No. 1 pick. Joining Ovechkin at the top of draft lists was another Russian, Evgeni Malkin, but there wasn't much doubt which direction the Capitals would go.

“We won the lottery and the first call I made was to Ross Mahoney and I said, ‘who do you have in mind?’” McPhee said. “He said, ‘Ovechkin is the guy.’”

“You have to have some discussion and we had some debate about going the traditional route and getting an elite center, which would have been Malkin, but Ovi was just such a unique player,” added McPhee, now GM of the Golden Knights. “He’s a modern-day Gordie Howe. He is big, intense, gets a lot of goals and has a lot of physicality, which is just a rare combination of that all in one player. And he is just exciting. He changed hockey in Washington forever.”

Being drafted by the Capitals was a goal fulfilled for Ovechkin, who while growing up was limited to viewing highlights of the NHL on TV. Back then, he idolized Penguins star Mario Lemieux and yearned to take the ice in North America.

“When I was a little guy my dream was to come here and play in the NHL,” Ovechkin said. “When you come here you never know how good you’re going to be or if you can play here. It was a big challenge for me.”

Soon after hearing Ovechkin was living in a hotel, McPhee had him stay at his home when training camp for the 2005-06 season began. Finally, around teammates, Ovechkin settled in and “it was much easier for me because I could hang out with the team and I was able to be around the players. (Dainius Zubrus) helped me a lot because he could speak Russian. He kind of was in charge of me.

“We didn’t have a good team because the Caps were rebuilding. But the atmosphere in the locker room was tremendous, and I got lots of support from my teammates as I learned English. I felt at home right away. George was a big part of it and (owner Ted Leonsis), coaches and all the players, too. I felt comfortable.”

On the ice, Ovechkin soon established he was a game-changer. The left wing scored 52 goals and added 54 assists to capture the Calder Trophy as the NHL’s rookie of the year.

That began a remarkable career that to date has resulted in three Hart trophies as league MVP, seven NHL All-Star Game appearances and seven Maurice Richard trophies as the league’s top goal scorer, among other honors.

This season, Ovechkin surpassed Dino Ciccarelli, Bobby Hull, Jarome Iginla and Joe Sakic on the all-time goals list and stands at 15th in league history with 629.

“What makes him unique is the top teams in the league on average probably score 270 goals a year and when you get can 40-50 a year out of one guy every year for more than a decade, it’s a contribution most teams don’t have,” McPhee said. “And when you can get that with the ferocity and intensity and the physicality with which he plays, it’s just a really unique combination. These guys come along once in a generation or two or three generations. I honestly believe his closest comparable is Gordie Howe.”

The combination of skill, passion and joy with which Ovechkin plays has helped inspire those around him.

“He’s obviously super talented and his hockey skills are off the charts, so that’s why he got drafted, but his passion and attitude are infectious,” teammate Matt Niskanen said. “He has fun playing the game. He loves being a star and a leader of our team. He embraces it and enjoys it. That’s infectious for us as teammates. And fans especially are going to gravitate toward that. It’s exciting to watch

him, and whether you love the guy or you don’t like him because you’re a rival, you have to admire his passion and his love to play.”

Ovechkin’s intensity is evident each time he jumps over the boards. It is a trait he said he has had “from day one when I started playing hockey” and it came from his parents, who were accomplished athletes in Russia. His mother, Tatyana, was a two-time Olympic gold medalist in basketball and his father, Mikhail, played soccer.

They taught their youngest son to play with a passion.

“My parents told me, ‘if you do something, you have to do it to the max,’” Alex Ovechkin said. “I love the game so much. My dream was to come here and try to be as good as I can. I got lucky that this organization drafted me and gave me everything that I needed.”

In turn, Ovechkin helped give the Capitals something the organization never had before he showed up: a championship.

Behind his leadership — Ovechkin is the first Russian-born captain in NHL history to win a Stanley Cup — and skills on the ice, the Capitals exorcized the demons of seasons past by defeating the Golden Knights in five games to capture the 2018 Stanley Cup.

It was the crowning achievement of Ovechkin’s career, but not the one of which he is most proud.

“It’s playing 1,000 games with one organization,” Ovechkin said. “You can set all kinds of records and do different things but if you play 1,000 games with one organization it means the team trusts and respects you as a person. Since day one in franchise history no one has played 1,000 games. I’m happy I’m No. 1.”

Along the way, Ovechkin, who played in his 1,032nd career game Saturday night against the Blue Jackets, learned to embrace Washington, D.C., and the city has embraced him back. He is involved in several charitable endeavors, including the American Special Hockey Association, “Ovechkin’s Crazy 8s” ticket program for children, soldiers and their families as well as the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

“He’s willing to do so much in the community,” said MacLellan, now the Capitals’ GM. “He’s good with kids and he’s always fun to be around. He’s just a likable person. The way he handled the Stanley Cup celebration, I think a lot of people saw and appreciated how he did it authentically. He basically put the Capitals on the map and hockey in the whole area has grown and he’s been a big part of it.”

Added Mahoney: “The excitement that he brings to the game and the love that he has for the game the fans really appreciate and gravitate toward. I don’t know if I can put in words how much he’s meant to the organization, really.”

For Ovechkin, 2018 was special in a number of ways, including hoisting the Cup on the ice in Las Vegas in June and two months later becoming a father for the first time with the birth of his son, Sergei.

“It was a pretty special year,” he said.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120466 Websites

The Athletic / LeBrun: Q&A with Chuck Fletcher on the need for urgency, obstacles of taking over midseason and the usefulness of analytics

By Pierre LeBrun Dec 10, 2018

Chuck Fletcher has been at the helm of the Philadelphia Flyers for a week, a whirlwind time for the former Minnesota Wild GM but he’s



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eager to put his stamp on his new team, having already explored trade options. I caught up with Fletcher over the phone on Monday morning – the Flyers GM was in Calgary with a fresh Tim Horton's coffee in hand as we discussed several topics for this story.

I wanted to start with the idea of how beneficial do you think it was, after all those years in the Western Conference, that your in-between job was with Ray Shero in New Jersey, as far as being able to get better acquainted with the East?

Yes, although I have to be completely honest, one of my assignments was (scouting) some of the teams in the Central Division. I was spending quite a bit of time watching Central Division teams and their AHL teams. But I did get out East a bit and first of all, Ray threw me a lifeline there after I was let go in Minnesota, which I very greatly appreciated. He gave me the opportunity to scout and be around the Devils, just watch hockey and give opinions. It was a great opportunity for me and I'm really appreciative of what Ray did for me. But yeah, I did have an opportunity to see some games in the East, and after being in the West for so many years, you're so focused on your own division and conference, you probably don't watch the other conference as closely as you should. So it was certainly an opportunity for me to see some of the teams, and I had a chance to see Philly actually a couple of times, which was certainly helpful.

Knowing Ray Shero's sense of humor, any funny lines from him about now being rivals in the Metro Division?

(Laughing) No, he's been great. But it is, I don't want to use the term awkward, but it is different. Because we've been very close and when I was in Minnesota he was either in Pittsburgh or New Jersey, so we'd play each other twice a year and it wasn't any big rivalry. But now, clearly, we're heated divisional rivals. So it'll be interesting to see.

I know Dean Lombardi is still around in his role with the Flyers, what's that like to have to have a contemporary around, a guy that you were a GM against in the same conference for a long time, someone who can bend an ear for you?

Yeah, it's been outstanding so far. Dean was around a little bit when I first got there (in Philadelphia last week) and I've spoken to him since he's been back out West. He's done it all, he's a Stanley Cup-winning general manager in this league. It's unbelievable to have a resource like that. And not just Dean, Paul Holmgren, and Bob Clarke, you've got three guys that have been very successful general managers in this league. So the resources I have available to me are probably unparalleled in the NHL with respect to having that kind of knowledge and experience around you. I'm very fortunate.

All three of those guys were there during the interview process and I'm wondering what you feel was your most important message during that interview that you wanted to most resonate with them?

Because they've all been general managers and are so active in the league, I think they were pretty aware of my track record. So I think it was less about where I've been and what I had done and my resume per se, it was more about moving forward and how are we going to continue to build this franchise and I think that resonated with them. And for me it's just simply, the future is always important but you have to also be as competitive as you can be in the present. We tried to do that in Minnesota. You always have to make sure you have good, young players coming but you always want to make sure you can be as successful as you can in the present. It's important to be competitive in both areas: the present and the future. So I think that resonated well with them and I think that's their viewpoint as well. There's so much parity in this league. There's clearly a few teams up there right now that are top, top teams and many of us are looking up to them. But most of us are pretty similar. We're all good teams and we all have areas we need to improve upon. We're all a three- or four-game winning streak away from being ahead of the

teams around us. So it's just which team can execute to get that done. The teams that make the playoffs will be the teams that figure that out first. There's a ton of parity. We have a good team and that's what we're trying to figure out right now.

You had some very competitive teams in Minnesota but I'm sure like every GM you don't feel satisfied unless you get to win it all. What are some of the lessons you take from your time there? I know when coaches and GMs get let go, they look back and decompress and analyze the good and the bad. What is one of the things you would look at and say, 'I've got to work on that.'

Yeah, I thought about everything. You think about all the trades you make and all the trades you didn't make. It's incredibly disappointing to me that we weren't able to have a long (playoff) run in Minnesota and certainly win a Stanley Cup. Every year it seemed to be something different that would befall our team. Some years we simply lost to a better team, some years we weren't able to score, some years the other team's goaltender was better than ours, there was just a host of reasons. But I guess the one thing I take away from it, is that you've got to try and give yourself a chance every year. I really do believe that. Again, you can't mortgage the future, you can't empty the cupboards, but you have to give yourself a chance every year. Look at Washington, all the years they've been in and finally they break through and have a run. You never know when you can get through and have that kind of year where everything clicks for you. You have to make sure, and it's not just the trade deadline, it's the summer before, too. Make sure you make the moves you have to, to fill the holes you have to, to the best of your ability. You just don't want to leave anything out there. You just don't know when you'll get another chance.

You obviously know how Ron Hextall feels right now having lived it yourself, I'm wondering if you've reached out to him at all?

Yeah, yeah, I've spoken with Ron and we've had some texts. Ron's son works for our organization as well and I've reached out to him. I'm sure it's not an easy time for Ron. But I shared with him my thoughts. He did a really good job. He's taken this organization and built it up. There's a lot of tremendous young assets here and there's cap space. He put a lot of time and effort into putting the Flyers into a place where they can become a very successful team for the next few years. It's not easy though. I've been through it. It's not an easy time for him.

Have you had a chance to speak with Daniel Briere yet? I know he runs the ECHL team for the Flyers. I was curious if he might be a guy that grows into something under you or if you have any sense yet of him?

Yeah I'm just getting to know Danny. I've met him before but I've had a couple of conversations with him here. It was funny the last time I saw him, as is often the case with the ECHL, was either because of injuries or players getting called up. It's a constant scramble to find talent to fill your roster every night. He was on the phone trying to find players. I just joked with him, 'Maybe you should go down and play.' But he's loving it, I think he's doing a great job there, he's learning the business side and also involved in the hockey side. So I think Danny was a great player, a smart player, I'm sure he'll have a very successful career in the hockey industry.

I assume when you take over a team, one of the first things you do is look over all the player contracts in detail and absorb what you've got on your hands? You need to know all that before making trades.

Yeah, that's sort of my background, working for Bob Clarke and Bryan Murray in the '90s. I was started off more as a front office contract guy. Over the years I started to scout more as time went on. But it's always been an area I've loved. I try to stay up on every team in the league (contract-wise) because it's something I'm interested in. That part here has been pretty straightforward for me. I think the biggest challenge has been just trying to get to know the players and the staff. Generally speaking when you come into a team it's the



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summer and you have the summer to get to know the staff and training camp to get to know the players. It's been a real challenge just to get face time with everybody and find the time in the day to sit down with everybody and get to know them, what they're all about, what their family situation is, that's so critical, getting to know your staff and players. You want to know what motivates them, how they operate, that's been the biggest challenge. It's something I'm working on every day, just spending time and getting to know a couple more people every day. Hopefully I can tackle and finish that task in the near future.

I know you've been asked about Dave Hakstol and the coaching staff and where that goes from here on in. It certainly sounds like you want to give them the benefit of the doubt, is that fair to say?

Yeah. I'm just trying to take the time to get to know Dave and his staff and get his thoughts on the team. I'm trying to work with him to find solutions to make this team more competitive as quickly as we can. I'm going to meet with Dave once we're done with this call. We're going to talk about last night's game, both games this weekend, where we're at, and what we can do in the short term from a roster perspective, but where he would like to see me try to help out. I think we need to work together here. We've got a good team, we've been a little inconsistent. Our defensive play has been inconsistent. I think we're both looking for solutions to get more consistency there and to drive better results from this team and develop a relationship together.

And finally for the last question, Chuck, you've been in the league a while now, I've always thought of you as a forward thinker, I wonder what your view is on balancing both the scouting side of things with analytics, you're a guy I think that wants to take everything in?

Yeah, absolutely. Ron Hextall had started to build a good analytics department in Philadelphia. We had a good department in Minnesota. Ray is building a good department in New Jersey. I think if you look around the league, everybody is doing that. You need data. You need to make informed decisions. And ideally you're combining the data with strong scouting opinions. You're trying to make sure you cover all the bases. It's something certainly that I utilize. But I would assume every general manager does at this point. Just to give you a different perspective and ideas and oftentimes the two are very similar: what the scouts see and what the data tells you. When there's a difference of opinion that's sometimes where the value is. That's what I enjoy looking into.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120467 Websites

The Athletic / DGB weekend power rankings: Flames surge, Hawks hit rock bottom and time running out on Blues, Wild and Flyers

By Sean McIndoe Dec 10, 2018

Spoiler alert: Even though they lost last night in Edmonton, the Flames are going to be back in this week's top five.

That probably isn't going to shock you. Calgary remains one of the hottest teams in the league, having won nine of their last twelve to take over top spot in the Pacific. Until last night they'd been filling up the net, ranking fourth in goals scored league-wide. But lately they've been keeping the puck out too, with David Rittich playing well and Mike Smith suddenly looking like a viable NHL starter again.

That's a tough combo to beat, as most of the Flames' recent opponents could tell you. They'd won four straight heading into the

weekend, which set up a marquee matchup with the Predators that featured the West's two top teams facing off with top spot in the conference on the line. It was the sort of game that feels like a test for a surging young team, and the Flames passed it by pouring in three third-period goals, turning a tight game into a 5-2 win.

After that kind of a season-defining win, maybe it was inevitable that last night's renewal of the Battle of Alberta would be a bit of a dud. The last time these two teams met, it had us giddy for a potential playoff matchup. Last night looked more like a tired team coming off an emotional win travelling to play a rested rival in a tough building. The Flames fell behind early, had a goal waved off for interference and then spent much of the third killing penalties instead of pushing for the comeback. The Oilers earned their 1-0 win and are working their way back into the Pacific title discussion themselves. But it didn't feel like they got the Flames best last night.

Still, it was a good week for Calgary, especially given that they were missing two players to suspension, including captain Mark Giordano. So yeah, the Flames are going to be in our top five this week. The question is how high they go and which teams they pass along the way. Let's find out ...

Road to the Cup

The five teams that look like they're headed towards a summer of keg stands and fountain pool parties.

Hey, remember when I made a big deal out of finally putting the Sabres in the top five, then they won the next night and haven't won again since? I think that may have been my fault. Sorry, Buffalo, won't happen again.

5. Washington Capitals (17-9-3, +16 true goals differential*) – This week brought a three-game road trip and four of a possible six points. Not bad, although not necessarily the sort of performance that guarantees a spot in the top five. Still, seeing them face down the Blue Jackets in a battle for top spot in the Metro and come away with a 4-0 road win was impressive. Next weekend brings an intriguing matchup against the Sabres and a chance for the champs to continue to defend their turf against the next wave of contenders.

4. Toronto Maple Leafs (20-9-1, +25) – They're still sitting second overall. But their last two games have been ugly and Saturday's loss in a nasty game in Boston had to bring back at least a few memories of playoffs past. It will also cost them Zach Hyman, who earned two games for his late hit on Charlie McAvoy.

There's no need to panic, but for now we'll nudge the Leafs down a spot or two until William Nylander finds his legs and the team reminds us that they can show up before the third period starts.

3. Calgary Flames (19-10-2, +23) – Should they be higher than the Predators? There's a case to be made, starting with the fact that they beat them on Saturday and have passed them in the standings. I'm not quite there yet – remember, these rankings aren't just a snapshot of right now, but a look ahead at how the rest of the season is likely to play out. There's some bias built in towards teams that are consistently good, so I think it's fair to still have teams like Nashville and Tampa ahead of a hot team like Calgary. For this week, at least.

2. Nashville Predators (19-10-1, +19) – With just three wins in their last eight, can the Predators get back on track? This week should be just about the perfect opportunity, as Nashville is home for three straight against the Senators, Canucks and Devils, before hitting the road for a rematch in Ottawa. You'd expect an elite team to manage at least six points out of that slate. Let's see what the Predators can do.

By the way, this week marks a bit of a milestone in our rankings: It's the first time since opening week that we've had at least one team from each of the four divisions in our top five. Welcome back to the



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party, Metro and Pacific, maybe think about sticking around this time instead of letting the Central and Atlantic do all the heavy lifting.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (23-7-1, +34) – Saturday served up a big test in the surging Avalanche. A 7-1 Tampa win is enough to lock down top spot for the second straight week and also to knock the A's out of the top five after making their debut last time out. Colorado should be back, but the Lightning flexed on them and have now won six straight to open up a comfortable lead over the Leafs in the Atlantic.

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: Minnesota Wild – As recently as three weeks ago, we had the Wild sitting comfortably in the top five. They'd been on fire, at one point winning ten of twelve and had bumped the Jets out of the way as the Central's number two team. Heck, they were making a pretty decent run at the Predators for top spot.

And they were doing it all while enjoying Vezina-caliber goaltending from Devan Dubnyk; during the twelve-game stretch, they gave up just a single goal in half the games. That was a potential warning sign – at one point we even cautioned Minnesota fans that hot goaltending was “not always the most sustainable model,” before immediately hand-waving the concern away. Goaltending is voodoo, so relying on it to fuel more than a temporary streak is always risky.

So you figured Dubnyk would come back to earth eventually. You just didn't think he'd splatter like an overripe watermelon when he did.

As Derek Peterson pointed out this week, Dubnyk went from holding the league's best 5-on-5 save percentage in October to dead last in November. An optimist could chalk that up to the sort of cold streak that every goalie has from time to time, just an admittedly extreme over-correction from a hot October. But the worst of Dubnyk's struggles coincide with the Nov. 13 collision that saw Tom Wilson run him over. The Wild say he's healthy. The numbers make you wonder.

Then there's the captain. Mikko Koivu was having another solid season before taking an ugly knee-on-knee hit from Calgary's Mark Giordano. At this point we don't know how much time he'll miss, but this doesn't seem like a short-term situation.

Now we're into what Wild writers are describing as a “crisis.” Ordinarily, that might sound like hyperbole. But after watching them get steamrolled by the Oilers on Friday, I'm not so sure. That loss knocked the Wild out of a playoff spot and a year that looked like it was going to be about gunning for the Central title now looks like it could be a season-long battle to scrape into a wildcard spot. And now rookie GM Paul Fenton is facing his first big test. It's enough to have Wild fans longing for the expansion days of Doug Risebrough's markers and whiteboards.

The good news is that they're home for their next four, and five of six before the Christmas break. And apart from a grudge match against the red hot Flames, the schedule isn't that daunting. There's time to get back on track. Maybe Dubnyk's game clicks back into place. Or maybe Fenton can make the kind of move that will put his stamp on what still looks a lot like Chuck Fletcher's team.

Or maybe the Wild just drift along, playing the sort of good-but-not-great hockey that's become their trademark over the years. That might even feel like an improvement right now. But for one of the league's oldest teams, it's hard to see how it's anywhere good enough.

The bottom five

The five teams that look like they're headed towards hoping the ping-pong balls deliver Jack Hughes.

Remember in the 2014 Western Conference final, when the Blackhawks and Kings went head-to-head in a seven-game classic that was highlighted by the single greatest stretch of playoff overtime in hockey history? This week's bottom five is exactly like that, except instead of a trip to the Stanley Cup final, those two teams are competing to be named the worst in the league. So I guess it's not like that at all.

5. New Jersey Devils (10-12-6, -13) – It was tempting to find a spot for the Coyotes now that we know that Antti Raanta could miss the rest of the season, but we'll see how this week's road trip goes before we overreact.

Instead we'll go with the Devils, who return to the bottom five for the first time in three weeks. Last night's 6-5 shootout loss to the Ducks was entertaining, but it was New Jersey's seventh loss in eight games as they continue to fade out of the Eastern race. Some of that is just plain bad luck, like their 0-6 record after regulation. But when you're dead last in the conference, moral victories don't help much.

4. Ottawa Senators (13-14-4, -17) – The big story in Ottawa is the loss of Matt Duchene, who'll be out for weeks with a groin injury. It's terrible timing for Duchene, who was on his way to a career year and needs a new contract. The team will also be without Bobby Ryan indefinitely due to a concussion.

The Senators still went out and beat the Penguins and got a point against the Bruins, because this team refuses to bottom out the way everyone thinks they should. But those are two big losses from a roster that can't afford many.

3. St. Louis Blues (10-14-4, -15) – It would be cruel to talk about what happened to the Blues yesterday. Let's just say they lost to the Canucks. Don't worry about the score, they just lost, OK?

Jeremy Rutherford

✓

@jprutherford

Tarasenko: “I apologize to all our fans. We can't play at home like this. I don't know how to fix it. We work on it but it doesn't work for now.”

Steen: “Right now we're not committed enough to what we want to accomplish”

Schenn: “We're a fragile group. It comes with losing”

819

10:53 PM - Dec 9, 2018

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At least they continue to be the league's top source of trade rumors, as we all wait for Doug Armstrong to start blowing stuff up. The latest is another rumor linking them to the Maple Leafs, with our friends at Hockey Night in Canada suggesting that Alex Pietrangelo could be the answer to Toronto's needs on the right side of the blueline.

Is it going to happen? Probably not, because the overwhelming majority of these sorts of rumors don't go anywhere. But Armstrong has to do something and he's already played his coach card. Something big has to be coming in St. Louis, even if we're only guessing as to what it will be.

2. Los Angeles Kings (11-18-1, -25) – Can they win two in a row in regulation for the first time in over a month? They've got a chance tonight in Detroit. In the meantime, they can celebrate slipping down to the second spot after five straight weeks in number one.



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1. Chicago Blackhawks (9-17-5, -30) – Here's a sentence you don't want people to be able to write about you when the season is only 31 games old: They've lost seven in a row and it's not their longest losing streak of the year.

With 18 losses in their last 21, it's tempting to say that the Blackhawks have flatlined, but that would imply the presence of a line. Instead, let's say the heartbeat monitor that should be flatlining is just a blank screen. And it's a blank screen because the machine isn't plugged in. And the machine isn't plugged in because it doesn't have a plug because it's just an overflowing garbage bag full of coffee grounds and used diapers.

Their season is going poorly. Not sure if I made that clear.

Not ranked: Philadelphia Flyers – Yesterday's 7-1 loss was the kind of game that gets people fired. So what happens when you lose that way after you've already fired everyone?

You knew that yesterday was going to be a tough one; they were playing the second of back-to-back afternoon games, both on the road. The Jets are a good team. Two points was always going to be a big ask.

But all that said, you'd like to think you could keep the final within a field goal. Instead the Flyers got rolled, making it the fourth time on the season that they've lost a game by five goals or more. It's become a cliché to talk about goaltending problems in Philadelphia, but yeah, they've got some goaltending problems in Philadelphia.

They can still put together an impressive outing, and in fact their last one was just on Saturday, when they went into Buffalo and beat the Sabres. They just don't seem to be able to do it with any consistency; today marks the one-month anniversary of the last time they won consecutive games.

And yes, Flyers fans, I hear you yelling at your screen: Not everyone has been fired. Not yet. Dave Hakstol remains on the hot seat, and under the gun, and whatever other metaphors you want to throw at him. We'll see if he can remain behind the bench. New GMs usually get a little bit of time to make those sort of decisions, but Chuck Fletcher got this job largely because the last guy was too conservative for Paul Holmgren's liking. So you'd figure that some sort of move is on the way.

We seem to be saying that for a lot of teams these days. We've got the Coyotes, the Blues, the Wild, the Flyers and more, all seeming like they need to do something quickly. Who'll actually do it, and who'll hem and haw and sit on their hands as a season slips away? We're going to find out over the next few weeks, if not sooner.

The Athletic LOADED: 12.11.2018

1120468 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Rosen extension prime example of Maple Leafs' plan to juggle around stars

Chris Johnston | December 10, 2018, 6:54 PM

Here we find the answer to a question that has been asked in various forms during this 'Year of the Contract' in Toronto: How can the Maple Leafs afford to sign all of their young stars and continue to compete?

May we introduce Calle Rosen.

Not so much Rosen, individually, but what the \$1.5-million, two-year extension the Leafs gave him Monday represents in the larger picture.

The 24-year-old, left-shot defenceman is a player the organization has come to value. The fact he was handed a one-way deal for both 2019-20 and 2020-21 after playing just four career NHL games is a reflection of that.

Rosen came over from Sweden as a free agent prior to last season and has more or less been a mainstay in the American Hockey League ever since. As a member of the Marlies he's shown an ability to skate and distribute the puck, while growing more comfortable with the defensive zone battles found in the North American game, and reached a point where management sees everyday NHLer upside in him.

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Rosen is a classic late bloomer and the type of player who stands to benefit from the constraints of a salary cap system. It's no secret that the Leafs will feel the pinch when new deals for Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner kick in next season, joining John Tavares and William Nylander as part of a \$40-million-plus Core Four, and so they're already looking for other areas of the roster where they might find relief.

Having a potential third-pairing defenceman earning \$750,000 — just \$50,000 above league minimum — is a pretty good start.

The Leafs bought insurance on a couple fronts by getting the Rosen extension done now.

In the event they're unable to retain pending unrestricted free agent Jake Gardiner, which seems increasingly unlikely given how little room they'll have to work under a projected \$83-million cap, they have another left shot option ready in the queue to play behind Morgan Rielly and Travis Dermott.

There is also very little risk for the Leafs with this contract since it won't count against the cap if they decided to send Rosen back to the AHL at any point in the next two seasons.

That probably won't be necessary given how well he played in helping the Marlies win the Calder Cup last spring and with the growth he's shown since returning in the fall. Rosen is logging major minutes and has produced 19 points in 24 AHL games this season.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

If it all goes to plan, he will be a prime example of how the Leafs look to populate their roster when they're paying big bucks to all of the offensive stars.

They need to establish a continuous pipeline of replacement-level players to fill in around the margins — either those on entry-level contracts or affordable deals like Rosen's. It will likely continue to take them to Europe in search of free agents, a practice that former general manager Lou Lamoriello pursued aggressively.

He signed Rosen and Andreas Borgman on the same day in May 2017, winning out a sweepstakes involving 15 NHL teams on Rosen in large part because both he and head coach Mike Babcock phoned the player directly to make their pitch.

That gave the Leafs a chance to work with him and get to know him over the last season and a half while paying him very little on an ELC. It also gave new GM Kyle Dubas the ability to identify Rosen as a solution to a looming organizational problem and produced the one-way contract he signed Monday afternoon.



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Sportsnet.ca / Mikko Koskinen gamble a success story for Oilers' Peter Chiarelli

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec December 10, 2018

EDMONTON — When Peter Chiarelli announced a one-year, US \$2.5 million contract for a goalie named Mikko Koskinen, it sparked a convenient, two-step process for the legions of the Edmonton general manager's critics.

One: Go directly to HockeyDB.com and answer the question, "Koskinen? Is that the guy who played for the Islanders, like, 10 years ago?"

Two: Jump right on Twitter and start ticking off the boxes of Chiarelli ineptitude:

- Overspending: Too much money for a backup goalie, by about 150 per cent.
- Talent evaluation: This was just another Taylor-Hall-for-Adam-Larsson, Ryan-Strome-for-Jordan-Eberle, "two high draft picks for Griffin Reinhart" caliber transaction.
- Lousy cap management — Well, then. Where are the wingers coming from now...?

Yep, what a stupid acquisition that Koskinen turned out to be.

Sportsnet NOW gives you access to over 500 NHL games this season, blackout-free, including Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the entire 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs and more.

Today, among NHL goalies who have played more than 800 minutes this season, Koskinen's .929 saves percentage lies below only Jaroslav Halak and Pekka Rinne, who are tied at .930. As for goals against average, Koskinen's 2.06 ranks second in that same group behind only Rinne (1.96).

He has started only 13 of Edmonton's 30 games, but Ken Hitchcock has gone with Koskinen in seven of the 10 games he has been behind the Oiler bench. The big Finn has rewarded him with a 5-1-0-1 record.

Koskinen, 30, shut out Calgary 1-0 on Sunday night (his third goose egg of the season), and will get the start Tuesday night in Colorado. Hitchcock says he'll then decide how he'll split up a Thursday-Friday back to back between Koskinen and the supplanted Cam Talbot.

So, when we approached the loquacious Euro to talk about his success. I'll tell you, we could barely shut the guy up.

"You have to be confident all the time. It doesn't matter, one game," said the six-foot-seven goaler. "I feel comfortable in the net, but I still believe I can do better."

His three shutouts rank second in the league. He was quite ecstatic to talk about that as well.

"That's three wins. Doesn't matter, 6-5 or 5-0. A win is a win."

After that extended oration, Koskinen blathered on about his prowess at the card table: "I'm not very good at the games. I lose all the time."

Then, as our digital recorder maxed out, he moved the conversation to his future in the NHL, a league he spent four games in eight years ago, and now seems to have mastered:

"The only thing I worry about is what I do every day. You can't look into the future. It's not going to do any good for me to look at what it's going to be at after three months."

Ok, ok... Let someone else get a word in, will you?

We should say, that two-step process for evaluating the Koskinen signing wasn't far off our own take on Chiarelli's work. We'll even admit to questioning a No Movement Clause in the deal. Because let's face it: If the player didn't work out in Edmonton, it is impossible to move a \$2.5 million goalie who isn't stopping pucks. So, what was the point?

In the end, we surmised this much, because despite making some mighty questionable trades, Chiarelli had to have a plan here: In Koskinen, he must see more than just a backup. With Talbot in a contract season, the GM must have landed a goalie who he thinks could be a No. 1.

Lo and behold, that's exactly what Chiarelli has.

"You just want another team guy," Talbot said when we asked him who the ideal partner would be. "A guy who is going to root for you as much as he wants to do well himself. We have that kind of chemistry now between Mikko and I. He's up there with some of the best partners I've ever had."

"We both want the net," Talbot assures. "But internal competition makes both of us better."

As for Hitchcock, he'll let the cream rise to the top, but he'll never make the mistake he made in Dallas. There, the old coach let Kari Lehtonen languish for too long, and when Ben Bishop got hurt Lehtonen wasn't ready to step in. It cost the Stars a playoff berth.

Talbot will get his games, and he's been excellent in his past two starts. But it's not looking like Koskinen — known back home as the Three Metres of Koskinen due to his height — is about to relinquish the No. 1 job any time soon.

"He's a tough guy. He's pushing the goalie coach, he's pushing me," said Hitchcock. "He let's go of the game right away and wants to know immediately the details of what he needs to do to get better. He's a pro's pro."

Koskinen's coach in St. Petersburg of the KHL was Hitchcock's old defenceman in Dallas — Sergei Zubov.

"He's a tough guy — way harder on himself than any of us are," Hitchcock said of Koskinen. "That's what Zoobie said: 'You're never going to have a problem preparation-wise or analyzing his performance. He'll be way harder on himself than you can ever be.'"

As hard, you might say, as fans were on the GM who signed him.

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Sportsnet.ca / Weekend Takeaways: Superior scouting on display in Lightning streak

Ryan Dixon |December 10, 2018

The Tampa Bay Lightning have been labeled a few things, both good and bad.



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Actually, there's really only one negative thrown at them, but it's a fairly awful one to be stuck with. The Bolts have infamously failed to punch all the way through in the post-season, losing the 2015 Stanley Cup Final to Chicago and a pair of Eastern Conference Game 7s in 2016 and '18.

That about does it for the bad.

As for the positive, does anything boggle the hockey mind more than Tampa's ability to find not just good, but elite-level players where others do not? Drafting Steven Stamkos first overall in 2008 and Victor Hedman second the following June formed a wonderful foundation. That said, we wouldn't be picking this team — which sits atop the league standings and is presently on a six-game winning streak after pounding Colorado 7-1 on Saturday — to win the Cup year after year if not for its ability to consistently unearth gems outside the first round of the draft.

The most points posted by any second-round draft pick this season is the 44 recorded by Nikita Kucherov. Switch your search to the third round and you'll find Brayden Point tops the list with 39. As for players who were never selected at all, check the top five undrafted scorers this year and you'll see Yannick Gourde at No. 3 (24 points) and Tyler Johnson at No. 5 (22).

Rookie Mathieu Joseph, a fourth-rounder in 2015, has nine goals this season. Ondrej Palat bagged a pair against the Avs and if he can move past the injury issues he's had in recent times, he'll go right back into the conversation for all-time best selections in the final round of a draft (seventh round in 2011).

Of course, Tampa has never hesitated to make bold trades, too, which has landed them defencemen Ryan McDonagh and Mikhail Sergachev. And I still can't take my eye off another blue-liner, Erik Karlsson, when it comes to this team. Karlsson, who was heavily linked to Tampa before San Jose swooped in and made a deal with Ottawa, picked up three points on the weekend. If he does hit the open market next summer, can anybody make a better pitch than the Bolts?

That said, should the Karlsson thing never come to pass, no team is better positioned to endure high-profile rejection thanks to its unbroken string of unheralded finds.

More weekend takeaways

- Edmonton's 1-0 win over the Flames Sunday night seems like the strongest proof yet the team can thrive playing Ken Hitchcock hockey. The Oilers, now 7-2-1 under 'Hitch,' allowed Calgary just four shots in the third period while protecting their one-goal lead. The Flames have been one of the hottest teams in the league recently, so while Edmonton still has a ways to go to make the 'Battle of Alberta' a true fight for the Pacific Division title, we certainly appear to be headed in the right direction.

The Calgary Flames are legit. Early this season, after the Canadiens dug out a win against them at the Bell Centre, Max Domi said to me a couple of times that he thinks they're a really good hockey team. I agreed then. I agree now.

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) December 9, 2018

- Even when he's a pending UFA, people don't talk enough about Joe Pavelski. The Sharks captain — whose contract status is easy to ignore because it's so hard to imagine him playing anywhere else — has 19 goals on the season after potting one in Saturday's win over the Arizona Coyotes. Pavelski has six tallies in his past seven outings and, after 31 contests this year, is just three goals shy of his 82-game total of 22 from last season. Three also happens to be the number of goals he trails league leader Alex Ovechkin by.

- Oh yeah, that guy. Ovie slipped one past his countryman Sergei Bobrovsky of the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday to give himself seven goals in his past eight games, as the Capitals have moved to the head of the class in the Metropolitan.

- The Chicago Blackhawks are 3-11-2 since firing former coach Joel Quenneville following Sunday night's 3-2 loss to the Habs. New bench boss Jeremy Colliton has watched his team lose seven straight games and Chicago's minus-31 goal differential is the worst in the league. Zero playoff series won since 2015 and no post-season games won since 2016. It's officially all about the lottery this year and figuring out if GM Stan Bowman will get to lead the team through its next phase.

- In consecutive years, Canadian teams drafted centres Connor McDavid (2015), Auston Matthews (2016) and Elias Pettersson (2017). McDavid is going to win his third consecutive scoring title (even current leader Mikko Rantanen knows that), Matthews refuses to play an entire hockey game without scoring a goal (16 in 16 thus far) and, on Sunday, Pettersson registered the second five-point night of his 26-game NHL career. The fact they're all from different countries also makes me want to drive to the NHL offices immediately and make sure these guys are at the 2020 Olympics.

Red and White Power Rankings

1. Toronto Maple Leafs (20-9-1): I'm seeing Tampa take control of the division, Buffalo slipping back and wondering if the Leafs will draw Boston again in the Atlantic 2-3 matchup.

2. Winnipeg Jets (18-9-2): The Jets are tightening up defensively, having allowed just a single goal in each of their past three games.

3. Calgary Flames (19-10-2): Noah Hanifin logged a season-high 25:09 of ice time on Sunday against Edmonton in the absence of suspended captain Mark Giordano (two games for kneeing Mikko Koivu on Thursday). The former Hurricane is really finding his stride with Calgary.

4. Montreal Canadiens (15-10-5): Carey Price has started seven straight for the Canadiens and his struggles from the first quarter of the season are becoming an increasingly distant memory.

5. Edmonton Oilers (16-12-2): Mikko Koskinen's shutout on Sunday only strengthens his bid to become Edmonton's full-time No. 1, but Cam Talbot has looked better his past couple times out, too.

6. Ottawa Senators (13-14-4): Three more points for Mark Stone in two weekend games, a win over Pittsburgh and an OT loss to Boston. It will be absolutely fascinating to see how things play out with Stone and fellow pending-UFA Matt Duchene (presently sidelined with a groin injury) in the next couple months.

7. Vancouver Canucks (13-16-3): Per the NHL stats department, 60 per cent of Vancouver's goals this year have been scored by players aged 23 or younger. Brock Boeser's hat trick on Sunday helped with that.

In Your Ear

Why is Phil Kessel a fascinating and entirely unremarkable personality all at once? The twice-traded star is having another very strong season for the Penguins, yet there's some notion Pittsburgh would move him in the right package. In the most recent episode of the Tape to Tape podcast, co-host Rory Boylen and I examined a few potential fits for Kessel should the Pens actually pull the trigger.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

Looking Ahead

- The first tilt of the year between Atlantic heavyweights Toronto and Tampa goes Thursday night in Florida. That will be the second and final game of Zach Hyman's justifiable suspension for his late hit on Bruins defenceman Charlie McAvoy on Saturday night.

- I don't want to get too excited here, but there's a real sense among plugged-in people that we could see some major moves before the holiday trade freeze hits a week from Wednesday (Dec. 19). When



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you see names like Bobrovsky and Alex Pietrangelo out there, hands start rubbing together.

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TSN.CA / NHL to test colour-changing, temperature-smart puck

Frank Seravalli

The average NHL puck is kept at a temperature between minus-10 and minus-7 Celsius before it hits the ice in a game.

Everyone knows that a frozen puck slides smoother and faster.

Once it's out of the freezer and in play, though, it's much more difficult to tell how quickly a puck has thawed.

That's why the NHL is set to test official game pucks featuring a thermochromic coating, which will change the colour of the league's logo on the back of the puck from purple to white when the puck's temperature rises above freezing, to serve as a visual indicator to officials that the puck should be replaced.

The NHL will first test the thermochromic puck at the 2019 Winter Classic at Notre Dame Stadium between the Chicago Blackhawks and Boston Bruins. The coated pucks will then be further examined during other significant events, including the 2019 All-Star weekend in San Jose, Calif. on Jan. 24-25, for potential future league-wide inclusion.

"Freezing a puck eliminates bouncing, and game officials closely monitor the puck for temperature changes that affect performance in play," said NHL senior vice president of facilities operations, Dan Craig, in a statement. "A coating that changes colour when the puck is above freezing will more accurately alert the officials that it is time for a replacement."

The key in testing the NHL's latest gizmo over a full game will be determining whether the thermochromic coating increases friction between the puck and the ice. Promotional stickers slapped on pucks often have that unintended effect.

The NHL and partner PPG Paints do not envision that issue, saying the thermochromic coating is dispersed into an ink system and screen printed directly onto an official NHL game puck.

An average of a dozen pucks are used in a single NHL game. As many as 22 have been used in one game; the last game in which a single puck was used was 1979 - and that puck resides in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Every official NHL puck is manufactured by InGlasCo in Sherbrooke, Que. Each NHL team uses approximately 1,500 pucks per season.

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TSN.CA / Hyman says suspension won't change his game

Kristen Shilton

TSN's Kristen Shilton checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The team held an 11 a.m. practice at MasterCard Centre on Monday.

The Maple Leafs were struggling to match the physicality of the Boston Bruins on Saturday night when Zach Hyman barreled into defenceman Charlie McAvoy along the boards, delivering a blow that would briefly shake McAvoy and earn Hyman a game misconduct.

The NHL's Department of Player Safety went even further, suspending Hyman two games for what it deemed a late and predatory hit.

Hyman was afforded a phone hearing on Sunday before the verdict, the first time he's ever been involved in the NHL's supplementary discipline processes.

"Everyone is trying to do their job," Hyman said of the play on Monday. "I'm trying to do my job. [Head of the Department of Player Safety] George [Parros] is doing his job. It is what it is. I'm just getting ready for Saturday."

That's when Hyman will be eligible to return to the Leafs' lineup, after he misses games against Carolina on Tuesday and Tampa Bay on Thursday.

While Hyman didn't go into detail about what he was thinking on the play, he did say it wasn't frustration driving him into McAvoy long after the blueliner had released the puck. Toronto was trailing Boston 6-2 at the time of the incident, with 10:17 remaining in the third period.

"I think the play is out there. I think everyone can interpret it the way they want it and that's what it is," Hyman said. "We play hard against them, they play hard against us. It's hockey."

Despite the suspension, Hyman insisted he won't be changing his game.

"I play hard. I play the way I play," he said. "I'm going out there and doing my job. It is what it is. I'm just doing my job."

Hyman's teammates were quick to come to his defence on Monday, not masking their surprise that the league would levy a multi-game sentence to a first-time offender.

Hyman has built a reputation for being a relentless forechecker and powerful net-front presence for the Leafs in the last three seasons, an antithesis to the highly skilled linemates he's usually paired with.

"I know him. I know he's not a dirty player," said Morgan Rielly. "He's honest, he plays hard. ...You're going to miss two, but he'll be back at the end of this road trip and we'll be expecting him to be flying."

"I don't necessarily agree with it," added Hyman's linemate, John Tavares. "I know he's not the type of guy who's going out there trying to hurt people. He's just trying to play a hard game. I felt it was a little harsh."

Coach Mike Babcock said his team is certain to feel Hyman's absence over the next two games.

"Zach is a real important player for us, plays hard," Babcock said. "He's a forechecker, he's a heavy guy, he's at the net. When everyone talks about his line (with Tavares and Mitch Marner) there are two guys on it. They forget about the guy who gets the puck back and is at the net all the time. We're going to miss him. We don't have a ton of that in our game."

When Tavares came off the ice after Saturday's loss in Boston, the first thing he said to the gathered media was that the defeat should piss him and his teammates off.

Babcock thinks it's a feeling his players should keep carrying forward.



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"I would," he said. "To me, we were in real good shape after one [period], had five Grade-A [chances] in the first period to their one, all set up ready to go. And then we took three or four penalties in a row [in the second], never seemed to get any momentum back and didn't do well in the game...we haven't been good enough. That's a message sent. It should be received and now let's do something about it."

It wasn't just Saturday's defeat that has been weighing on the Leafs. They were down 4-1 to the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday before battling back for a point in their 5-4 overtime loss. Some details of Toronto's game have been glaringly absent of late.

"I think we're trying to blow out of the zone a little bit more, try to make the ice bigger, create room underneath," said Rielly. "We have a system in place that we like to follow. It's important that if we prepare and we work hard, we play the system, we're going to be fine."

Babcock has said that there's often a disruption of some sort to the chemistry of the group whenever players come back into the lineup. So it's not wholly surprising that with Auston Matthews and William Nylander both returning within the span of three games, Toronto's rhythm is a little off.

When both Matthews and Nylander were out of the lineup for 14 games earlier, the Leafs went 9-5; they're 3-1-1 now since Matthews' return and 0-1-1 since Nylander slotted back in on Thursday.

Rielly believes the wins will return once the Leafs start to pull together again.

"When you look at the standings, there are good things there," he said of the Leafs, who sit second overall in the NHL with 41 points.

"There's a good amount of wins and things we can be proud of. But there are lots of things we can get better at; there are areas we want to build on. We missed Matty for a little...but now that he's back, Willy's back. I think there's a good opportunity for us to win some games here."

Toronto will have to shore up defensively for that to happen. They've given up 11 goals in their last two outings, the most in a two-game span since Oct. 6-7.

"It's just good motivation getting back at it today," said Tavares. "You're looking forward to getting that chance to respond and get back in here feeling like we got some growth to our game and we can get a result that we need. At times we haven't played well and gotten results and times where we have played well and we haven't gotten the results. So just being able to find our game again and get some momentum and do what we need to do to be successful."

In his rookie season two years ago, Connor Brown put together the quietest 20-goal campaign of a star-studded freshman class for Toronto. He'd like to start making a little of that same noise again.

Brown has three goals and six assists in 30 games this season, while being shuffled between nearly every line on the ice. With Hyman suspended, Brown will get a new assignment on Toronto's top line with Marner and Tavares.

It's a designation he earned by doing what Babcock asked of him in a more defensive role.

"I think he is going [despite his stats]," Babcock said. "His job is to be real solid defensively and penalty kill for us and I actually think he's been good."

Brown is already clocking an average of 1:54 per game shorthanded, but he'll likely see an uptick there while Hyman (2:16 a game shorthanded) is out. The two players are seemingly interchangeable in many ways – both strong forecheckers and puck

possessors – but Tavares is looking forward to seeing what Brown may be able to add.

"We just want to go out there and play. I don't think we want to think a whole lot," said Tavares. "Brown is an extremely talented player, has proven himself in this league. Just want him to feel like he's playing his game and doesn't have to change anything or do anything different. Me and Mitch will do our best to try to find him and create some offence and be reliable out there."

Prior to the change, Brown was skating on the fourth line with Par Lindholm and Tyler Ennis. Before that he was on Nazem Kadri's line with Andreas Johnsson or Patrick Marleau on the opposite wing. It's one of Brown's greatest assets that Babcock trusts him enough to play the same blue-collar game with any amount of ice time and in any arrangement.

"He's got that grittiness, that tenaciousness on the puck," said Kadri. "And he's certainly a great forecheck player and he shows a lot of hustle. The tenacity to get the puck back I think is one of his strengths."

Alarm bells have been sounded this season over whether the Leafs have enough physicality to avoid being run over by the league's heavier teams.

Three different fights broke out during Saturday's game in Boston, but Toronto isn't convinced that's the best way to show off their true toughness.

"We're not going to go beat every single person up on the ice," said Kadri. "But we're definitely going to show that bite back and I think we've done a good job this year of showing teams we won't be pushed around, no matter how hard you try – on the road or at home. So it's just about sticking up for each other and I think we have the quality of guys in the room to do that."

Tavares had pointed to that lack of a bite in his post-mortem Saturday, but he doubled back a bit on Monday.

"We play hard we want to possess the puck but I don't think we're looking to spend time in the penalty box," he said. "[We don't] put our focus on whether we're irritating the other team or trying to get under their skin. I think we just do that by playing our game. When there are times to finish checks, be hard on guys. We want to be in front of their net in their crease making it hard on their goaltender and make it so they have to defend us. I think that's the kind of toughness and grittiness we need."

Speaking of being physical, Rielly chose not to chime in on the hit Bruins' forward Chris Wagner got him with in the third period on Saturday. But he did appreciate defense partner Ron Hainsey coming to his aid in an ensuing fight.

"I don't have anything to say about it. It's all good," Rielly said of the hit. "[Hainsey] got in there pretty quick, so I said thanks. But we'll put that one behind us and we'll move on."

Lines at practice:

Brown-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Kadri-Nylander

Lindholm-Gauthier-Ennis

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Ozhiganov

Marincin-Holl



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TSN.CA / Recent history suggests Sens in uncharted territory on Duchene, Stone deals

Ian Mendes

General manager Pierre Dorion informed the media Saturday morning that Matt Duchene suffered a groin injury and would be out of the Ottawa Senators lineup for "weeks."

When Duchene returns to the fold – likely after the Christmas holidays – the clock will be ticking to get him signed to a new contract. With the trade deadline set for Feb. 25, it would give Dorion less than two months to either sign Duchene to a contract extension or move him to another team.

After giving up so much to acquire him in the first place, there's no chance the Senators could let Duchene walk out the door with nothing in return. The feeling around here is Duchene is signed to a contract extension by the deadline or he's gone.

It's worth noting that in the salary cap era – since 2005-2006 – the Senators have never waited this long into a season to sign a player to a long-term contract extension. They've actually never signed a player to a five-year extension in the period between Dec. 1 and the trade deadline of any season.

In their franchise history, the Sens have signed a total of seven different players to a contract that lasted five years or more. Only once – with Jason Spezza signing a seven-year deal on Nov. 2, 2007 – did the negotiations bleed into the regular season. It should be noted that Spezza was set to become a restricted free agent at the end of that season, so the dynamics were a little bit different than what we're seeing with Duchene – who could potentially walk out the door for nothing this summer.

That's not to say the Sens haven't flirted with late deals when signing potential unrestricted free agents.

In 2015, Marc Methot agreed to a four-year contract extension worth \$4.9 million per season on Feb. 16 – just two weeks before the trade deadline. In 2017, the team agreed to a four-year deal worth \$3.25 million per season with Zack Smith on Jan. 23 – about six weeks before the trade deadline.

But considering Duchene is likely looking for a contract in the neighbourhood of eight years, it would seem somewhat flawed to use Methot and Smith as legitimate comparables. Instead, we should look at players who have re-signed with their teams on eight-year contracts with cap hits in the neighbourhood of what Duchene will cost.

Since the summer of 2013, there have been 37 players who re-signed with their teams for a maximum eight-year contract. Courtesy of CapFriendly, here is a breakdown of the month they signed the deals:

June: One contract signed

July: 25 contracts signed

August: Four contracts signed

September: Three contracts signed

October: Two contracts signed

November: One contract signed (Brent Burns)

December: No contacts signed

January: One contract signed (Anze Kopitar)

February: No contracts signed

March: Zero contracts signed

Looking at that breakdown, you'll see that approximately 90 per cent of these eight-year deals were signed in the period between June and September. That leaves four maximum extensions that were signed at some point after the calendar flipped to October to start the regular season.

The two players who signed in the month of October in the past five years – Buffalo's Jack Eichel and Florida's Michael Matheson – were both pending restricted free agents. The only player to sign an eight-year contract extension in the month of November was San Jose defenceman Brent Burns, who hammered out his extension with the Sharks on Nov. 22, 2016.

In the past five years, the only pending UFA to re-sign with his team for a maximum eight-year contract in the period between Dec. 1 and the NHL trade deadline was Kings captain Anze Kopitar, who inked an eight-year deal worth \$80 million on January 16, 2016.

While the dollars might be on the high side, Kopitar is probably the only true comparable for Duchene in the past few seasons – an elite centreman and pending UFA, with a contract negotiation that went into the month of January before he signed on the dotted line.

In most cases, these deals are hammered out in the summer time. In Dorion's defence, he was entangled in the Erik Karlsson situation this past summer and the unknown status on that front may have muddied the waters on trying to get a long-term deal done with Duchene's camp. It may have also affected his ability to get a deal done with Mark Stone, which is why the two sides agreed to a one-year deal this summer.

Dorion can officially sign Stone to a contract extension at some point after Jan. 1 – which is now less than a month away. The Senators insist they were close to hammering out a long-term extension with Stone this past summer. But most experts believe Stone's contract will look similar to Duchene's in terms of dollar and term and that could make it tricky for the Senators.

The challenge for Dorion is clear: Try and sign two star players to eight-year contract extensions between now and the trade deadline.

But to put it simply, we've reached a window where it's virtually unheard of to sign a player to an eight-year contract.

That's not to say it's impossible – just that recent history suggests it is highly unusual.

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TSN.CA / Aleksander Barkov, master of penalty differential

Travis Yost

There are some records in the National Hockey League we talk about every year. Wayne Gretzky's 92-goal season in 1981-82,



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Gretzky's 163-assist season in 1987-88, Phil Esposito's 550-shot season in 1970-71, Bobby Orr's plus-124 rating in 1970-71, and so on. All otherworldly individual achievements that seem like they will sit as high-water marks for a long, long time.

We are in the midst of a possibly historical regular season again in 2018-19. But I'm not talking about goals, assists, plus-minus, shots, or save percentages. I'm talking about penalty differential and the work that Aleksander Barkov is doing this season in Florida.

Florida is 34 per cent complete with the regular season and Barkov hasn't taken a single penalty. That's obviously league-leading, tied with five other regular skaters (all of whom have played considerably less minutes) – Colorado's Samuel Girard, Vegas' Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, Chicago's Dominik Kahun, New York's Kevin Shattenkirk, and New Jersey's Will Butcher.

Keep in mind that only seven players in the history of the NHL have finished an entire regular season without logging a single penalty minute. Butch Goring (1980-81, NYI) and Craig Ramsay (1973-74, BUF) are probably the most impressive in that class, since they both managed to play 78 games in their respective seasons.

We're a ways off from talking seriously about Barkov chasing that sort of record, but it is something to note. We should remember the Goring and Ramsay seasons came during a different era. In the last decade or so, only one player has made it through the majority of the regular season without taking a penalty: St. Louis' Carl Gunnarsson in 2014-15, and that was in a truncated 61-game season.

The only issue with this is we are only looking at half of the equation. What we ultimately care about is penalty differential – a statistic that has been publicly available since the 2007-08 season. Although it's important to stay out of the penalty box, it's just as important to be able to draw penalties (and correspondingly, win power-play opportunities) for your respective team. The more net penalties you create for your team, the more goals and wins you are going to add in the standings. That's hugely valuable.

Barkov also leads the NHL in drawn penalties this season – by a considerable margin. His 22 penalties drawn are comfortably tops in the NHL, six ahead of New Jersey's Nico Hischier, Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon, and Edmonton's Connor McDavid.

So perhaps the league's most talented player in avoiding taking penalties is also establishing himself as the league's most talented at drawing penalties. It made me wonder, with some historical context, how impressive Barkov's season has been.

I pulled out the 20 best seasons by penalty differential since the 2007-08 season. Below is net penalty differential (per game) across all situations for our leaders:

There is really only one statistical player comparable to the season Barkov is having and that's Dustin Brown nearly a decade ago. Brown, if you recall, posted some legendary penalty drawn totals – he drew 81 penalties in the 2008-09 season and followed that up with 71 drawn in 2009-10. Those numbers have never been touched, though Brown offset some of those penalties drawn with minors and majors of his own.

To that end, I'm not sure we've ever seen a season like the one Barkov is having. He hasn't taken a single penalty. He's drawn the most penalties in the league. He's on pace to carry the best penalty differential in the modern era of hockey, and it seems possible that it's the best number we have seen in decades. The best part is this isn't merely some interesting trivia tidbit – these penalties are real and tangible and Florida is already about five goals better than expected on Barkov's penalty differential alone.

What we have here is a possible record trifecta. Odds are still against him, but Barkov could be the first player in 40 years to finish the season without taking a penalty. He also has a shot (albeit an outside one) at Brown's penalties drawn record. He also has a very

real shot at the best penalty differential we've seen from a player for as long as the data has been available.

Now that is chasing history!

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